

Sent: Wednesday, March 09, 2016 8:47 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Daniel 3

Daniel 3 tells the familiar story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It apparently takes place 20 or so years after the events of Daniel 2, where God uses Daniel to reveal the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar--which concern "things to come"! We saw a "humbled" Nebuchadnezzar "falling on his face" before Daniel and proclaiming that Daniel's God is the "God of gods and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries!" It seems like Nebuchadnezzar has been "converted"! But it all changes as we get into Daniel 3!

Daniel is conspicuously absent--perhaps on a diplomatic mission--and, assuming a 20-year lapse in time, Nebuchadnezzar's army is making its third conquest of Jerusalem. II Chronicles 36 and Jeremiah 52 give the details of its final destruction! The house of the Lord is burned down; the sacred treasures of the temple are carried off to Babylon, to be used for pagan worship; the walls of Jerusalem are torn down; and those Jews not killed by the sword are taken captive. This includes Zedekiah, the last king of Judah!

The Babylonian empire is now the major power in the world, and Nebuchadnezzar is the greatest ruler in human history up until now! His opinion of God (Yahweh) is apparently altered! How could you call the God of Daniel and the God of Israel "all-powerful," and the "one true God," when He couldn't even save His own people, he might have thought? He would establish his own god which would be visible to all--a ninety foot high "golden image," serving as an expression of his own greatness. After all, Daniel had prophesied that Babylon would be "the head of gold!" Why not go for the whole thing! A great "political ceremony"--or better yet, a "religious service," complete with stirring music--would be held and, when the first chord was struck, everyone would be required to bow down and "worship!" A common "one-world religion" would consolidate his power and maybe even prolong a kingdom, which Daniel prophesied would one day also fall!

The "three Hebrew children" didn't buy it! Their faith was in the "true and living God," and they would not bow--or even bend! They would stand! Their response was courteous but firm! "O Nebuchadnezzar...our God is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king! But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up!" (They obviously were familiar with God's law, as clearly stated in Exodus 20:3-5, and elsewhere!)

Well, you all know the rest of the story! God would be "with them" and deliver them! They may have been encouraged by the words of Isaiah, written well over 100 years earlier: "But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel! Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you! When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you! For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...!" (Isaiah 43:1-3)

Peter probably had this scene in mind when he wrote: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation!" (1 Peter 4:12-13)

So, what can we take from all this? Most importantly, we can have the same confidence that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had! That "our God is able to deliver us..." from whatever the situation! Hebrews 7:25 says: "...He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for us!" Ephesians 3:20 says: "Now unto Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think..." In II Tim. 1:12, Paul proclaims: "For I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day!" And how can we ever forget the words of Jude 24: "Now unto Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever, Amen!"

While it's difficult for us to imagine Christians being thrown into a literal fiery furnace in our day, it's also true that similar things are actually occurring all over the world today within the "persecuted church"! And who knows what's to come for us? And yet, to a lesser degree, all of us as believers face times of trials and adversity, sent or allowed by a sovereign God--to test our faith, and to give opportunity for witness. The question is: are we committed to stand? The example of the three Hebrew children, as Wiersbe notes, helps us examine our faith and determine whether we have the kind of authentic faith that can be tested and bring glory to God!

On to Lesson #4, and chapter 4, of Daniel!

Have a great week, men!

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