

SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO ARE ACCUSED

DANIEL 3:8-12

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 3:8-12 in your favorite Bible. As you read, remember that reading Scripture can strengthen your faith in God (Romans 10:17).

Yesterday we saw Nebuchadnezzar construct a golden image to be worshiped. Now let's watch as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego get into life-threatening trouble for refusing to worship the image. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 3:8

Chaldeans (3:8): The word "Chaldeans" can be used in different senses in Scripture. It can function simply as a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people. In the present case, however, the term is used more narrowly in reference to priests who functioned as astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men in Nebuchadnezzar's government.

Maliciously accused the Jews (3:8): The phrase "maliciously accused" translates a rather vulgar expression that means, "devour the pieces of flesh torn off a person's body." It came to connote doing injury to another person through malicious slander. The Chaldeans were making a serious accusation against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in order to destroy them.

PARALLELS**Daniel 3:8**—Pagans persecute the Jews.**Revelation 12:13**—Satan targets the Jews.

The motivation of the Chaldeans for maliciously accusing the Jews was probably threefold. First is the issue of racism, for many Babylonians hated the Jews. We see this same type of hatred elsewhere in Scripture. Esther 3:5-6 tells us, "When Haman [a Persian] saw that Mordecai [a Jew] did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus." The psalmist laments to God of the attempted genocide against the Jews: "For behold, your enemies make an uproar; those who hate you have raised their heads. They lay crafty plans against your people; they consult together against your treasured ones. They say, 'Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; let the name of Israel be remembered no more!'" (Psalm 83:2-4). Many Babylonians would have been happy to completely do away with the Jews.

Second, aside from hatred of the Jews, there was also the issue of jealousy. When one nation took the people of another nation into captivity, the captives were generally assigned positions of servitude in the conquering nation. They were not typically elevated to positions of authority, but Daniel and his friends had become governing officials in the kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar himself had previously spoken of them with high praise: "In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom" (Daniel 1:20). The Chaldeans no doubt bitterly resented this praise and their high appointments. We recall from Daniel 2:49 that Daniel himself "made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court." The Chaldeans referred to the king's appointment of these Jews during their accusation of them: "There are certain Jews *whom you have appointed*

over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" (Daniel 3:12). One can almost see the jealousy dripping from their lips.

Third, their accusation was ultimately self-serving. The Chaldeans had bowed before the golden image, whereas Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had not. Perhaps they were trying to make themselves look good at the expense of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Perhaps they were seeking personal favor from the king.

Notice that Daniel was not among the accused. Daniel would not have been present with this group because he remained in the capital city "at the king's court" (Daniel 2:49). Besides, these Chaldeans may have considered it risky to say anything negative about Daniel, who was a higher official and was highly regarded. Let us be clear, however, that Daniel would have refused to bow before the image with as much fervor as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had he been there.

Daniel 3:9-11

O king, live forever (3:9): Before launching their verbal attack against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the Chaldeans said, "O king, live forever." This was apparently a common show of respect when beginning a conversation with the king. Later in the book of Daniel, when the high officials and satraps appeared before another king with the intention of entrapping Daniel, they began their conversation, "O King Darius, live forever" (Daniel 6:6). Daniel ended up in the lions' den as a result of their entrapment. But the next morning, the king rushed down to the den to see if Daniel was okay. Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths" (6:21-22).

You, O king, have made a decree (3:10): The unscrupulous Chaldeans reminded the king of his decree that the penalty for not bowing before the golden image was death by incineration.

Every man who hears (3:10): The cue for bowing before the image was to be the sound of musical instruments playing. As the music played, however, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't budge. They continued to stand upright.

Whoever does not (3:11): The word "whoever" communicates the idea that

there were to be no exceptions. Any person who failed to bow before the image was to experience capital punishment by burning.

Cast into a burning fiery furnace (3:11): A form of capital punishment that was not only effective but also terribly painful.

