

Anthology | Learning to Love the Stories of God

Week 10: Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3)

Read the story:

When?

During the era of The Exiles. This story occurs after Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have been brought into King Nebuchadnezzar's house.

Who?

- King Nebuchadnezzar
- The satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces
- The herald
- Peoples, nations, languages
- Certain Chaldeans
- The Jews
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego
- Nebuchadnezzar's gods
- God
- The mighty men of Nebuchadnezzar's army
- The fourth man in the fire

What?

- The golden image
- The fiery furnace

Where?

The plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Summarize the story:

V. 1-7 King Nebuchadnezzar has a golden statue made (reminiscent of the statue he dreamed about in Daniel 2). It was 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. He invites all the leaders and officials from all the lands that the Babylonian empire has conquered to come together and bow down to worship the golden image. Along with the invitation, Nebuchadnezzar threatens that anyone who doesn't worship his statue will die by being thrown into a fiery furnace. With a large fanfare of instruments, everyone bows down and worships the statue.

V. 8-15 Some Chaldeans come to Nebuchadnezzar and maliciously accuse Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego of not bowing down to worship the statue. Nebuchadnezzar is enraged and has Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego brought before him for questioning. Nebuchadnezzar commands them to bow before the statue or be thrown into the furnace. Then he asks "who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

V. 16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego respond to Nebuchadnezzar's threat with a strong no thank you. They answer Nebuchadnezzar's question by confidently stating that God can absolutely save deliver them from the fiery furnace and they also state that whether God saves them or not, they will remain faithful to Him. They won't bow to the golden statue or worship Nebuchadnezzar's gods.

V. 19-23 Their answer is infuriating to Nebuchadnezzar and he orders the fire to be made 7 times hotter than it already was. He orders some of his mighty soldiers to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the fire. The fire was so hot that Nebuchadnezzar's mighty soldiers were killed in the process.

V. 24-25 Nebuchadnezzar is stunned to see that the three men he had thrown into the fire appear to be unharmed and walking around in the fire. He's also astonished that a fourth man is with them and he says that the fourth man "is like a son of the gods."

V. 26-30 Nebuchadnezzar calls Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out of the fire. He calls them servants of the Most High God. All the officials along with Nebuchadnezzar look and are stunned to see that not a hair on their bodies or even their clothes have been burnt at all in the flames. Nebuchadnezzar then begins to praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He also threatens to kill anyone who speaks against God. The chapter finishes with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego getting promoted for their faithfulness.

Leader Notes:

Throughout Daniel 1-4, Nebuchadnezzar shows a pattern of flip flopping from seeing God work powerfully and praising Him, then flipping back to worshipping his false gods and himself. God goes to great lengths over and over to humble Nebuchadnezzar. One of the primary tools that God uses is the faithful steadiness of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They are exiled foreigners who have been taken from their home country by force and forced to work in the house of their captor's King. Instead of complaining and hating their situation, these four young Jewish men seek to remain humbly faithful to God in the midst of their foreign, pluralistic (accepting of multiple faiths, belief systems and religions) and often hateful culture. God uses their humility, their faithfulness and their boldness to show off to Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar both His incomparable power and how God demands and is worthy of exclusive worship for Himself. God is unwilling to let people keep worshipping themselves or false gods.

Analyze the story:

Attributes of God displayed:

- God demands exclusive worship. (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to worship a false god because they know the one true God.)
- God hates idolatry. (Pattern of Daniel 1-4 and God's interactions with Nebuchadnezzar.)
- God graciously intercedes. (God supernaturally uses Nebuchadnezzar's desire to unite everyone in his kingdom around worshipping a false god and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's refusal to do so as an opportunity to draw people to worship Him as the one true God.)
- God is present in the midst of suffering. (He sees Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego suffering for their faithfulness and sends someone to join with them in the fire.)
- God is a deliverer. (He powerfully delivers His servants from the fire.)
- God is a protector. (He protects His servants completely; not even the smell of fire is on them.)

Who is who in the story? (Who is like us? Who is like Christ?)

- We are like Nebuchadnezzar in how we worship false gods.
- We are like Nebuchadnezzar in how we worship ourselves.
- We are like Nebuchadnezzar in that we get bothered when people don't do what we want.
- We are like Nebuchadnezzar in how we long for people's approval and praise.
- We are like the officials of Babylon in that we often bow to others' demands out of fear of man.
- We are like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in how we're called to be faithful in the face of opposition.
- We are like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in how we're called to give up everything (including being willing to remain faithful to Jesus).

- The fourth man in the fire is like Christ in how he walks through the fire with God's servants. (Consider Philippians 3:10 where Paul says ministry suffering is sharing in the fellowship of Jesus' suffering.)
- The fourth man in the fire is like Christ in how he protects and delivers them from the fire and death.
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are like Christ in that they are willing to die to glorify God.

Connect the story:

Parallel Statements:

- God graciously leads people from idol worship to worshipping Him.
- God sends His servant(s) from a distant land to confront the ruling powers and idol worship of the day.
- God's servant(s) are willing to be delivered to death to see God lifted up and glorified.
- God's servant(s) have confidence in the midst of persecution. (Consider Hebrews 12:1-4).

Apply the story:

- Worship God alone and put your idols to death.
- Stop worshipping yourself and believing that other people should listen to and obey all your ideas without question.
- Be courageous and confident in the face of opposition so God will be glorified.
- Repent from your fear of man. (Even powerful humans like King Nebuchadnezzar can't do anything to God's servants that God can't deliver them from. And God's worthy of worship whether He physically saves His servants from pain or not.)
- Practice being willing to suffer for Jesus' sake by serving and laying down your preferences on a regular basis.
- Repent from complaining about your circumstances instead of asking God where He's giving you opportunities to faithfully join Him in His mission.

Who needs this story?

- People who are pluralistic and/or think all religions are equal.
- People who are fearful. Specifically fearful of other's opinion of themselves.
- People who cower and give in to social pressure to sin along with the rest of the crowd instead of seeking to glorify God faithfully.
- People who are consumed with self-centered concern about their circumstances.
- People who don't know if God will take care of them.
- People who question God is in the midst of their suffering.