



The Fiery Furnace

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Daniel 3:13-27

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia ordered that a golden statue be built and commanded that all his officials bow down before it. All who failed to do so would be thrown into a blazing furnace. Certain officials informed the king that the three Jewish youths Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were refusing to worship the golden statue.

King Nebuchadnezzar was furious. So he sent for the three young men and said, "I hear that you refuse to worship my gods and the gold statue I have set up. Now I am going to give you one more chance. If you bow down and worship the statue when you hear the music, everything will be all right. But if you don't, you will at once be thrown into a flaming furnace. No god can save you from me."

The three men replied, "Your Majesty, we don't need to defend ourselves. The God we worship can save us from you and your flaming furnace. But even if he doesn't, we still won't worship your gods and the gold statue you have set up."

Nebuchadnezzar's face twisted with anger at the three men. And he ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual. Next, he commanded some of his strongest soldiers to tie up the men and throw them into the flaming furnace. The king wanted it done at that very moment. So the soldiers tied up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and threw them into the flaming furnace with all of their clothes still on, including their turbans. The fire was so hot that flames leaped out and killed the soldiers. Suddenly the king jumped up and shouted, "Weren't only three men tied up and thrown into the fire?"

"Yes, Your Majesty," the people answered. "But I see four men walking around in the fire," the king replied. "None of them is tied up or harmed, and the fourth one looks like a god."

Nebuchadnezzar went closer to the flaming furnace and said to the three young men, "You servants of the Most High God, come out at once!"

They came out, and the king's high officials, governors, and advisors all crowded around them. The men were not burned, their hair wasn't scorched, and their clothes didn't even smell like smoke.

Commentary

God continued to bless Daniel and his three friends even though they were far from home, in Babylonia, an enemy nation. Daniel's gift for understanding dreams earned him a top job with the king, and the other three were also given positions of influence.

However, the king saw himself as even more important than God, and built a tall gold statue as a symbol of his power. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were loyal to the one true God and refused to bow down to the statue when the king's orchestra played. This was exactly the sort of idol worship that had been the downfall of Judah back home, and they weren't going to repeat it, even if it cost them their lives.

God honoured their choice and kept them safe in the flames. The king even saw God walking in the fire with them. At last Nebuchadnezzar understood how important God was for these three men and for Daniel. The story goes on to recount how he too became a believer in Israel's God, and perhaps this was the most amazing miracle of all.

Questions

- ▶ The friends were prepared to trust God whether he saved them or not. What does that tell you about their faith?
- ▶ Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar was so angry with them? Why did God choose to walk with them in the furnace?
- ▶ Everyone was amazed at how God saved Daniel's friends. What miracles is God doing today?



Visual aid

Assemble as many musical instruments as you can. You could also make some from parchment paper and a comb, or tin cans and elastic bands, or upturned pots and pans. As a family, recreate the sound of the mixed orchestra that the king arranged to perform as a signal for everyone to bow down to the statue.



Activity idea

To illustrate the choice of 'bow or burn' faced by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, build a tall tower with wooden toy bricks or from Lego™ pieces and place alongside it a 'furnace' created from red, yellow and orange tissue paper set into a small box. Talk about the courage it took to have faith in God in these circumstances.



Prayer idea

Christians today, in some parts of the world, also face times of testing and can suffer terribly because they believe in God. Pray for all who are having a hard time because they are Christians, and ask God to be with them, like the fourth man in the fire with the young men of our story.

Key verse

"We don't need to defend ourselves. The God we worship can save us from you and your flaming furnace" (Daniel 3:16-17)

New Testament story link

1 Peter 5:8-11: Peter warns his readers about those who want to try to rob them of their faith, but he also promises that God will be there to help them.



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