

GOD RESCUES SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO FROM THE FIERY FURNACE

DANIEL 3:19-30

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 3:19-30 in your favorite Bible. As you read, never forget that God urges you to quickly obey His Word in all things (Psalm 119:60).

Yesterday we watched as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained unbendingly faithful to God by refusing to worship the golden image. Today we will witness God's glorious rescue of the three youths. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 3:19-20

Filled with fury (3:19): Nebuchadnezzar had previously held these three youths in high regard (Daniel 1:20). But they had publicly defied his authority, and their continued defiance now brought public consequences. Burning them alive would provide a public example to anyone thinking about defying his authority in the future.

The expression of his face (3:19): So angry was the king that his countenance changed.

He ordered the furnace heated (3:19): So angry was the king that he ordered that the fiery furnace be heated as much as humanly possible ("seven times

more"). He wanted the furnace to be intensely hot as an expression of his intense wrath. (See Major Themes.)

The mighty men of his army (3:20): As a show of his own personal strength, the king ordered that his strongest soldiers bind the youths and cast them into the furnace.

To cast them into the burning fiery furnace (3:20): Nebuchadnezzar's industrial-size oven had doors on top as well as a door on the side that allowed for ventilation. The king's strong men would cast the Hebrew youths into the fire through the top door, and the victims would be observed through the side door.

Daniel 3:21-23

Bound in their cloaks (3:21): Normally a person would be stripped naked before being cast into the flames of a furnace. In the present case, however, the three Hebrew youths remained fully clothed because the king had commanded an immediate execution.

The flame of the fire killed (3:22): A furnace burning at a lower temperature causes the victim to suffer more as he or she takes longer to die. But in a furnace that is heated "seven times more," the temperature is so hot that victims are instantly incinerated. Nebuchadnezzar may not have anticipated that anyone near the top door of the superheated furnace would be incinerated as the hot flames burst up through the opening.

Fell bound into the burning fiery furnace (3:23): Apparently, once the top door of the furnace was opened, the explosive heat instantly killed the king's strong men, and the three Hebrew youths fell directly into the flames.

Daniel 3:24-25

Nebuchadnezzar was astonished (3:24): Though the main door was atop the furnace, there was also a secondary door on the side of the furnace, likely intended to provide ventilation for effective burning. Because of what he saw through this opening, Nebuchadnezzar "was astonished and rose up in haste," and asked those with him, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" And they said, "True, O king."

PARALLELS

Daniel 3:24-27—God rescues Daniel's friends from danger.

Revelation 12:13-14—God rescues the Jewish remnant from peril.

I see four men unbound...the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods (3:25): The king now verbalized what astonished him. This fourth person was likely a preincarnate appearance of Jesus Christ (see Major Themes). Though Nebuchadnezzar had no personal knowledge of the Son of God (Jesus Christ), he witnessed what appeared to be a supernatural person or heavenly being who was saving the other three. The thing that must have stood out to Nebuchadnezzar as he witnessed all this was that none of Babylon's gods could have accomplished such a feat. He had earlier said to the three youths, "Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" (verse 15). The answer was now clear. The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had delivered them out of his hands.

Recall the New Testament teaching that the entire universe was created by Jesus Christ. John 1:3 says of Him, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." Colossians 1:16 likewise says of Him, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him." Now, the same One who created the universe maintains absolute control over the elements in the universe, including fire. If Christ indeed made a preincarnate appearance in the burning furnace, His control of the effects of the fire would have been in perfect keeping with His divine power.

GOD AND HIS ACTIVITIES		
TOPIC	DANIEL	REVELATION
The Living God	Daniel 6:20,,26	Revelation 7:2
God Is Righteous and Just	Daniel 9:14	Revelation 15:3; 16:5; 19:2
Revelations from God	Daniel 2:47	Revelation 1:1; 4:1; 17:7; 22:6, 16
Prophetic Revelations	Daniel 8:17	Revelation 1:1; 4:1; 17:7; 22:6, 16
Writing Down God's Revelations	Daniel 7:1	Revelation 1:19
Divine Deliverance	Daniel 3:24-27	Revelation 12:13-14
God Shields from Harm	Daniel 6:23	Revelation 7:3; 11:5
Lamb's Book of Life	Daniel 12:1	Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12
Divine Balances	Daniel 5:27	Revelation 6:5

Daniel 3:26-28

Servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here (3:26): Earlier the Hebrew youths had informed the king, “Be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods” (verse 18). Now the king looks into the furnace and recognizes that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are servants of the Most High God, who was quite obviously more powerful than any of the gods Babylon offered. Earlier the king had referred to the youth’s God as the “God of gods and Lord of kings” (2:47). Now he calls Him “the Most High God.” This represented a major paradigm shift for Nebuchadnezzar. He had previously thought that Babylon’s gods—and especially he himself—were more powerful than all other gods. Witnessing what transpired in the furnace was a game changer.

