



Shadrach

Meshach

Abednego

Survive The Fiery Furnace

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Overview

SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO SURVIVE

A FIREY FURNACE

The story of Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael), and Abednego (Azariah) is told in the book of Daniel.

Friendships make life enjoyable and difficult times bearable. Friendships are tested and strengthened by hardships.

Such was the relationship between three young Jewish men deported to Babylon along with Daniel. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego help us think about the real meaning of friendship.

As much as these friends meant to each other, they never allowed their friendship to usurp Gods place in their lives—not even in the face of death.

Together they silently defied King Nebuchadnezzar’s order to fall down and worship the image of gold. They shared a courageous act, while others, eager to get rid of them, told the king that the three Jews were being disloyal.

While this was not true, Nebuchadnezzar could not spare them without shaming himself. This was the moment of truth. Death was about to end their friendship. A small compromise would have allowed them to live and go on enjoying each other, serving God, and serving their people while in this foreign land.

But they were wise enough to see that compromise would have poisoned the very conviction that bound them so closely—each had a higher allegiance to God. So they did not hesitate to place their lives in the hands of God. The rest was victory!

When we leave God out of our most important relationships, we tend to expect those relationships to meet needs in us that only God can meet. Friends are helpful, but they cannot meet our deepest spiritual needs.

Leaving God out of our relationships indicates how unimportant he really is in our own lives. Our relationship with God should be important enough to touch our other relationships—especially our closest friendships.

Also called Hananiah

A Hebrew captive in Babylon

The Captivity of Daniel and His Companions

Daniel 1:1-7

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, took Jerusalem, and carried whom and what he pleased away.

From this first captivity, most think the seventy years are to be dated. It is the interest of princes to employ wise men; and it is their wisdom to find out and train up such.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that these chosen youths should be taught. All their Hebrew names had something of God in them; but to make them forget the God of their fathers, the Guide of their youth, the heathen gave them names that savored of idolatry.

While Ezekiel was ministering to the captives in Babylon, Daniel was drafted as a counselor to King Nebuchadnezzar. With God's help, Daniel interpreted two of the king's dreams, Daniel's three friends were rescued from certain death in the fiery furnace, and Daniel was rescued from a lions' den. Daniel's life is a picture of the triumph of faith. May God grant us this type of faith so that we may also live courageously each day.

Born during the middle of Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22-23), Daniel grew up during the king's reforms. During this time, Daniel probably heard Jeremiah, a prophet he quoted in Daniel 9:2. In 609 B.C., Josiah was killed in a battle against Egypt, and within four years, the southern kingdom of Judah had returned to its evil ways.

In 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylonia. In September of that year, he swept into Palestine and surrounded Jerusalem, making Judah his vassal state. To demonstrate his dominance, Nebuchadnezzar took many of Jerusalem's wisest men and most beautiful women to Babylon as captives. Daniel was among this group.

Nebuchadnezzar, the supreme leader of Babylonia, was feared throughout the world. When he invaded a country, defeat was certain. After a victory, the Babylonians usually took the most talented and useful people back to Babylon and left only the poor behind to take whatever land they wanted and to live peacefully there (2 Kings 24:14).

This system fostered great loyalty from conquered lands and ensured a steady supply of wise and talented people for civil service.

At certain times God allows his work to suffer. In this instance, the Babylonians raided the temple of God, and took the worship articles to the temple of a god in Babylon. This god may have been Bel, also called Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonians. Those who loved the Lord must have felt disheartened and discouraged.

We feel greatly disappointed when our churches suffer physical damage, split, close down for financial reasons, or are wracked by scandals. We do not know why God allows his church to experience these calamities. But like the people who witnessed the plundering of the temple by the Babylonians, we must trust that God is in control and that he is watching over all who trust in him.

The common language of Babylonia was Aramaic, while the language of scholarship included the ancient and complicated Babylonian language. The academic program would have included mathematics, astronomy, history, science, and magic.

These young men demonstrated not only aptitude, but also discipline. This character trait, combined with integrity, served them well in their new culture. Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of Daniel and his friends because he wanted to make them Babylonian—in their own eyes and in the eyes of the Babylonian people. New names would help them assimilate into the culture.

Daniel means “God is my Judge” in Hebrew; his name was changed to Beltshazzar meaning “Bel, protect his life!” (Bel, also called Marduk, was the chief Babylonian god). Hananiah means “the LORD shows grace”; his new name, Shadrach, probably means “under the command of Aku” (the moon god). Mishael means “who is like God?”; his new name, Meshach, probably means “who is like Aku?”

