

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL EXILE and RETURN GOD THE SUSTAINER

## *The God Who Deserves Our Allegiance*

Today, we come to a familiar story from the Old Testament – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and the Fiery Furnace. Their story is a beautiful reminder of our God who sustains us not only in the triumphs but in the trials of life. I will never forget the words of a former pastor, Harvey Webb, who said, "the times we are thrown into the fiery furnace are the very times that we most often see God." The fiery furnace for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was a literal fire. For us that may or may not be the case; however, our reaction when experiencing the trials of life not only allows us to see God but also gives others the opportunity to see Christ in us. Are others seeing Jesus in the way you experience the trials of your life?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced persecution for their belief in the One True God. Many Christians around the world today still face persecution for following Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. Did you know that a law approved by Russian President Putin on July 20 lumps Christians in with terrorists? The Russian law now makes it illegal to share one's faith in residential locations, creating a serious problem for house churches. No matter the world ruler, God's people bow down to God alone.

In *Daniel 2* King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream where he saw an enormous statue – dazzling in appearance. He wanted an accurate interpretation of his dream which he said he had forgotten. He was on the verge of putting all his 'wise men' to death since there was no way they could interpret something that the king himself did not remember. However, Daniel by the grace and miraculous power of God saw the dream and its interpretation in a night vision.

The king dreamed of a great statue. The dream was a revelation concerning the 'times of the Gentiles' which began when the Jews were carried into captivity. The statue's various body parts were materials representing kingdoms yet to come. Although this lesson is not about this prophecy specifically, I mention it because I believe it 'goes to motive' concerning Nebuchadnezzar's future actions. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom of Babylon was the head of gold on the image. Sometimes when we hear something, we focus only on what we want to hear. Apparently, that is what Nebuchadnezzar did – his focus was on Daniel's interpretation that his kingdom was the head of gold. It appears he ignored that there would be more and stronger kingdoms to come.

Most Bible students believe that the fiery furnace event may have occurred as much as 20 years after the King's dream near the time that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. The king built a huge gold statue and had it set up expecting the people to bow in worship to it. Although Nebuchadnezzar had said when Daniel interpreted his dream, "*Truly, your God is God of gods*" his future actions reflected something quite different. Worship a gold

statue??? Let's face it – such a command would not 'set well' with anyone who serves the Living God. God's people bow down to God alone!

**Read Daniel 3:8-12 (ESV)** <sup>8</sup> *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.* <sup>9</sup> *They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever!"* <sup>10</sup> *You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe... bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and **worship** the golden image.* <sup>11</sup> *And whoever does not fall down and **worship** shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.* <sup>12</sup> *There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or **worship** the golden image...."*

King Nebuchadnezzar set up the image of gold in the plain of Dura in Babylon. This statue was most likely wood overlaid with gold strips which was common in that day. Undoubtedly, the image was not solid gold. This idol was monstrous. It was 90 feet tall and nine feet wide. For a visual comparison, the Christ of the Ozarks statue in Eureka Springs stands 67 feet tall.

This self-deification attempted by the first king of the 'times of the Gentiles' is the mindset that is repeated throughout the kingdoms of the Gentiles and will be found in the Anti-Christ, the last ruler of the Gentile world-dominion.

Recall that when the Jews were taken into captivity, they were treated well by the Babylonians. The Jews were 'making the best' out of their captivity. However, 'living in the world' for the followers of the true and living God does not mean that we can 'live like the world'. God's men in Babylon were willing to stand tall for Him.

There were those in Babylon who wanted to get God's people in trouble with the king so they tattled on Shadrach Meshach and Abednego. Apparently, Daniel was not in the area at the time. His detractors would make a plan against him later. It is likely that the accusers were consumed with jealousy of these godly men. **Proverbs 27:4 (ESV)** <sup>4</sup> *Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?*

It began with a call to worship. Music of every kind was meant to encourage the people to 'worship.' But, not all worship is proper and not all music leads to true worship. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego knew the command of God. **Exodus 20:3 (ESV)** <sup>3</sup> *"You shall have no other gods before me.* They had been raised to worship the one true God. Think of the dilemma they faced – they could worship a false piece of gold and please an earthly king or they could remain standing and please the King of kings! God's people trust that God is sovereign and good.

