

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God: Fire Resistant

Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonied, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. (Daniel 3:8-27)

Aside from the miracle of God's deliverance of His faithful children from the fire, this chapter is the only detailed trial recorded in the book of Daniel that deals with Daniel's three friends, not with Daniel himself. Clearly Nebuchadnezzar felt a bit trapped by his self-serving staff who accused the three Hebrews to him. Despite his apparent wish to deliver the three Hebrew men, he refuses to alter his command. He even gives the Hebrews a second chance to change their minds and bow to his image.

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he

will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. As we observed in our last study, these faithful men do not predict what God will do in their case, but they also do not hesitate to tell the king that they do know their God's ability. They set a powerful example before us in their refusal to bow to the idol, regardless of what God does. If God delivers them, praise Him for deliverance. However, if God does not deliver them, idol worship is wrong based on one of God's Ten Commandments, and they will not

compromise their allegiance to Him or their faithful service to Him, burn or not. Their obedience is not contingent on God giving them favorable care. An old Christian quartet hymn about this experience includes a recurring line, "They would not bend; they would not bow; they would not burn." In their faithful commitment to God they mirror Joshua.

Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:14-15)

This passage is one of the most frequently misquoted—or partially quoted in the Bible. Typically people who seek to use the verse to promote their human-centric belief will quote only "...choose you this day whom ye will serve..." The passage contains Joshua's instructions to Israel, to God's people, not to lost, hell-bound sinners. It categorically commands them to put away their false gods from their past and to serve God faithfully. In this line of reasoning Joshua qualifies his point with "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD..." Only those who already decided that they would not serve God—those who thought it evil to serve God at all—were told to choose. Joshua didn't use a motivational incentive or promise a personal reward to those who served God, though in the context of this book, he certainly outlined rich blessings for those who were faithful to God.

The Hebrew men had no promise of deliverance when they stood their ground and refused to bow to the golden image. They had every reason to expect death by fire. For them death by fire was a better consequence than being unfaithful to their God. Wow! What men! I love these men. They exemplify true faithfulness to God, faithfulness that neither asks nor expects personal gain from their faith. Serving God is right whether in Babylon and in danger of death by fire or in Jerusalem in the midst of safely, joyfully worshipping their God. Serving God is right. Therefore they will serve God and give no consideration to any other alternative.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and

*said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Most modern commentaries rewrite these verses thereby changing Nebuchadnezzar's conclusion from "...the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" to "...the form of the fourth is like **a son of the gods.**" They claim ancient textual authority or some other basis. Often the very men who make this textual change in the English text of the King James Bible count themselves among the strongest defenders of the King James. However, they seem oblivious to the fact that approximately seventy translators who completed the King James translation were highly trained in ancient Bible text and consulted most of the same original language sources available to us today. However, they obviously felt quite comfortable with their translation of the text. I rely on their translation more than on a modern textual critic. We need to keep in mind the most basic points of the text. Nebuchadnezzar knew how many men were cast into the fire, three. He knew how many men he saw walking in the fire, **four**. He knew the men he saw were supernaturally protected from the fire. How do we explain all these supernatural facts? There is one simple explanation, and the passage reveals it in language that a child can readily grasp. God—I believe in a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the "Son of God"—stepped into the fire with His faithful children and protected them. Consider these words from an earlier prophet.*

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (Isaiah 43:2)

Take the time to turn to this passage from Isaiah and read its full context. It will thrill you. Not only did God intervene on this one occasion, but He promises to stand with you and me in our trials as we stand with Him. Notice also that this verse in Isaiah refers to walking through the fire, and that Nebuchadnezzar saw four men walking in the fiery furnace. They were neither sitting around waiting to be consumed, nor were they running around in a confused frenzy. God is with us, and when we place our dependence on him, we will neither melt in despair nor overheat in anxiety. Rather, we will walk peacefully in His protection. Paul encourages us to "walk worthy" of our vocation as a child of God, even if it is through the fiery furnace or through the valley of the shadow of death!

*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses:
but we will remember the name of the LORD
our God. (Psalm 20:7)*

Where is your trust anchored? Only one Anchor
will never disappoint you.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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