

Daniel's Three Friends

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I can remember back when our son Britt was a little boy. You know three, four, five, six-years-old. At night, I had a tradition. I would sit by the bed and read him a Bible Story Book. You know from the old Worldwide Bible Story Book as he got older (And we'd had some ones for younger age.) and would read the stories of Noah Ark, and David and Goliath. And I would animate and add a little to it. Sometimes his eyes were as big as saucers thinking about the story and what actually went on.

What we want to do today is look at one of these stories (It happens to be one of his favorites.), these childhood Bible Stories today—the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. During the sermon time what we want to do is dig a little deeper into that story and to see what maybe we can find buried there, because Daniel had these friends.

We want to find out first of all: Who are these guys? What is their background? Why did the story turn out the way that it did? And then, secondly, we want to find out what lessons we can pull from the story that apply to us today because God doesn't put anything in the Bible by accident. Everything is there, as we're going to see, for our learning. And so, we want to expand on this and look at it not just as something you read to your kids and your grandkids and they remember for the rest of their lives, but it's something that is there for a reason.

So, we want to ask and answer these two questions:

- **Who were these men, (looking at the background)?**
- **What lessons we can learn for today.**

Now, as you know, the story is in the Book of Daniel, Daniel chapter 3, but we need to start in Daniel chapter 1.

And the year is 605 B.C. This date is historically verifiable because 605 B.C. was the first year of King Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He was the king of truly the first world-ruling empire, Babylon. Now, in that same year, in 605 B.C., at Carchemish which is about 340 miles north of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar defeated a combined army of Assyrians and Egyptians. You can read about that in Jeremiah chapter 46. We won't go there, but his victory resulted in the collapse of the Assyrian Empire. We know the Assyrians took the northern ten tribes captive in 720-721 B.C. So, the Assyrian Empire collapsed and now the Babylonian Empire ruled the known world in those days.

After that victory at Carchemish in 605, Nebuchadnezzar turned his attention to Jerusalem. Let's go to Daniel 1 and verse 1. If you have a ribbon, you might

want to put it there or a marker of some kind. I'm going to read out of the New King James for most of the sermon because it is just a little more clearly translated and can flow a little better. Daniel 1 and verse 1:

Daniel 1:1. *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, (NKJ)*

Now this was probably 604 B.C., maybe late in the year 605, but probably 604.

Daniel 1:1b. *...Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it [after his victory at Carchemish]. (NKJ)*

Now, the Babylonian language is called Akkadian (A-k-k-a-d-i-a-n) in English. And Nebuchadnezzar's name in Akkadian is as follows: "O God, Nebo" or it can be "Nego" (the b and the g are interchangeable in Akkadian); "O God, Nebo, defend my firstborn son." And his father gave him that name and his father's firstborn son was Nebuchadnezzar—"O God, Nebo, defend my firstborn son."

Now, Nebo in the Babylonian religion was the moon god, also the god of wisdom, and the son of Marduk. And there is an inscription in the British Museum where Nebuchadnezzar calls himself "Nebo's favorite son." In essence what he is saying is he's calling himself the Son of Nebo or the Son of god, following in the tradition of Nimrod.

Now this siege that occurred here that we read in Daniel 1:1, it was the first of three sieges. The last occurred in 585 B.C. we know. That was the year that the Temple was completely destroyed. So, this is the first of three sieges.

Now to verse 2:

Daniel 1:2. *And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, (NKJ)*

He didn't take them all at this time, some.

Daniel 1:2b. *...which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god [Nebuchadnezzar's god]; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god [Nebo or Nego]. (NKJ)*

Now this is fulfilled prophecy of Isaiah chapter 39 verses 6 and 7. You remember—we won't turn there—but this is when, remember, Hezekiah showed the insides of the Temple to Babylonian emissaries that were coming. And he showed them things that he should not have showed them. He was bragging about the treasures and all the beauty in the Temple. God sent a message to him that all of these treasures are going to wind up in Babylon and your kids are going to wind up as eunuchs in Babylon. This was the beginning of the fulfillment of that prophecy here in verse 2.

Now verse 3:

Daniel 1:3. *Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, (NKJ)*

That's in the New King James. The New International says "top officials." So, Ashpenaz was like his chief of staff at that time.

Daniel 1:3b. *...to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, (NKJ)*

Take them from Judah and take them to Babylon.

"Young men," verse 4, and the commentaries and the Babylonian chronicles tell us that they were fourteen to fifteen-years-old. They were boys, but there were mature enough so that they could be taught. And they had quick alert minds.

Daniel 1:4. *young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, (NKJ)*

So, he was raiding Judah of the best and the brightest young men for his own use.

Daniel 1:4b. *...and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans [which they did]. (NKJ)*

Then in verse 18, jumping to verse 18:

Daniel 1:18. *Now at the end of the days, (NKJ)*

What this is referring to is a three-year training program for these young men. So, now we're talking from 604 to 601 B.C.; they were in a period of training learning the Babylonian language, culture, and educating them in the ways of the Babylonians.