**Read Daniel 3:13-15 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> *Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.* <sup>14</sup> *Nebuchadnezzar ... said to them, "Is it true, ... that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"* <sup>15</sup> *Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe... bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the*

*image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"*

Daniel tells us that the king was in a furious rage. **Proverbs 16:32 (ESV)** <sup>32</sup> *Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.* Self-mastery is a great victory. Nebuchadnezzar could conquer kingdoms but he was not powerful enough to control his own temper.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were being given a ‘second chance’ – a chance to ‘live’ as the world lives. They had ‘done their thing’ – they had ‘stood tall’ for God. As they were faced with death itself, did they wonder if there was a place for compromise in such an extreme situation?

There are many ways the men could have justified to themselves that compromise was the best path to take just like we justify our own compromise today. “Everybody else is doing it,” OR “We’ll bow our knees but we won’t bow our hearts. The ways of justifying compromise are many. Warren Wiersbe says, “true faith does not look for loopholes; it simply obeys God and knows that He will do what is best. Faith rests on commands and promises, not on arguments and explanations.”

Is it ever okay to compromise our beliefs in life or death situations? The truth is many Christians compromise their beliefs in many areas that have nothing to do with life or death situations. I question my own self – what would I do – if I were faced with such a death – would I remain standing for God? I know from the New Testament, that Jesus does forgive even our denials of Him. We saw that in the life of the Apostle Peter. But, I also think of how pleased God must have been that day when the three young men remained standing as a testimony to the power of God. Compromise begins with leaving our first love for Jesus Christ, which leads ultimately to immorality, idolatry, and other sins.

None of us know for certain if we would stand tall in the face of death. But, this I know: Jesus conquered death and because of His victory – absent from the body means present with the LORD! If Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had yielded to fear and bowed to the golden image, the God of heaven would have still loved them but they would have lost their powerful witness for Him. There is one of those telescope of time pictures found in these three men. They were faithful to God while the nation of Israel was far from home picturing the Jewish remnant of people who in the last days will be found faithful in the furnace of the Great Tribulation.

**Read Daniel 3:16-23 (ESV)** <sup>16</sup> *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ... said to the king, “...we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand.... <sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” <sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury...He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. <sup>20</sup> And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to **bind** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup> ... <sup>22</sup> Because the king’s order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed*

*those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. <sup>23</sup> And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.*

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were men of faith but not men of presumption. Had they affirmed that God would deliver them, that would have been presumption, because they did not know God's will for their situation. Instead, they stated that their God was able to deliver them, but even if He did not, they still would not fall down before the king's golden image. Today's prosperity gospel maintains we receive rewards for what we do. Some people want to 'bargain' with God to 'persuade' Him to do their will. True faith confesses the Lord and obeys Him regardless of what happens. God's people trust in God for protection.

**Read Daniel 3:24-30 (ESV)** <sup>24</sup> *Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."* <sup>25</sup> *He answered and said, "But I see four men **unbound**, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."* <sup>26</sup> *Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "...servants of the Most High God, come out...!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.* <sup>27</sup> *And the ... governors, and the king's counselors ... saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.* <sup>28</sup> *Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God."* <sup>29</sup> *Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.* <sup>30</sup> *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

Notice – the only thing that burned in the fire that day – was the rope that bound the three men. When we refuse to compromise, God will free us from the things that bind us!

When the king looked into the furnace, he saw that they were alive and not dead, loose and not bound, and that there was a fourth person with them! The king thought it was an angel who looked like *a son of the gods*, but the fourth person in the furnace was Jesus. This is one of His pre-incarnate appearances in the Old Testament. **Isaiah 43:2 (ESV)** <sup>2</sup> *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was indeed able to deliver them!

If you are thinking your situation is so desperate that nothing like this miracle could never happen for you, remember the words of Jesus – *with God all things are possible*.