

The Furnace of Fire



SABBATH—OCTOBER 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Daniel 3.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘You will pass through deep waters. But I [God] will be with you. You will pass through the rivers. But their waters will not sweep over you. You will walk through fire. But you will not be burned. The flames will not harm you’ ” (Isaiah 43:2, NlrV).

“POLYCARP, BISHOP OF SMYRNA,¹ WAS BROUGHT TO TRIAL FOR BEING A CHRISTIAN. The judge said, ‘Give loyalty to Ceasar . . . and I will let you go free. Give up Jesus.’

“Polycarp answered: ‘Eighty-six years I have served Jesus, Jesus has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King (Jesus) who saved me?’

“ ‘I have wild beasts,’ said the judge. ‘I will throw you to them if you refuse to give up Jesus.’

“ ‘Call the beasts!’ Polycarp said. So Polycarp died a martyr.”²—Adapted from Elon Foster, *6000 Sermon Illustrations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), p. 273.

This week, we will see how three Hebrews, like Polycarp, faced a test about faith and worship. The first test in this world was over worship (Genesis 4:4-8; 1 John 3:12). The last test also will be over worship (Revelation 14:9-12). So it is very important that we try to understand this test.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Why did Nebuchadnezzar have the golden statue made? How does Daniel 3 relate to Revelation 13? How was the whole question of worship involved in Daniel 3? Who rescued the three men? What

¹Smyrna—one of the cities on the western coast of Turkey.

²martyr—a person who is killed because of his or her religion.

does their rescue symbolize? What is the difference between believing in God and knowing God?

Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 16.

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 10

THE STATUE OF GOLD (Daniel 3:1-7).

For a while after the dream in Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar respected God. But his success filled him with pride. So he returned to idol worship. He decided to make a statue almost the same as the statue in his dream. But he made the statue all of gold. The king thought this statue would symbolize Babylon as an eternal,³ all-powerful kingdom.

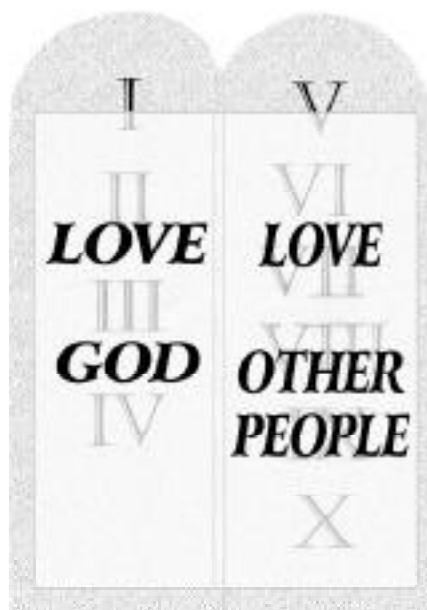
Why was the king's act of making the statue an act of rebellion against the meaning of the dream in Daniel 2? Daniel 2:34, 35.

What did Nebuchadnezzar hope to get by inviting all the leaders in his area and requiring them to worship the golden statue? Daniel 3:4-6.

A ceremony such as the one in Daniel 3 served two purposes. First, all the leaders had to show public loyalty to the king. Second, the ceremony would help all the leaders do as they were told. The act of bowing to the statue would show their obedience and loyalty to the king.

The furnace of fire was a serious threat. Jeremiah 29:22 records that the king burned to death two Hebrew men called Zedekiah and Ahab. This makes the decision of the three Hebrew men even more unusual.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted the world to remember him forever. We all want to be remembered forever, because we know life is short. What is our only hope of being remembered forever, and why? 1 John 2:16, 17.



People "who do what God wants them to do live forever" (1 John 2:17, NIV).

³eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

MONDAY—OCTOBER 11

THREE HEBREWS REFUSE TO OBEY (Daniel 3:8-18).

Who reported to the king that Daniel's friends refused to worship the statue? Daniel 3:8. Why did they?

