

In chapter 1, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego alongside Daniel, refused to defile themselves with the tainted royal food and wine, and now their commitment to God, is again being challenged.

In Daniel Ch2 King Nebu praised God because He revealed to Daniel his frightening the dream, and gave its interpretation. In ch2:47 King Nebu acknowledged God as 'the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a Revealer of mysteries...'

Events in chapter 3 (about fifteen years later), illustrate that you can have a religious experience without being converted if there is no true surrender of lives to God. Many people believe that God exists and that Jesus is his Son and that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of humanity. But so does the devil. **The key is to believe that Jesus died for you personally, to repent and to invite the risen Christ to be the commander-in-chief of your life; then you are truly converted. Have you been converted or have you just had "spiritual goose bumps?"**

Chapter 3 under three headings: **1. The pride and boast of man – What God will rescue you from my hand? (1-15)**

2. The faith that does not bow or bend. (16-23)

3. When the heat is on, Jesus is close! (24-30)

1. The pride and boast of man – What God will rescue you from my hand? (1-15)

King Nebu built a massive golden image which is 90' by 9' in size which he wanted everyone to worship.

Note: King Nebuchadnezzar did not forbid people from following their own religion and worshipping their own god. He was a political realist who demanded that in *addition* to worshipping their own god, people were to bow down to worship his statue at an appointed time. We see in v 8 '*... some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews...v.12 "There are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."* Of course, they were happy to report the 'rebellion' of the 3 Hebrew men to the king. Summoned before the king, he gave the 3 men another chance to rethink their stance and worship his golden idol or face the dire consequences of their choice. **Nebuchadnezzar threw down the challenge - the gloves were off.** He proudly asked, *then what God would rescue them out of his hand and his fiery furnace.*

2. The faith that does not bow or bend. (16-23)

Others obeyed, but not Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Why did they stand against king Nebu in the face of such enormous potential consequences? Vs 16, they replied, '*we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter...*' They knew and we know, that order is in direct violation of God's commandment (Ex 24:4-5) *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.* Their solid faith in God made them unflinchingly stand for God in the face of threat and opposition.

Re consequences, in v17-18 they say, *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if He does not, we want you to know that we will not serve idols or worship the image of gold you have set up.'* Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego placed their trust in God. They believed that God would deliver them, either by sparing them from the fire or by taking them home to heaven but they would not dishonour God. It was the ultimate win/win situation and they simply could not lose.

If there is a law in our country that contravenes the law of God, we as His children must always obey God and be willing to suffer the consequences. Our lives should demonstrate that we choose to honour and obey God by placing Him first in all we do. Remember when Peter and John were threatened in Acts 5 and ordered by the authorities not to speak in the name of Jesus on the streets. Their response – '*We must obey God rather than men.*' Note that their faith did not presume upon God. They were confident that God has the power to deliver them, if however, He chose not to do so, that was fine too. He knows best.

Some insights about faith and God from this story

a. Faith should be in God's ability, not in the desired result. Some people keep confessing what they want and think that God is obliged to do it- they place their faith not in God, but in the result. True we should be specific in our prayers (Philippians 4:6) and not doubt James 1:6. But our confidence should be in God who is able to do abundantly above all we can ask or think. (Ephesians 3:20).

b. God doesn't work according to our wish, but according to His will. We should be willing to submit to God's will. On His way was to the cross Jesus, He prayed, asking if the cup of crucifixion could be taken from Him; He then added, *not my will but Yours be done*. It is tragic for a believer to give up faith in the eternal God for temporary gain in this world.

c. The results do not define our relationship with God. Their commitment wasn't dependent on the outcome. The 3 men remained steadfast in faith whatever the outcome. If God doesn't answer my prayer as I expect, He's still God and still loving; it is not a reflection of my standing with Him. There are times that God will let the fire burn us and we live with the scars. If we never had to experience times when our faith is tested, how would we testify to His faithfulness? There are so many modern day martyrs for their faith in Christ. Going through tough times builds our faith and confidence in Him.

3. When the Heat Is On, Jesus is Close! (24-30)

Read Vv 24-25. *Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

When you miss a promotion because you don't play office politics, or your colleagues say, "You're just too narrow-minded when it comes to morality," Jesus is close. Remember Isaiah 43:2: **"When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned."** **Jesus always shows up when his children dare to take some heat for his glory.**

Nebuchadnezzar saw the 4th person in the fire who '*looked like a son of the gods*' -i.e. this was a Divine Being. Imagine his shock. Everyone there witnessed God's deliverance- v27 There was not a singed eyebrow in sight. The fire only burnt one thing, the ropes that bound the 3 men. **Our fires burn up the things that bind us**, like our fears and desire for acclaim. Peter tells us not to consider it strange concerning *the fiery trial which is to try us as though some strange thing has happened to us*. (1 Peter 4:12). God often uses the fiery experiences we experience in life to purge and purify us; only to burn out the impurities.

Question: what *really* impressed Nebuchadnezzar to bring about a mega change such that he ends up declaring Israel's God as the true God? The miracle? Well, yes- v28- 'the God who sent his angel and rescued his servants.' But more, V28b tells us what *really* struck him- '*They trusted in him and defied the king's commands and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.*' That gets people every time- **the courage of Christians to take a stand**. Compromise never draws people to Christ. But if people see Jesus means so much to us that we are willing to suffer for our faith in Him, then they will start to ask questions and begin to take us seriously. May God give us the courage to stand up for Him.