

Daniel 3:16-30 – Trial by Fire

Some time after Nebuchadnezzar had the dream about an image, he set up a monstrous golden image and commanded that everyone fall down and worship the image. For Daniel's three friends from Judah, that was not an option. They were not going to bow down to the king's craft project. Some Chaldeans told the king that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego defied the king's order to worship the image. Were these Chaldeans some of the "wise men" who looked unwise when they told the king that no one could tell him his dream which God then revealed to the king through Daniel? At the end of chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar had elevated Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to positions over the affairs of the province of Babylon. He gave them one more chance to bow down to the golden monstrosity. If they did not bend the knee, the king asked "who is the god who will deliver you?"

Read Daniel 3:16-25.

In verses 16-18, how did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to the king? ESV has "if this be so". NASB has "if it be so". NKJV has "if that is the case". NIV has "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace". Does NIV have it right? What is the "if this" or "if it" or "if that is the case"? Did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego know for sure that God was going to protect them in the fire? If they thought they could die, why were they confident? What did they know for sure? Are believers always physically delivered from every fiery trial? Give some examples. (3:16-18)

In verses 19 and 20, how did Nebuchadnezzar respond to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? What does it mean that "the expression of his face was changed"? NIV has "his attitude toward them changed". Do you think the king fully expected the three from Judea to comply with his command given the severe consequences for disobedience? (3:19-20)

Some army men threw the three into the fiery furnace. In verse 21, ESV has "hats". NASB has "caps". NKJV and NIV has "turbans". The word is only used once in the OT. From the context, it is something they wore. What happened to the obedient army men who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace? Do you think that these army men had fallen down and worshiped the golden image? I guess the golden image was taking a nap and was not able to protect them. I couldn't resist a taunt in the style of Elijah. (3:20-23)

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been bound and thrown into the fiery furnace. In verses 24 and 25, what got the king off of his chair in a hurry? Who was the fourth person in the fiery furnace? How did the king describe the fourth person? Notice that they were walking around in the fire and didn't seem to be in a hurry to get out of the furnace. They may have been enjoying the company of the fourth person. (3:24-25)

Read Daniel 3:26-30.

In verse 26, what command did the king give to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? How did the king address them? This time Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had no problem obeying the order given by the king. (3:26)

In verse 27, who inspected them? What did they find? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were delivered from the fire. What signs were there that they had been in the fire? Even these “wise men” must have been able to tell that this was a divine deliverance. (3:27)

In verse 28, I don’t think that we need to be told that “the expression of his face was changed” again. To whom did Nebuchadnezzar give the credit for this deliverance? What actions of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did the king seem to commend? He seemed to commend them for the very thing he tried to kill them for. What was the answer to the king’s question “who is the god who will deliver you?” (3:28)

In verse 29, what new decree did the king make? Why did the king make this decree? A certain person is fond of saying “if they didn’t have double standards, they would have no standards at all”. I wonder if the king thought that requiring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down to a golden image constituted speaking against their God? (3:29)

In verse 30, what did the king do? Maybe the king had a new policy, “if you can’t kill them, promote them”. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar learned anything from this divine deliverance? You may want to wait until after chapter 4 to answer this question. (3:30)

While there is a bit of a mocking tone to chapter 3, the content is deadly serious, literally. The only thing more serious would be for someone to die in a state of spiritual death. I know I can’t judge the heart, but Nebuchadnezzar seemed a bit full of himself when he set up the monstrous golden image and commanded everyone to fall down and worship it. He was a powerful person but that power had been given to him from God. When the king asked “who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands”, he seemed to imply that there was no way for them to be delivered. If he thought about it, he should have been embarrassed. He tried to kill Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego but he only succeeded in killing some of his loyal army men. What are some important lessons from chapter 3? One lesson that Nebuchadnezzar needed to learn was what Jesus told Pilate. You have no power except what has been given you from above. That is a good introduction to chapter 4.