The crowd was so large that the king probably could not see that three men remained standing. So certain men went to the king to tell him. These Babylonians were jealous of the promotions given to the three Hebrews.

What is the relationship between the idols in Daniel 3 and Revelation 13:11-18?

In the last days, another idol will be set up to force people to obey a false god. A worldwide business strike and a death law will be made against people who refuse to worship "the beast and its image [idol]." The number six is a symbol of people under Satan's control. The worship of the golden idol by the people in ancient Babylon is spoken of six times (Daniel 3:5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 18). And in the book of Revelation, the warning against worshipping the beast and his image is also given six times (Revelation 13:15; Revelation 14:9, 11; Revelation 16:2; Revelation 19:20; Revelation 20:4).

The three Hebrews refused to worship the king's power. Daniel 3 shows the problem of the close connection

between government and religion. The connection between government and religion has been a problem of most nations throughout history. The idea of a separation between religion and government is a fairly new idea.

The conversation between the king and three Hebrews is one of the most interesting conversations in the Bible. A powerful king and three young men who refuse to obey his order because of their belief in the God of the universe. What a story!

What are some things we are tempted to worship? Are we slowly but surely getting caught up in worshipping something other than God? How can we protect ourselves from worshipping something other than God?

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 12

THE TEST OF FIRE (Daniel 3:16-23).

What are the important parts of the answer the Hebrews gave to the king's death threat? Daniel 3:16-18.

The word *deliver* (save) is an important word that appears often in the book of Daniel. When Nebuchadnezzar asked the three Hebrews, "Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" the Hebrews answered that their God whom they served was "able to deliver" them from his (Nebuchadnezzar's) hands

(Daniel 3:15, 17, NKJV). After the miracle in the furnace of fire, the king admitted that “ ‘no other God can save people that way’ ” (Daniel 3:29, NIV). Daniel’s experience in Daniel 6 shows that the God whom Daniel served is “able to deliver” His people. Finally, at the end of the book of Daniel we read that at the end of time, Michael, the Great Prince, shall stand up to deliver everyone whose name is written in the book of life (Daniel 12:1).

Why did the three Hebrews refuse to bow to the golden statue? Exodus 20:3-5.

How can Matthew 10:28 help Christians who face death because of their faith?

The king became very angry. But the three men would not change their minds. They obeyed Nebuchadnezzar as far as their consciences⁴ permitted. The young men journeyed to the plain of Dura.⁵ But when their consciences told them, *No further*, they refused to worship the gold statue. They knew that they had “ ‘to obey God rather than men’ ” (Acts 5:29, NKJV). They refused to break God’s law. God’s law does not permit idol worship (Exodus 20:4, 5). The three men did not care whether or not God would deliver them.

⁴conscience—a knowledge or sense of right and wrong with an urge to do right.

⁵the plain of Dura—the place where Nebuchadnezzar set up the golden statue.

⁶compromise—keeping something and giving up something to reach an agreement. Christians should not compromise their beliefs to get something else.



Their consciences said, *No further!*

Throughout Christian history there have been faithful people who have taken a brave stand. *Fox’s Book of Martyrs* shows the lives of thousands of Christians who were killed for their loyalty to God.

Compromise⁶ is a favorite word of politicians. But is there a place for compromise when it comes to faith? How can we tell if we are compromising or simply being wise?

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 13

**“ONE LIKE THE SON OF GOD”
(Daniel 3:24, 25).**

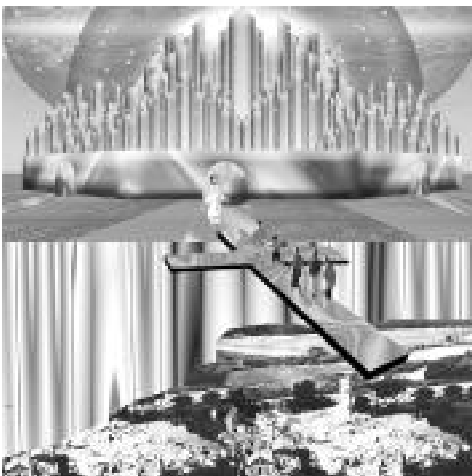
What question did the king ask the three men? How did the men answer the king’s question? Daniel 3:24, 25.