Azariah means “the LORD helps”; his new name, Abednego, means “servant of Nego/Nebo” (or Nabu, the god of learning and writing).

This was how the king attempted to change the religious loyalty of these young men from Judah’s God to Babylonia’s gods.

Their Refusal to Eat the King's Meat

Daniel 1:8-16

The interest we think we make for ourselves, we must acknowledge to be God's gift. Daniel was still firm to his religion.

Whatever they called him, he still held fast the spirit of an Israelite. These youths scrupled concerning the meat, lest it should be sinful.

When God's people are in Babylon they need take special care that they partake not of her sins. It is much to the praise of young people, not to covet or seek the delights of

Daniel avoided defiling himself with sin. It is easier to keep temptation at a distance, than to resist it when near.

Daniel resolved not to eat this food, either because the meat was some food forbidden by Jewish law, like pork (see Leviticus 11), or because accepting the king’s food and drink was the first step toward depending on his gifts and favors. Although Daniel was in a culture that did not honor God, he still obeyed God’s laws.

Resolve is a strong word that means to be devoted to principle and to be committed to a course of action. When Daniel resolved not to defile himself, he was being true to a lifelong determination to do what was right and not to give in to the pressures around him. We too are often assaulted by pressures to compromise our standards and live more like the world around us.

Merely wanting or preferring God’s will and way is not enough to stand against the onslaught of temptation. Like Daniel, we must resolve to obey God.

It is easier to resist temptation if you have thought through your convictions well before the temptation arrives. Daniel and his friends made their decision to be faithful to the laws of God before they were faced with the king's delicacies, so they did not hesitate to stick with their convictions.

We will get into trouble if we have not previously decided where to draw the line. Before such situations arise, decide on your commitments. Then when temptation comes, you will be ready to say no.

God moved with an unseen hand to change the heart of this Babylonian official. The strong moral conviction of these four young men made an impact. God promises to be with his people in times of trial and temptation (Psalm 106:46; Isaiah 43:2-5; 1 Cor. 10:13).

His active intervention often comes just when we take a stand for him. Stand for God and trust him to protect you in ways you may not be able to see.

Anything short of complete obedience meant execution for the officials who served Nebuchadnezzar. Even in such a small matter as this, the official feared for his life.

The Babylonians were trying to change the *thinking* of these Jews by giving them a Babylonian education, their *loyalty* by changing their names, and their *life-style* by changing their diet. Without compromising, Daniel found a way to live by God's standards in a culture that did not honor God.

Wisely choosing to negotiate rather than to rebel, Daniel suggested an experimental ten-day diet of vegetables and water, instead of the royal foods and wine the king offered. Without compromising, Daniel quickly thought of a practical, creative solution that saved his life and the lives of his companions.

As God's people, we may adjust to our culture as long as we do not compromise God's laws.

Their Improvement in Wisdom

Daniel 1:17-21

Daniel and his fellows kept to their religion; and God rewarded them with eminence in learning. God will honour those who honour him, but those who despise him shall be lightly esteemed.

Daniel shares God's blessing with the Hebrew children.

Daniel 2:17

Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:

Daniel was at a crisis point. Imagine going to see the powerful, temperamental king who had just angrily ordered your death! Daniel did not shrink back in fear, however, but confidently believed God would tell him all the king wanted to know. When the king gave Daniel time to find the answer, Daniel found his three friends and they prayed.

When you find yourself in a tight spot, share your needs with trusted friends who also believe in God's power. Prayer is more effective than panic. Panic confirms your hopelessness; prayer confirms your hope in God. Daniel's trust in God saved himself, his three friends, and all the other wise men of Babylon.

Given government positions

Daniel 2:49

Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

After being named ruler over the whole province of Babylon and placed in charge of the wise men, Daniel requested that his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, be appointed as his assistants. Daniel knew that he could not handle such an enormous responsibility without capable assistants, so he chose the best men he knew—his three Hebrew companions.

A competent leader never does all the work alone; he or she knows how to delegate and supervise. Moses, Israel's greatest leader, shared the burden of administration with dozens of assistants. (This story is in Exodus 18:13-27.)

Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image

Daniel 3:1-7

In the height of the image, about thirty yards, probably is included a pedestal, and most likely it was only covered with plates of gold, not a solid mass of that precious metal.

There is nothing so bad which the careless world will not be drawn in remembrance of a fiery furnace. By such methods, false worship has been set up and maintained.

In Babylon's religious culture, statues were frequently worshiped. Nebuchadnezzar hoped to use this huge image (ninety feet high by nine feet wide) as a strategy to unite the nation and solidify his power by centralizing worship.