Daniel 1:18b. *[So, at the end of these three years] when the king had said that they should be brought in [in other words, in unto him], the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.
19) Then the king interviewed them, (NKJ)*

Remember this was a wide swathe of the very best and brightest of Judah

Daniel 1:19. *Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. (NKJ)*

They very much impressed Nebuchadnezzar. Verse 20:

Daniel 1:20. *And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. (NKJ)*

Now, this doesn't imply that they were involved in magic and astrology. It just implies that they were more intelligent and more competent than the magicians and astrologers he had in his court.

And, of course, we see that today. It's no mystery that God has given the Jews mental ability that most of us don't have because today the Jews comprise a mere one-quarter of one percent of the world's population—one-quarter of one percent. And yet, thirteen percent of all the Nobel Prizes that have ever been awarded went to Jews. And fifty-four percent of all the world chess champions have been Jews. He gave them this gift.

I worked for three Jews during the 70s for six years. I'm a bumpkin from West Texas. So, I go to Boston and work for three Jews. Never met a Jew in my life until I got there. They just blew me away by their quick minds, their ability to reason quickly. It was a manufacturing company and they had manufacturing processes down just perfectly. They could design advertising and marketing just off the top of their head. They had product development plans that you just sit there in awe. You just wouldn't think of these things. Just brilliant, brilliant minds.

So, Nebuchadnezzar was tapping this gift that God gave to the Jews.

Now, let's go to chapter 2 and verse 1. We know this chapter.

Daniel 2:1. *Now in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. (NKJ)*

Then he asked his advisors to tell him what the dream was and he wouldn't tell them what the dream was. "You're smart guys. You tell me what the dream was and you also tell me what it means." And, of course, none of them could. Then Daniel got involved and Daniel told him both what the dream was, but also the meaning of the dream. This was in the second year of his reign. It equates to about 604-603 B.C. as 605 was the first year of his reign.

So, we know that story. We won't go into detail there, but look at verses 48 and 49 as we wrap up chapter 2.

Daniel 2:48. *Then the king promoted Daniel... (NKJ)*

Because of this ability—of course, it was God-given and God told him that.

Daniel 2:48. *Then the king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts; and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief administrator over all the wise men of Babylon. (NKJ)*

But notice in verse 49 what Daniel did.

Daniel 2:49. *Also Daniel petitioned the king, and he set [the king set these three young men]... (NKJ)*

Now these names that we're going to read are their new Babylonian names. He set Hananiah, which that's the Jewish name, now Shadrach; he set Meshach, which was Mishael that we just read earlier in chapter 1; and Azariah and his new name is Abed-Nego. Now in the New King James, Abed-Nego is hyphenated—Abed-Nego—and what that means is in Akkadian, it means "servant of Nebo" or "servant of Nego." So, what Nebuchadnezzar did is apparently he thought so highly of Azariah that he gave him a name reflecting his own name because Nebuchadnezzar's god is in his own name. And he named Azariah after his god. So, that tells you that there's some affinity here with Abed-Nego, and, frankly, all three. And what he did, he put them:

Daniel 2:49b. *...over the affairs of the province of Babylon; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king. (NKJ)*

Now these three, now, by this time are in their late teens or early twenties. And they are foreigners. Now put yourself in the place of a Babylonian bureaucrat. How would you like to have three young whippersnappers, wet behind the ears in their view, foreigners running and administering the Province of Babylon? And these bureaucrats now have to take orders from these three young foreigners. Now, what do you think their attitude might be? Obviously, jealousy and resentment were part of that and it will come into play later as we're going to see.

Now, we're going to start with Daniel 3, but before we do that we need to talk about the Septuagint translation of the Bible.

After the destruction of the Temple which occurred 19-20 years later, the Jews were scattered all over the Middle East. It's called to this day a Diaspora (and Israel had gone years before.), but most of them evolved to speaking Greek and not Hebrew over the decades because they were not back in Israel or not back in Judah.

Now the Septuagint is a translation of the Old Testament Hebrew into Greek. In part it was done so that all of the Jews and Israelites who spoke Greek could now read the Old Testament because they had lost the knowledge of Hebrew, many of them.

The Septuagint was commissioned by Ptolemy who was a king of Egypt in the third century B.C. And, at that time, the greatest center of world knowledge was the Library in Alexandria, Egypt. You can read that in any history. They had more historical documents than any place in the world. Now, that library was later burned.

But the fact is Ptolemy created and enriched this and funded this [the Septuagint] as a source of knowledge. It wasn't that he had any dedication to the truth or he had any dedication to the Jews or the Israelites or to God. It was an ancient manuscript and he wanted it translated into Greek.

In fact, Jewish tradition says that King Ptolemy once gathered, before he started this, he once gathered seventy-two Jewish elders together and he placed each one of them in a separate (We would say today a "cubicle.") a chamber. He had seventy-two chambers for seventy-two elders. And he placed them there and never revealed up to that point why he had done so. And he entered into each one's chamber and told them, he says, "Write for me the Law, the Torah of Moses your teacher." And he wanted each one to do it separately, independent of consulting with each other. And they did.

And the Jewish tradition said that God put into the mind of each one of those seventy-two men, they each wrote out a translation and when Ptolemy compared all seventy-two translations, they were identical. Someday we'll find out if that's true, but that is Jewish tradition. And it is also said that that event occurred the same year that the Temple was destroyed in 585 B.C. So, that's how the Septuagint translation came to be.

