

THREE MEN WHO WOULD NOT BOW!

Presented by

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Things were not going well for the nation of Judah. Jehoiakim was king at the time, but, as 2 Kings 23:36 tells us, he “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” As a result, God allowed Babylon’s powerful king, Nebuchadnezzar, to seize the city of Jerusalem and carry off many of Judah’s strongest and smartest young people. Daniel 1 tells us that one of the young men who was taken captive to Babylon was Daniel himself, and that three of his friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—ended up there, too.

King Nebuchadnezzar did not believe in God. Instead, he worshipped manmade idols. In fact, Daniel 3:1-5 tells us that the king commanded that a solid-gold statue—**75 feet tall and 9 feet wide**—be erected in Babylon. He then gave an order that whenever certain sounds were played on musical instruments, people were to bow down and worship the golden statue.

However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow to the king’s idol because they worshiped the true and living God. When some of the people in Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom saw this, they said to the king, “There are certain Jews in Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—O king, who...do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:12). This made Nebuchadnezzar furious! Daniel 3:14-15 says that the king ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought before him. He then asked them, “Is it true...that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image which I have set up? If you do not worship it, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said to the king, “Let it be known to you, O king, that we do **not** serve your gods, nor will we worship the golden image which you have set up. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand” (Daniel 3:16-18). The Bible then says,

“Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were...cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace, and because the king’s command was urgent, and because the furnace was exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who threw in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:19-23).

Sometime later, Nebuchadnezzar went to inspect the fiery furnace. But, as Daniel 3:24-25 tells us, “Nebuchadnezzar was astonished, and...said to his counselors, ‘Did we not cast **three men** bound into the midst of the fire?’ They answered and said to the king, ‘Yes, O king.’” Nebuchadnezzar then said to his counselors, “Look! I see **four men** loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

Daniel 3:26-29 records what happened next. Nebuchadnezzar went near the fiery furnace and yelled, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” The three young men then came out of the fiery furnace. The king and his counselors were astonished to see that not a single hair on Shadrach, Meshach, or Abednego’s heads was singed, that their garments were not burned, and that there was not even any smell of smoke on them. Nebuchadnezzar then said,

“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him. And they have disobeyed the king’s command and yielded their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. I therefore make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego 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” (Daniel 3:28-29).

But the story does not end there. As chapter 3 of the book of Daniel comes to a close, verse 30 says simply, “Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.” So, not only were the young men unharmed by their trip to the fiery furnace, but in the end—because of their faithfulness to God—they even were promoted by the king to better positions in his service. Plus, no one in Babylon was allowed to say anything bad about God. Many years later Isaiah wrote on God’s behalf, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you” (Isaiah 43:2). In the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we can see that principle at work **in a very literal fashion!**

In the New Testament the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.” The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teaches us the importance of faithfulness to God. James reminded first-century Christians, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3). The apostle Peter wrote, “Who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?... Do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.... For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3:14-17).

That, of course, is exactly the point of the story about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They knew that if they remained faithful to God, everything would turn out well. As Paul put it in Romans 8:28 “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego believed that with all their hearts. The question is: **Do we?**