This gold image may have been inspired by his dream. Instead of having only a head of gold, however, it was gold from head to toe. Nebuchadnezzar wanted his kingdom to last forever. When he made the statue, Nebuchadnezzar showed that his devotion to Daniel's God was short-lived. He neither feared nor obeyed the God who was behind the dream.

Satrap was a governor over major divisions of the empire, serving as the chief representative of the king. Prefects were the governors over conquered cities. Governors were civil administrators over provinces.

This blazing furnace was not a small oven for cooking dinner or heating a house; it was a huge industrial furnace that could have been used for baking bricks or smelting metals. The temperatures were hot enough to assure that no one could survive. The roaring flames could be seen leaping from its top opening, and a fiery blast killed the soldiers who went up to the large opening (Daniel 3:22).

Shadrach and His Companions Refuse to Worship the Image

Daniel 3:8-18

The matter is put into a choice, turn, or burn.

Proud men are still ready to say, as Nebuchadnezzar, Who is the Lord, that I should fear his power? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not hesitate whether they should comply or not. Life or death were not to be considered.

They did not contrive an evasive answer, when a direct answer was expected.

The faithful servants of God find him able to control and overrule all the powers armed against them. Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst. If He be for us, we need not fear what man can do unto us.

The saving them from sinful compliance, was as great a miracle in the kingdom of grace, as the saving them out of the fiery furnace was in the kingdom of nature.

They Are Cast into a Furnace, but Are Miraculously Preserved

Daniel 3:19-27

Let Nebuchadnezzar heat his furnace as hot as he can, a few minutes will finish the torment of those cast into it; but hell-fire tortures, and yet does not kill. Those who worshipped the beast and his image, have no rest, no pause, no moment free from pain, Rev 14:10, 11.

Nebuchadnezzar owns them for servants of the most high God; a God able to deliver them out of his hand. It is our God only is the consuming fire, Heb 12:29.

“His attitude toward them changed.” When we do something that offends non-Christians, their attitude toward us often changes because they are basically selfish. Christians should be different; they should still love those who offend them. It was obvious to those watching that this fourth person was supernatural. We cannot be certain who the fourth man was. It could have been an angel or a pre-

incarnate appearance of Christ. In either case, God sent a heavenly visitor to accompany these faithful men during their time of great trial.

3:25-30 God's deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was a great victory of faith for the Jews in captivity. They were protected from harm, they were comforted in trial, God was glorified, and they were rewarded. Let us determine to be true to God no matter how difficult the pressure or punishment. God's protection transcends anything we could imagine.

3:27 These young men had been completely untouched by the fire and heat. Only the rope that bound them had been burned. No human can bind us if God wants us to be free. The power available to us is the same that delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and raised Christ from the dead (Ephes. 1:18-20). Trust God in every situation. There are eternal reasons for temporary trials; so be thankful that your destiny is in God's hands, not in human hands.

Nebuchadnezzar Gives Glory to Jehovah

Daniel 3:28-30

What God did for these his servants, would help to keep the Jews to their religion while in captivity, and to cure them of idolatry. The miracle brought deep convictions on Nebuchadnezzar. But no abiding change then took place in his conduct.

Nebuchadnezzar was not making a commitment here to serve the Hebrews' God alone. Instead, he was acknowledging that God is powerful, and he commanded his people not to speak against God. Nebuchadnezzar didn't tell the people to throw away all the other gods, but to add this one to the list.

Where was Daniel in this story? The Bible doesn't say, but there are several possibilities.

(1) He may have been on official business in another part of the kingdom.

(2) He may have been present, but because he was a ruler, the officials didn't accuse him of not falling down and worshiping the image.

(3) He may have been in the capital city handling the administration while Nebuchadnezzar was away.

(4) He may have been considered exempt from bowing down to the image because of his reputation for interpreting dreams through his God. Whether Daniel was there or not, we can be sure that he would not have worshiped the image.

He, who preserved these pious Jews in the fiery furnace, is able to uphold us in the hour of temptation, and to keep us from falling into sin.

Strengths and accomplishments:

Stood with Daniel against eating food from the king's table
Shared a friendship that stood the tests of hardship, success, wealth, and possible death
Unwilling to compromise their convictions even in the face of death
Survived the fiery furnace

Lessons from their lives:

There is great strength in real friendship
It is important to stand with others with whom we share convictions
God can be trusted even when we can't predict the outcome

Key verses:

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up”
(Daniel 3:16-18).

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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