Now the reason we bring it up is that in Daniel 3 verse 1 in the Septuagint, it begins with the words "In his eighteenth year," referring to Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth years. Now, if the Septuagint is correct, that would place it at 587 B.C. Now the King James doesn't say that. But it makes sense from the standpoint that if it is correct, there were sixteen years between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. In other words, Daniel and these three young men had been ruling Babylon for sixteen years and running the capital for sixteen years if the Septuagint is correct. The King James is silent. Maybe it wasn't sixteen, maybe it was ten or maybe it was eight or maybe it was five. We don't know, but if the Septuagint is correct, then things begin to make even more sense.

So, beginning in Daniel 3 verse 1, we'll read out of the New King James.

Daniel 3:1. *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. (NKJ)*

That means the ratio, the aspect ratio of this image was ten to one. It was ten times higher than it was wide.

Daniel 3:1b. *He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. (NKJ)*

Now obviously, Nebuchadnezzar had clearly forgotten the lessons of chapter 2 because Daniel told him, "It is God who sets up kings. It is God who determines who is ruling and how long they rule." And he had forgotten that because now he's setting up an image to honor himself.

His arrogant attitude makes sense if chapter 2 is sixteen years after chapter 2 because he's had sixteen years to forget those lessons. He's had sixteen years of people sucking up to him and whispering in his ears and telling him how wonderful he is. So, now he comes up with this idea of this great image.

Now, we don't know for certain what image was. This is written in Aramaic. So, it is Strong's #6755, the word "image" here in Daniel 3 verse 1. And all it means is an idolatrous figure. We don't know anymore than that from the definition of the Aramaic word.

Now, the Israeli cubit was eighteen inches. The Babylonian cubit is twenty inches. So the image was somewhere between 90-100 feet tall, but only 9-10 feet wide—ten to one aspect ratio. Now that is the right ratio for an obelisk. So, it could well have been an obelisk.

But you see a human ratio is not ten to one; it's four to one. We're generally four times taller than we are wide. So, if this was an image of Nebuchadnezzar, it must have been a statue of him placed on a pedestal. So, it could have been a forty foot statue placed on a sixty foot pedestal. We just don't know.

It could be an obelisk. It could be a statue of him. It is not clear. Either way, it's quite imposing. And someday we'll find out what that was.

Now, verse 2:

Daniel 3:2. *And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, (NKJ)*

That the New King James. The King James says "princes."

Daniel 3:2b. *...the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, (NKJ)*

Every ranking person, he called in to witness the dedication of this image.

Daniel 3:2 continued. *...to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (NKJ)*

Verse 3, so all of these mucky mucks came in from all over the land and they:

Daniel 3:3b. *... gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (NKJ)*

Big ceremony dedicating this obelisk or this statue of Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel 3:4. *Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, (NKJ)*

In other words, everybody in the empire! Because there were many foreign peoples, there were many different languages spoken in the empire that they had conquered. Verse 5:

Daniel 3:5. *"that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, (NKJ)*

Now probably, this is speculation, but probably it was some kind of anthem, musical anthem created for the occasion. Just like when we play the national anthem, certain things happen. Military men salute, people put their hands over their hearts. In this case, this music was created and they were to bow down. And when they heard this music they were to bow down.

Daniel 3:5b. *...you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; (NKJ)*

A hundred feet high made of gold, very imposing! Verse 6:

Daniel 3:6. *"and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." (NKJ)*

So, again, if this is sixteen years later than the end of chapter 2, he has clearly forgotten the lessons of who is great and who is not great. And this is to exalt himself and his Kingdom. Verse 7:

Daniel 3:7. *So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of [all these instruments and probably this anthem, they] fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.
8) Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. (NKJ)*

The Tanakh translation says"

Daniel 3:7. *Seizing the occasion, certain Chaldeans came forward to slander the Jews. (TAN)*

You can understand. They've been chafing for sixteen years. Verse 9:

Daniel 3:9. *They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! (NKJ)*

Now that's about the biggest suck-up I can think! We've seen that in the Church. People suck up to ministers, evangelists, all that. "Oh, you're so wonderful! And you're going to do this and you're just wonderful and great and all that." Well, this is exactly what was happening here.

Verse 10:

Daniel 3:10. *"You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of [all of these instruments and this anthem], shall fall down and worship the gold image;
11) "and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. (NKJ)*

Now they get to the point in verse 12.

Daniel 3:12. *"There are certain Jews... (NKJ)*

Notice what they say!

Daniel 3:12b. *...whom you have set [up]... (NKJ)*

They're reminding him. "You're the one that did this."

Daniel 3:12. *There are certain Jews [which] you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. (NKJ)*

What they're saying is, "Look, you exalted them. You picked them up from slavery. You trained them. You taught them. You put them in these positions. And they're not going to bow down to your own image. They're not going to bow down to your god."

Daniel 3:12b. *They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up." (NKJ)*

Now, there are two things to note at this juncture.

First One:

Daniel is not there. Now, why is that? I mean he was next to the king. He was the number two guy. He was over Shadrach and Meshach and Abed-Nego, but why wasn't he there? Well, we'll see later that God did not want him to be there. And there is a reason behind it. So, the First One: Daniel isn't there.