Nebuchadnezzar likely recalled the words of the Hebrew youths: “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and

he will deliver us out of your hand, O king" (verse 17). As requested, the three Hebrew youths exited the furnace—apparently through the side door—and came out to Nebuchadnezzar.

The fire had not had any power over the bodies (3:27): Nebuchadnezzar had ordered the furnace to be heated "seven times more," and yet their bodies were not burned, their hair was not singed, their clothes were not harmed, and no smell of fire was upon them. Nebuchadnezzar was not alone in witnessing this. Other government officials witnessed it as well. As Hebrews 11:34 describes it, in this miraculous act, God "quenched the power of fire."

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3:28): This carries the sense, "May the God of these three Hebrew youths be honored."

Who has sent his angel and delivered his servants (3:28): This was likely the "Angel of the Lord," or "Angel of Yahweh"—a preincarnate appearance of Christ. One is reminded of Psalm 34:7: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them."

Who trusted in him (3:28): Proverbs 3:5-6 affirms, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths"—including a straight path right out of the furnace.

And set aside the king's command (3:28): Nebuchadnezzar was apparently impressed that the three youths were so committed to their God that they were willing to yield up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

Daniel 3:29-30

I make a decree (3:29): Don't misunderstand Nebuchadnezzar. He was not here committing to following the Hebrew God alone. He was still a polytheist who believed in many gods. The king essentially added Yahweh to a large pantheon of deities. The purpose of his edict was to prevent anyone from criticizing the God of the Hebrews.

Nebuchadnezzar had still not learned his lesson. Recognizing Yahweh as part of a pantheon of deities was grossly misguided. Nebuchadnezzar would soon learn that Yahweh is not one among many, but is rather the unique and singular God.

Torn limb from limb (3:29): Anyone who disobeyed this edict was to be dismembered and suffer utter ruination.

There is no other god who is able to rescue in this way (3:29): Even though Nebuchadnezzar still believed in many gods, he became convinced that no god could bring miraculous deliverance the way the Hebrews' God did.

The king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3:30): Nebuchadnezzar not only honored the one true God but also honored Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by giving them a promotion.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *Heated seven times more.* Bible scholars have noted that the number seven in the Bible often indicates completeness or perfection (see Leviticus 26:18-28; Proverbs 6:31; 24:16). To heat the furnace "seven times more" than normal may just be a metaphorical way of saying, "as hot as it can get," or "intensely." Notice that the more hotheaded the king became, the hotter he ordered the furnace to be heated.
2. *God's angel.* The one described as "a son of the gods" may have been the Angel of the Lord, an appearance of the preincarnate Christ. Scripture reveals that the Angel of the Lord—or more accurately, the Angel of Yahweh—is in fact Yahweh (Exodus 3:2-6). But the angel of Yahweh was also *sent by* Yahweh to minister to God's people (Judges 13:8-9), just as the Father sent Jesus in New Testament times. We begin to detect Trinitarian distinctions here. The Angel of Yahweh is often seen functioning as Sustainer and Rescuer of His people in Old Testament times (Genesis 16:10-13; 22:15-18; Exodus 23:21; Joshua 5:14; Zechariah 1:12-17).

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

The testing of faith—Genesis 22:2; Matthew 9:28; 14:30; Mark 4:38; Luke 1:18; 5:5; John 4:50; Hebrews 11:8, 17; James 1:3; 1 Peter 1:7

Divine preservation—Genesis 7:23; 45:7; Deuteronomy 6:24; 8:4; Joshua 24:17; Nehemiah 9:6, 21; Job 10:12; Isaiah 43:2; Jeremiah 39:18; Jonah 1:17; Acts 17:28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3

LIFE LESSONS

1. *Obedience to the point of death.* Daniel and his friends were obedient to God to the point of death—that is, they were willing to die rather than disobey God (Daniel 3:16-18). In the New Testament, Stephen was stoned to death because of his faithful testimony of Christ (Acts 7:54-60). Revelation 6:9 refers to those who were martyred because of their faithful witness to Christ. The apostle Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19), though he survived. We do well to keep in mind the words of Jesus Christ: “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:25). Those who die for Christ have eternal life waiting for them in heaven (see John 10:28; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 3:21; Revelation 2:10).
2. *The incomparability of God.* Nebuchadnezzar said of God, “There is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.” I have noted previously that the Old Testament portrays God as being incomparably great. This is typically communicated with the declaration, “There is none like God,” as well as the rhetorical question, “Who is like God?” The ancient Egyptians had earlier discovered this reality. Indeed, the Egyptian sun god (Ra) could not stop Yahweh from covering the land with darkness. Nor could the Egyptian river god (Nilus) prevent Yahweh from turning the Nile—the lifeblood of Egypt—into real blood. Our God truly is incomparable (see Exodus 15:11; Numbers 33:4). Regardless of the mountain you are facing, our incomparably great God can always help you.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How does Psalm 25:2 reflect the attitude of the three youths in this passage?
2. How does Proverbs 19:21 relate to Nebuchadnezzar’s intentions in this passage?
3. Is your faith presently being tested? What have you learned in this lesson that might help you?