What did the words “Son of God” (KJV) in Daniel 3:25 mean to Nebuchadnezzar?

The Hebrew words for “son of the gods” means a person sent from heaven. In Daniel 3:28, Nebuchadnezzar means the fourth person as an angel. But Daniel 3:28 does not show if Nebuchadnezzar really understood the true nature of the fourth person.

Christians understand the Son of God as Jesus (Matthew 8:29; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 7:3; 1 John 3:8). In Daniel 3, we see a small taste of the future victory over death that Jesus gives all His followers at the end of time.

What do the following verses tell us about the deliverance (salvation) we have in Jesus? Romans 7:24, 25; Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13, 14; 2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:10.



Jesus “has saved us from the kingdom of darkness” (Colossians 1:13, NIV).

⁷mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

Daniel 2 shows Nebuchadnezzar praising the same God he refuses to obey in Daniel 3. How do we refuse to obey God after we praise Him? God does something wonderful for us. But before long we doubt Him. What can we do to protect ourselves from questioning God?

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 14

NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S CHANGE OF MIND (Daniel 3:26-30).

The three Hebrew men walked out of the furnace of fire holding their heads high. The crowd must have been very impressed. It seems clear that God again showed this king His power in a way that touched his heart. One might have thought that after God had really shown Nebuchadnezzar His power (Daniel 2) He would have had enough of the stubborn, rebellious king. But no matter what Nebuchadnezzar did, God again showed His mercy⁷ and patience toward him.

What other stories can you find in the Bible of God giving powerful leaders many chances? What do these stories tell us about His character? What hope do these stories offer us? (Read for example, Exodus 7–15; 2 Samuel 12:1-13.)

What result did the miracle in the furnace of fire have on the king? Daniel 3:26-28.

It seems that the king came to understand the power of God. But as the following chapters in Daniel will show, believing in God or understanding His power is not enough. The king needed to really know God (John 7:3). There is an important difference between believing in God and really knowing Him. Knowing God is more than just believing truths about Him. The worst of sinners can believe in God's eternal nature and His creative power. James 2:19 says, "You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that. And they tremble!" (NIRV). We must know God the way Hannah and David knew Him (1 Samuel 1–2:1-10; Psalm 51:1-17).

We must know God as our Lord and Savior. What difference will knowing God as our Lord and Savior make in our lives? How does John 15:1-14 teach us to really know God?

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 15

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read "The Fiery Furnace [The Furnace of Fire]," in *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 503–513.

According to Ellen White, Nebuchadnezzar understood who the fourth person was: "How did that idol-worshipping king know who the Son of God was? The young Hebrews serving in high government positions in Babylon had shown King Nebuchadnezzar the truth through their life and character. When the king asked why they had faith, they

quickly gave the king an answer. Plainly and simply, they had presented to the king the truths of righteousness (holiness). They had taught the people around them of the God they worshiped. They had told the people of the Savior who would come. So the king recognized that the fourth person in the fire was the Son of God."—Adapted from *Prophets and Kings*, p. 509.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

In the book *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville wrote about a man who was asked to worship the idol of his pagan⁸ roommate named Queequeg. Follow this man's reasoning. "I was a good Christian. How then could I unite with this idol worshiper in worshipping his idol? . . . But what is worship? Worship is to do the will of God. What is the will of God? The will of God is to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me. Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that Queequeg would do to me? I wish he would join me in worshipping my God. As a result, I must worship his idol, because he wants me to. —Adapted from *Moby Dick* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1999), p. 70.

What is wrong with this reasoning? What does this reasoning tell us about how easy it is to make excuses for wrong spiritual decisions?

SUMMARY: The three Hebrew men refused to compromise when it was important not to compromise. We need to know what things are important and then never compromise on those things.

⁸pagan—a person who worships idols.