And Number Two:

If the Septuagint is correct, there were sixteen years for jealousy and bitterness and resentment to build on the part of the Babylonian administrators. And they had been chafing for sixteen years under these foreign kids bossing them around and ruling them. Now Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego probably at this time were now in their late twenties, maybe early thirties. And they had been running the show for sixteen years. These people, these Chaldeans saw an opportunity to bring them down and they took it.

Verse 13:

Daniel 3:13. *Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring [these three young men. They did.] ... they brought [them] before the king.*

14) Nebuchadnezzar spoke ... to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? (NKJ)

Again, great vanity and ego—"My gods; they're my gods and I've set this up."

Nebuchadnezzar, humanly speaking, was probably very hurt because he took these Jewish slaves—in his mind—he took these Jewish slaves from nobodies, trained them, educated them, taught them, gave them these positions, gave them homes, gave them money, gave them servants. And he's saying, "I've done all this and you've treat me this way? You won't bow down to my god? You won't bow down to this image after all I've done for you?" So humanly, you can see why he was pretty ticked. In fact, he even named one of them after his own god and after his own name. "I've done all of this. And this is the way you treat me."

So, in verse 15, he makes them an offer. Despite what's happened in the past, he makes them an offer. He says:

Daniel 3:15. *"Now [regardless of what these other people say,] if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, [and all this music and probably this anthem], and [if] you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! (NKJ)*

So, the implication is "If you will fall down now in front of me and in front of all of the leaders of the nation, if you do that, everything's forgotten; everything's cool. You can keep your positions and I'll be happy and satisfied."

Daniel 3:15b. *But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the [middle] of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (NKJ)*

Again, [he] completely forgot the lessons of Daniel chapter 2.

Now, this furnace was used for smelting metal and refining metal. Iron oxide becomes metallic at 1250 degrees. This is not your living room fireplace. We would call it today a blast furnace. This is an industrial furnace. This is a gigantic furnace and very, very hot. And it's right there. And Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are looking at this thing. And then we continue in verse 16.

Daniel 3:16. *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we [don't] have need to answer you in this matter. (NKJ)*

Now, that is a slap in the face. That is very bold. "We don't even need to answer this." Can you imagine what the blood pressure of King Nebuchadnezzar is now? I think we've all been there where you can just feel the heat rising. And you see even in some people's faces, the neck starts to turn red and then the face and then the forehead and then so on. Undoubtedly, this was happening then.

It says:

Daniel 3:16b. *...we have no need to answer you in this matter. 17) "If that is the case, (NKJ)*

Meaning: "If you're going to throw us in this furnace, our God—not your God:"

Daniel 3:17b. ...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... (NKJ)

Now they didn't say, "He will deliver us." They said, "He is able to deliver us."

Daniel 3:17 continued. ...from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. (NKJ)

Meaning: "He's able. If He's willing, that will happen."

Now, they used the word "O king," and they were wise in the sense that they acknowledged Nebuchadnezzar as king. They went as far as they could in obeying him and acknowledging his authority; they went up just as far as they could.

Verse 18:

Daniel 3:18. "But if not, (NKJ)

Meaning: "If God chooses not to save us:"

Daniel 3:18b. ...let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (NKJ)

Now, they're saying this in front of all of the leaders of the Babylonian Empire. And they're saying this after Nebuchadnezzar has promoted them and done all of this for them. Now, you can imagine his reaction.

But they clearly knew that God could save them. They didn't know if He would save them.

But Nebuchadnezzar just had a hissy fit. Look at verse 19.

Daniel 3:19. Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. (NKJ)

I'm sure he was hoping they would relent and bow down. Then they slapped him in the face, in this sense. The Revised English Bible says, "His face became distorted with anger."

Daniel 3:19b. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. (NKJ)

Now, this is really hot, very hot. Verse 20:

Daniel 3:20. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

21) *Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the [middle] of [this] burning fiery furnace.*

22) *Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up [these three young Jews].*

23) *And these three men ... fell down bound into the [middle] of the burning ... furnace. (NKJ)*

Verse 24. You have men dead now, just fried to a crisp. You have these three men in the furnace.

Daniel 3:24. *Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "[Didn't we throw] three men ... into [this furnace]?" They answered and said ... "[Yes,] True, O king."*

25) *"Look!" he answered, "I see four men, walking [loose, walking] in the [middle] of the fire; and [they're] not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (NKJ)*

The New King James Version says, but in the margin it says, "literally son of the gods." And what Nebuchadnezzar is saying, "It looks like there's a Spirit-being in there with them who happens to be the son of one of the gods."

Verse 26:

Daniel 3:26. *Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, [He started yelling at them], "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, (NKJ)*

Now his tune is starting to change just a little bit.

Daniel 3:26b. *...come out, and come here." Then [the three] came from the [middle] of the fire.*

27) *And the [princes and the] administrators, [all of these rulers of the whole empire were] gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not [even] on them. (NKJ)*

Now, that's very impressive! It's obvious a miracle.

Daniel 3:28. *[Then] Nebuchadnezzar spoke, (NKJ)*

I mean what's the guy going to say?

Daniel 3:38b. *[he said], "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!*

29) *"Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this." (NKJ)*

Now, this is quite a turn around from probably five or ten minutes before.