Daniel 3:12

Certain Jews...Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (3:12): Notice the subtle insinuation that the king made a mistake in assigning foreigners high positions of leadership. One can almost see the finger pointing: "There are certain Jews whom *you* have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon."

Pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image (3:12): Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were acting under clear instructions from God's Law.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God (Exodus 20:3-5).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to choose between King Nebuchadnezzar and the one true God, who is the King of kings. They chose wisely!

The three Hebrew youths likely recalled some of God's promises. Here's an example:

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 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 (Isaiah 43:1-2).

Based on their faith in the God of promises, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood tall when all other leaders bowed low.

This brings up a controversial question: Are God's people ever justified in disobeying civil authorities? Many Christians have concluded that they must

obey the government *unless* the government explicitly commands them to go against one or more of God's commands found in Scripture. In such a case, believers must obey God rather than the government.

The New Testament illustrates this principle. After being commanded by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish government) not to preach any further, "Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:29). God commanded Peter and the others to preach; the Jewish government commanded them not to preach. So they chose to obey God rather than human government.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego likewise chose to obey God instead of men. Sometime later, Daniel righteously disobeyed when the government commanded him to go against God's revealed will (Daniel 6).

Of course, believers must guard against abusing this principle, for Scripture elsewhere instructs them to obey government (Romans 13:1). So, for example, believers would certainly *not* be justified in disobeying the government in cases where they simply disagreed with its policies.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *Nebuchadnezzar's golden image.* The large image constructed by Nebuchadnezzar was not unique to him. Archeologists have discovered other large statues from the Babylonian, Persian, and Greek Empires. Herodotus, a Greek historian who lived in the fifth century BC, speaks of an 18-foot golden image of a man in a Babylonian temple. Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian who wrote *Bibliotheca Historica (Universal History)* between 60 and 30 BC, mentions a 40-foot image of Zeus atop a Bel temple. Nebuchadnezzar's golden image was 90 feet tall, thus pointing to the highly exalted view he had of himself.
2. *Death by burning.* History reveals that Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece all used burning as a method of capital punishment. In a sixth-century BC Mesopotamian record, a king instructs that a corrupt priest be burned in an oven. Nebuchadnezzar burned two Judean false prophets to death, Zedekiah and Ahab (Jeremiah 29:22). Burning as a form of execution was sanctioned in the Hammurabi Code. The oven was likely not originally

constructed for capital punishment but rather to cast and smelt metal and to bake bricks and pottery.

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

The decrees of kings—Ezra 5:13; 7:21; Esther 1:20; 2:1; 4:8; 8:14; Daniel 2:13; 3:4, 10, 22, 29; 6:9, 26; Jonah 3:7; Luke 2:1

Troublemakers—Proverbs 6:16-19; 16:28-30; Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:18; 16:17; Titus 3:10

LIFE LESSONS

1. *Obey God no matter what.* Daniel and his friends were committed to obeying God no matter what. Daniel and his friends remind us that obeying God may often entail sacrifice, but it also has many benefits. For example, obedience brings great blessing (Luke 11:28), long life (1 Kings 3:14; John 8:51), happiness (Psalms 112:1; 119:56), peace (Proverbs 1:33), and a state of well-being (Jeremiah 7:23; see also Exodus 19:5; Leviticus 26:3-4; Deuteronomy 4:40; 12:28; 28:1; Joshua 1:8; 1 Chronicles 22:13; Isaiah 1:19). Never get discouraged in your obedience to God.
2. *Enduring despite pressure.* Daniel and his friends patiently endured whatever they faced in Babylon—including persecution for refusing to worship an idol. You and I are also called to patiently endure whatever comes our way. Hebrews 12:1-2 exhorts believers, “Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” Jesus described Christian commitment this way: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25). Let’s not forget, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been maliciously accused by someone who sought to get you in trouble? Were you able to forgive that person?
2. Do you think you'd have the courage to obey God in a circumstance that might lead to your death?
3. Can you think of any modern-day examples of Christians standing strong in their faith and losing their lives for it?