

## Faith in the Fiery Furnace

Darrell sat in the chancellor's office suite. He felt like he was back in high school, waiting outside the principal's office. He was at the office because of a complaint against him for "proselytizing on company time."

The complaint involved his co-worker, Sharrita, though it was not Sharrita, but a faculty member, Dr. Elizabeth Smothers, behind the move to get Darrell fired.

Two months ago, Sharrita and Darrell were talking over lunch in the university cafeteria. Sharrita said her husband wanted a divorce because he had been seeing someone else. Sharrita didn't want the divorce and was concerned for their two small children. Darrell had introduced the Lord into the conversation. Sharrita said she was thinking about going to church because she needed "something."

"You need Someone," Darrell had said. And so, he presented the Gospel to Sharrita; and she accepted Christ.

The problem came when Sharrita, who was taking courses at the university, mentioned her interaction to Dr. Smothers, who wanted to keep "religion" off the campus and complained to the chancellor.

"Lord, help me during this interrogation with the committee," Darrell prayed outside the chancellor's office. "But if I get fired, so be it."

A week later, Sharrita visited Darrell's church.

"Hello, Darrell," said Sharrita. "I told the committee you didn't push anything on me when we had lunch. I'm glad you didn't get fired. God must have been with you."

"Yes, indeed He was," replied Darrell with a smile.

- 1.** *What is a "fire" that you've endured in your life?*
- 2.** *How can we cling to intangible faith when our world feels like it's crumbling?*
- 3.** *How has your faith been strengthened after overcoming a trial?*

## Into the Fire

*Daniel 3:19-23, KJV*

19 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.

20 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.

21 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.

22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flames of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

*Daniel 3:19-23, NIV*

<sup>19</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup>and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

<sup>21</sup>So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

<sup>22</sup>The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, <sup>23</sup>and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had refused to bow down to the gold idol Nebuchadnezzar had ordered to be created, the king became “furious” with them (vs. 13) and summoned them before him to confirm the reports his other leaders had given him. The three men made it clear that they had knowingly refused—and why: “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able

to deliver us from it. . . . But even if he does not . . . we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (vss. 17-18). It seems that Nebuchadnezzar had been willing to give the men a chance to “redeem” themselves in his eye up to this point. But now, “his attitude toward them changed” (vs. 19); and his rage became unrestrained.

Nebuchadnezzar then made the furnace match his rage, ordering it to be “heated seven times hotter than usual” (vs. 19). Then, in his rage and pride, he “commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego” (vs. 20) and throw them into the furnace, clothes and all (vs. 21).

The results, however, were not what Nebuchadnezzar expected. The soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not even able to complete their task before being burnt alive by the flames. Nebuchadnezzar’s rage had only succeeded in consuming his own best soldiers—while the men he had sought to kill as quickly as possible would have a different fate.

**4.** *How did King Nebuchadnezzar react after Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told him they would not worship his idol?*

**5.** *How did Nebuchadnezzar express his rage and try to exert his power?*

**6.** *What happened to the soldiers who were with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Why?*

## The God in the Fire

*Daniel 3:24-28, KJV*

24 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

*Daniel 3:24-28, NIV*

24 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,

king, True, O king.

25 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.

26 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.

27 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.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants.

Your Majesty."

<sup>25</sup>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."

<sup>26</sup>Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, <sup>27</sup>and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

<sup>28</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants!"

Just the fact that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had survived long enough to fall into the blazing furnace, while the soldiers had been consumed, was a miracle. But the king noticed something even more miraculous.

He asked his advisors, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” (vs. 24). Considering that Nebuchadnezzar knew the answer to his question, it is amusing to think that he even needed to ask.

Once his advisors confirmed it, Nebuchadnezzar said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods” (vs. 25). The men’s fetters had burned off as well, yet they remained untouched by the fire. And there was one more person with them in the fire—one who looked “like a son of the gods.” While the exact identity of this fourth person is debated (was it Jesus or an angel?), there can be no question that God had sent this person to protect these three men who had stood up for His name.

Nebuchadnezzar immediately recognized this, not only summoning the three men out of the fire but calling them “servants of the Most High God” (vs. 26). As the king and all his people gathered around the men—clearly this intended execution was meant to be a very public event—they noticed yet another miracle: Not only had the men survived the fire, but “nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them” (vs. 27)! Having seen the full extent of God’s delivery, the king honored the God these men served: “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God” (vs. 28).

**7.** *What did King Nebuchadnezzar immediately notice and ask his advisors to confirm?*

**8.** *What—or, rather, who—else did Nebuchadnezzar notice?*

**9.** *How did Nebuchadnezzar respond, both through his actions and his words?*

## Enduring the Flame

When I was a sophomore in college, I got a phone call from my best friend that changed everything. She lived three states away and had just found out she was pregnant. She wasn't married and in college. Though my friend wasn't a believer, she knew I was; and she reached out for help. Ultimately, she decided she wanted to keep the baby.

As time went on, I checked in with her as best as I could. My parents offered to let her live with them, but she was reluctant to leave her current home life and the father of the child. As weeks ticked by, my friend wasn't gaining weight and the doctor determined that the baby's brain was not forming properly. This was causing other growth and development issues. She told my friend that if the baby made it full-term, it would face many special needs issues for his or her lifetime. She recommended that my friend terminate the pregnancy. I cried out to God: *Wasn't her life wrecked enough already?* We started a prayer chain at my church and prayed for a miraculous healing.

But shortly thereafter, she was brought to the emergency room and gave birth to a stillborn baby girl at only 18 weeks.

My friend was severely depressed, the boyfriend left her, and she had no faith to fall back on. I cried out to Jesus: *Why didn't You perform a miracle to bring my friend to salvation instead of turning her further away from You?*

On this side of heaven, I'll likely never have the answers or understand why the situation all played out this way. But through that intense trial, I never abandoned my friend. I stayed with her in that fire, even though it burned me too. Even though she didn't have Jesus in her furnace, I tried to point her to Him, knowing He preserves His own in all the fires of life.

**10.** *When was a time that you had to endure a fiery furnace?*

**11.** *How can you be the fourth person to a friend who's struggling?*

**12.** *Why do you think God allows trials and hardships?*

## Into the Fire

If Christianity was suddenly outlawed in this country, if churches and Bibles were made illegal, would you keep your faith or renounce it to possibly save your life or stay out of prison? Some of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world are currently being persecuted and killed for their faith in God. They have already made the choice to follow the Lord through their own fiery furnaces.

► *What fiery trial of faith are you in now? How can you keep your faith? How might you help others overseas who are in fiery trials?*

### KEY VERSE

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. —Daniel 3:28, KJV

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God." —Daniel 3:28, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of February 12 through February 18

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Exodus 1:8-21—Fear God, Not Pharaoh.
- Tue.** Matthew 8:18-27—Why Are You Afraid?
- Wed.** John 14:1-11—Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled.
- Thu.** John 19:1-11—Earthly and Heavenly Authority.
- Fri.** 1 Peter 5—God Cares for the Flock.
- Sat.** Daniel 6:1-9—A Law and a Trap.
- Sun.** Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16, 19-23, 26-27—Delivered from the Lions.