Now, this doesn't say that Nebuchadnezzar says that their God is the one true God. It doesn't say that. Nor does it say that Nebuchadnezzar agreed to worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Nor does it say that Nebuchadnezzar decided to change his own name or Abed-Nego's name to reflect the one true God. So, the bottom line is he didn't give up his gods. He brought temporary credit to God Almighty, which he should have learned from Daniel chapter 2. And here's another lesson, but it's clear that Nebuchadnezzar kept worshipping his own gods.

Then in verse 30, poetic justice arrives.

Daniel 3:30. *Then the king promoted...* (NKJ)

The Aramaic means to advance or to prosper.

Daniel 3:30. *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.* (NKJ)

Now this was poetic justice because they were promoted or prospered or advanced even higher over the ones who wanted to bring them down. And, of course, now they [the Babylonian bureaucrats] were grinding their teeth and they were stomping and doing who knows what because at the end they [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego] were promoted even higher.

So this is the story that we read to our children and grandchildren. And they sit there wide-eyed thinking about the furnace and these men walking around in the fire and God saving them. But now is the time to ask the question: Why is this story here? What's the point of it? What's the purpose? Especially now twenty-five hundred odd years later, what does it have to do with us today at the end-times?

We have Five Lessons. Some are very obvious. First Lesson that we learn from this story is:

1. The three did not compromise even though they were threatened with death.

That's something all of us have to learn. They did not compromise even though they were threatened with death.

Now think about it. If you were one of the three and the image was there and you heard that everybody had to bow down and you were talking amongst yourselves, you could probably rationalize—the human mind would—that "Hey!

If we don't bow down and we all die, we can't help our Jewish friends. We can't help the rest of the Jewish captives in Babylon. So, maybe we should bow down and worship this thing just so we can retain our positions so that we can help the Jews in Babylon." That would be something that the human mind would probably come up with.

But God tells us we cannot compromise. Let's go to James chapter 1 and verse 27, again out of the New King James. Now we normally read this talking about visiting widows and orphans, but notice the further meaning of this. James 1 verse 27, it tells us what pure religion is.

James 1:27. *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, (NKJ)*

We normally go there for that, but notice the last sentence here.

James 1:27b. *...and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (NKJ)*

The New International says, "to keep oneself from being polluted."

The Jewish New Testament says, "to keep oneself from being contaminated."

Now, the English definition of the word "contaminated" means: to soil or to stain or to corrupt or to infect by contact or association.

And what this clearly says is we can't be contaminated; we can't be polluted or corrupted by the world around us. And that's exactly what Nebuchadnezzar was attempting to do to these three young men. And they did not compromise. And James says, "We must keep ourselves unspotted from the world."

Now as with both the king of physical Babylon and the king of spiritual Babylon that's going to come, the physical king (We know who the spiritual king of spiritual Babylon is.), God's servants were then threatened with death and they will be threatened with death in the future. Let's go to Matthew 24 and verse 9. We will be threatened with death as God's people at some point. Christ made this prophecy, Matthew 24 verse 9. Christ says:

Matthew 24:9. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and [then, they shall deliver you up and [shall kill you: and [you] shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. (KJV)*

It's going to happen again.

They [Daniel's three friends] did not compromise and God is demanded of His people today, "No compromise, even unto death." In standing in front of the king of this world, as we're going to see (the Beast, the False Prophet, ultimately with Satan behind it), we cannot compromise either. And they set an example for us of no compromise even facing death. That's the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson is:

2. Their faith saved them.

Now remember faith is that whatever God's will is is best for us. We have to come to the point in our lives that we trust God and have faith in God that no matter God allows us to go through, it is for our ultimate good, for our ultimate learning, for our ultimate benefit and for us to be the Bride of Christ. We have to have faith in that.

Remember, the three young men said, "He is **able** to deliver us." They didn't say, "He **will** deliver us." But they had faith that whatever happened—live or die—it was for the best because it was according to God's will for them. They had faith that God would always do what is best for them. We need to have that same kind of faith.

Let's go to Ephesians 2 and verse 8, a very familiar Scripture. Ephesians 2 verse 8, again out of the New King James, it tells us:

Ephesians 2:8. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, (NKJ)*

Now the Jewish New Testament says:

Ephesians 2:8. *You have been delivered by grace through trusting, and even this is not your accomplishment but God's gift. (JNT)*

Both the grace and the trusting or the grace and the faith; they're both gifts from God.

The Cassirer translation says:

Ephesians 2:8. *And indeed, it is by grace you have been saved, with faith as its instrument. It was not anything coming from ourselves; it was God's gift.*

But it is clear that faith will save us. And their faith (these three young men's faith, in their late twenties, early thirties), it saved them. And in the end-time, we in God's Church (We're called "spiritual Jews," just as they were physical Jews.), will be saved by faith and by obedience and by, obviously, God's grace.

Let's go to Revelation 14. We're going to read verses 11 and 12, again out of the New King James. Notice what it says. Revelation 14:11:

Revelation 14:11. *"And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, (NKJ)*

Now, this is a hint of what is going to come. Not only the Beast, but there is an image, just like in Daniel chapter 3.

Revelation 14:11b. ...and whoever receives the mark of his name."

12) Here is the patience of the saints [referring to us today]; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus [Christ]. (NKJ)

Now, God's people (these three young men and us today) when facing both the kings of physical Babylon and later (We don't know how many years down the road.) of spiritual Babylon, God's servants were then and will be saved by faith. And the lesson for us today is that we have to ask for faith, grow in faith, and be able to trust God with our very lives as they did. So, the Second Lesson is to learn that faith saved them.

Now, the Third Lesson that we can glean from this story is that:

3. God didn't prevent them from going into the fire.

God could have stopped it. God could have stopped it right at the mouth of the furnace, but He didn't. He chose to let them go through the fire.

Now, sometimes we think being in God's Church, being called out of the world, it's easy for us to think, "Well, if God is on my side, He's going to keep bad things from happening to me." And when people go through trials they say—and I've done it too—"Well, God, why me? You've called me. You've given me Your spirit. Why are You making me do this? Why are You bringing all these trials? Why are You allowing all these trials to come my way? After all, we're supposed to be blessed people and why is my life filled with all these trials?"

Remember the three said, "He is able," but not "He will." Remember that? They said that. So, they themselves didn't know if they were going into the furnace or that God would stop them before they went into the furnace. I'm sure they never thought they would go into the furnace and survive. I'm sure they thought when they got pitched into the furnace it was God's will that they die. And lo and behold, now they're in the furnace and they're walking around and nothing is happening to them. But they clearly understood that God was able, but they didn't know if He would.

The fact is God will always do what is best for us, what we need in order to be the Bride of Christ and to be in His Family. Sometimes that means going through very difficult situations. Sometimes it means going through horrible, horrible trials, but at the end of the day, God allows it because that is what is best for us.

David finally learned that. Let's go to Psalm 119. We'll begin in verse 67. Again, we'll read this out of the New King James. Psalm 119 and verse 67, David is referring to the time prior to Bathsheba and he said:

Psalm 119:67. Before I was afflicted I went astray, (NKJ)

And boy, he did with Bathsheba! So, what this is saying is "I wasn't afflicted up till that point and because of that I went astray. Because things were good,

because I'd been prospered and blessed, I went off the path." There is a lesson there.

But notice he says:

Psalm 119:67b. ...but now... (NKJ)

Meaning: "After I've been afflicted."

Psalm 119:67 continued. I keep Your word. (NKJ)

"I'm much more diligent now that I've been through this mess and I've had to pay the penalty and suffer the consequences for my actions." [He] lost a child, [had] nothing but trouble from his family, nothing but violence and murder and intrigue and insurrection and rebellion from his family and those that followed them.

But notice verse 71.

Psalm 119:71. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, (NKJ)

Because he learned from the affliction; he learned from the trial.

Psalm 119:71b. ...that I may learn Your statutes. (NKJ)

The implication is "I didn't really understand Your statutes before I was afflicted. I didn't really understand the benefit of keeping Your Law before I was afflicted." Because he broke God's Law and affliction resulted. And now he learned a very painful series of lessons.

Verse 72:

Psalm 119:72. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver. (NKJ)

He learned that the trappings of being a king, the palaces, the horses, the armies, the courtiers, all the wealth, all the concubines that he had, he said, "That means nothing compared to Your Law that I now understand."

That's why trials, while painful, are a good thing. We won't turn there but James 1 and verse 2. Remember James says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever trials face you of many kinds. Consider it joy when you're tried and tested."? Well, David, through the 20/20 hindsight, saw that. That he was a better person. He learned some lessons he would not otherwise have learned through this horrible affliction.

The purpose of trials is very much analogous to the process of refining silver and gold. Someone sent me this piece where a woman went to visit a refinery. They went back and this was a place here in the twentieth or twenty-first century where they refined as though they did it centuries ago, millennia ago. And she has the following description of what happened.

As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one need to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were the hottest so as to burn away all the impurities.

[This is] kind of a direct analogy of the three men being in the center of the fiery furnace.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot. Then, she thought again about the verse that says, "He sits as a refiner and a purifier of silver."

And, of course, we're the silver. We're the ones being refined.

She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time while the silver was being refined. And the man answered and said, "Yes." He not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. (Emphasis added.)

Do you think God removes His eyes from us while we're going through a trial? Do you think God somehow thrusts us into a trial and then walks away and goes to sleep or takes His attention somewhere else? Well, of course not. This analogy is direct.

"If the silver was left a moment too long," the refiner is saying. "If the silver was left a moment too long, it would be destroyed."

The woman was silent for a moment and then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined, all the impurities are gone?"

He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy—when I see my image in it."

God refines us and tries us until He sees His image and the image of Jesus Christ in us. We're molded and shaped (Another analogy is the potter and the clay.) but in this case refining. When God can see His image in each one of us, the refining process is finished. He's done. But until that time, the refining process goes on and on and on to refine us so that we will be in the image of Jesus Christ.

And the same was true back then with physical Judah, physical Israel and today with spiritual Israel. God will not keep us from the fire. There is no promise in the Bible that God will keep us from the fire. In fact, you could have a whole sermon on His promises that we will be in the fire and that we will suffer. God allowed these three young men to be put directly into the fire. He could have stopped it at the mouth of the furnace, but he chose not to as an illustration to us today that we will have to go through the fire.

But remember what happened to them after it was over with? They were promoted. They were elevated. They received greater spiritual riches, greater rewards than they had before they went into the fire. Likewise God is going to allow spiritual Israel, us today, to pass through the fire. And, as we heard in the opening prayer and we see in the Sabbath updates, many are experiencing tremendous, tremendous trials right now. But God has promised that those trials are for our good, our benefit. And like these three men, after the trials are finished, after God sees His image in us, we will receive greater spiritual riches, greater spiritual rewards than they would ever think of (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego) and we can ever think of as physical human beings when we emerge from the fiery trials.

So, let's understand that God did not prevent them from going into the fiery trials and He will not prevent us, likewise before it's all over, going through fiery trials.

The Fourth Lesson we can learn, this is a huge lesson.

4. The three men stood on their own two feet without Daniel being there.

Now think about that!

It is evident from the Book of Daniel, if you read Daniel from start to finish, that God worked through Daniel in a very special way. God allowed him to interpret dreams, to discern dreams. He gave him incredible wisdom. All of these gifts He gave to Daniel. And Daniel was the close friend of these three young men. And, in fact, he was their mentor. He was older probably and he taught them. They were out in the field and he was at the king's palace and the king's court. And he taught them and educated them and was a mentor to them.

Yet, during this occasion, Daniel was not there. Now, that's very, very important. Why was he not there? Why did God—and we don't know how God did it or what God did. We don't know if he was traveling, whether he was ill. We have no idea, but God created circumstances that Daniel wasn't there. Why did He do that? What was the point?

Well, it's obvious when you think about it that if Daniel was not there, these three young men would have to stand on their own two feet. They couldn't lean on Daniel. They couldn't go to Daniel and say, "What do you think we ought to do?" They couldn't do that. In fact, there is every indication they couldn't communicate with him for whatever reason. They had to decide for themselves what they were going to do.

And they had to do the same thing as Abraham had to do with the knife coming down on Isaac. There was nobody to help him. There was nobody around. You either obey God or you don't. You either follow God's instructions or you don't. Abraham learned that.

And they learned that Daniel was not their ticket to salvation. They learned that they had to stand on their own two feet and they couldn't go and lean on Daniel's shoulder and ask him what they should be doing.

And this is happening so much today. People lean on other people. Let me give you two quotes that I have heard with my own ears. They said, "Following so-and-so" (And they named the leader of a certain group.), "Following so-and-so gives me a leg up on the Kingdom of God," as though this individual is going to get them into the Kingdom of God.

The same thing would have happened if Daniel was there. "Daniel's going to take care of us. Daniel's going to make it all right. Daniel's right next to Nebuchadnezzar. He'll speak for us and get Nebuchadnezzar to change his mind." Daniel was not there by design.

I heard also the quote, "So-and-so is going to take us to a Place of Safety. If we just sit in the audience and we're part of this group, the leader so-and-so is going to take us to a Place of Safety."

It's not going to happen! No man is going to take us to a Place of Safety. Just like Daniel was not going to take care of the situation. They had to decide for themselves what they were going to do: Obey God or obey the world or obey the king of Babylon. And the king of Babylon today is Satan the Devil.

Look at Philippians 2 and we'll read verses 12 and 13. They had to stand on their own two feet. And Paul is trying to tell the Church in Philippi the very same thing. Philippians 2 and verse 12, out of the New King James again, Paul says:

Philippians 2:12. *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, [but] not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, (NKJ)*

He was writing them a letter. Obviously, he wasn't there and he's saying, "Now I'm not there for you to lean on me. I'm not there to look over your shoulder. I am gone." But he says:

Philippians 2:12b. *...now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (NKJ)*

"You must work it out. You can't lean on me. I can't work out your salvation for you. Just by following me around or sitting in the synagogue, (They were teaching in the synagogue or somebody's home most likely.) just by being there doesn't mean that you're going to attain salvation. You have to work out your own salvation."

Verse 13:

Philippians 2:13. *for it is God [NOT A MAN.] who works in you both to will [meaning to have the desire] and to do [meaning the works the deeds] His good pleasure. (NKJ)*

Now, let's go to Revelation 3 and see another example here. Revelation 3 and we'll read verses 20 and 21. Christ is saying here in these two verses, He's saying, "I'm on the outside, you're on the inside. And look at what's happening. Revelation 3 and verse 20:

Revelation 3:20. *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*

21) "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, (NKJ)

And the implication is the Marriage Supper and dining together, sitting with Him on His throne.

Revelation 3:21b. *...as I also overcame [I] sat down with My Father on His throne. (NKJ)*

And Christ is saying to the end-time Church, "I'm here knocking on the door. I'm pleading with you to let Me into your lives, let Me into your hearts, let Me into your minds. I want you to let Me in."

I hate to say it, but too many in this current era of God's Church are not personally answering the knock of Jesus Christ. They're not answering. They're not letting Christ into their lives. They're looking to men. They're looking to administrations. They're looking to doing a work. They're looking to do whatever, but not let Christ in their minds. Too many are answering to a man or to an administration and not to God and not to Jesus Christ. We have to stand on our own two feet as these three young men did.

So, during the times of the physical king of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar and the spiritual king of Babylon, God's elect will have to stand on their own two feet. Nobody is going to prop us up. We're not going to walk into the Kingdom on somebody's coattails or somebody's shirt sleeves. It's just not going to happen.

Our salvation is not predicated on someone else's relationship to God. Now, we have to get that message!

Our salvation is not predicated on somebody else's relationship with God.

It is predicated on our personal relationship with God.

We can't rely on somebody else's relationship with God. We don't have any control over that. God is looking to us and whether we're going to open that door and let [Him] and Christ live in us. So, the Fourth Lesson that is so important is these three young men, by God's design, had to stand on their own two feet and we must do the same!

Fifth and Last Lesson:

5. This story of these three young men and the fiery furnace is going to be repeated at the end of the age. It is going to happen again!

This story is for our benefit. It is not just to entertain our children and grandchildren. It is for our benefit because it is going to happen again. Look at Romans 15 and verse 4. Romans 15 and verse 4, this tells us very clearly that what is written in the Bible is for our use, our learning, our understanding. Romans 15 verse 4, it tells us:

Romans 15:4. *For whatsoever things were written aforetime... (KJV)*

And the only thing they had aforetime then was the Old Testament.

Romans 15:4. *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (KJV)*

Boy, if there's anything that gives you hope it's the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego! I mean they went right to the wall! They were in a furnace and God performed a miracle. So, there are lessons to be learned.

Now, we're talking here about this story is going to be repeated at the end of the age. Let's go to Revelation chapter 13 and see that. This is going to happen again and we had better be prepared for it. Revelation 13 beginning in verse 4, out of the New King James:

Revelation 13:4. *So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (NKJ)*

Meaning: He is more powerful than any.

Verse 7, Revelation 13:

Revelation 13:7. *It was granted to him [referring to the Beast now] to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. (NKJ)*

[That is] a lot of authority!

Jumping to verse 14; it says, "And he" now referring to the False Prophet.

Revelation 13:14. *... deceives those who dwell on the earth... (NKJ)*

Great deception is coming in our lifetime.

Revelation 13:14b. *...by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast... (NKJ)*

It's going to happen again.

Revelation 13:14 continued. ...telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.
15) He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause [NOTICE THIS!] as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. (NKJ)

Just like Daniel 3. Just like these three young men!

The king of Babylon at the end of the age, which will be the Beast aided by the False Prophet, will demand exactly what Nebuchadnezzar demanded of the Babylonians and all the people in the Kingdom.

We will have a choice to make. Are we going to bow down and worship the image that is set up by the King of Babylon in these end days? Ultimately the King of Babylon is Satan the Devil. Or, will we worship our God and refuse to do so as these three young men did?

We need to spiritually prepare ourselves for that eventuality and for that day to come. We need to prepare now to decide what we would do when faced with that eventuality.

Now, let's conclude.

King David ruled approximately 410 years before the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, before that happened. But the principles of what he wrote back then applied to them and apply to us today. Let's go with one final Scripture over to Psalm chapter 66 and we're going to read verses 10 through 12. Psalm 66:10-12 and out of the New King James again. These principles that he wrote long before these three young men ever lived applied to them and apply to us today. Psalm 66 verse 10:

Psalm 66:10. For You, O God, have tested us; (NK)

David was tested. The three young men were tested. We're being tested.

Psalm 66:10b. ...you have refined us as silver is refined. (NKJ)

And silver is refined in the fire, as we just read. Verse 11:

Psalm 66:11. You brought us into the net; (NKJ)

Now that takes fish captive. It takes people captive.

Psalm 66:11b. ...you laid affliction on our backs [many trials].
12) You have caused men to ride over our heads; (NKJ)

Meaning: to be elevated above us or to take advantage of us or to abuse us.
Notice this!

Psalm 66:12b. ...we went through fire and through water; (NKJ)

But notice the end result.

Psalm 66:12 continued. ...but You brought us out to rich fulfillment [as the New King James says]. (NKJ)

The NIV says, "You have brought us to a place of abundance," at the end of the day.

David could say that. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego could say that. And if we are faithful, we will be able to say that.

These three young men were members of physical Israel, physical Judah and they were literally refined in the fire, absolutely literally, but they came through it in a better position than they had ever been before.

And, as we approach the end-time, as we get closer and closer to the end-time, spiritual Israel, the Firstfruits, God's people, will be increasingly refined. The temperature will be hotter. The trials will be more severe. And the Book of Revelation tells us. It even says that a portion of the Church, the dragon—the ultimate king of Babylon—is going to become enraged with them as Nebuchadnezzar was enraged with these three young men—he, this ultimate king of Babylon will go to make war with them and their offspring, we're told. Those not in a Place of Safety, we're told.

So, let's understand that the spiritual attributes, the character traits that helped save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego from the king of Babylon way back then are going to save spiritual Israel from the king of Babylon in the future.

- **No compromise! Even in the face of death, no compromise!**
- **Tremendous faith.**
- **Standing on our own two feet, not following a man, but working out our own salvation.**
- **Enduring going into the fire, enduring the trials.**

So, you see that this story of these three young men is clearly much more than just a kiddy bedtime story. It really happened and it happened for a reason. It has direct application in our lives today—direct application!

We know that God saved these three young men—without doubt—from the fire of the king of Babylon back then. And God is going to save us from the fire of the true king of Babylon, Satan the Devil. He will do it today and He will do it in the years to come. So, let's learn the lessons of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego.