

A Bold Faith

Daniel 3:19-28

SS Lesson for 01/14/2018

Devotional Scripture: Acts 4:23-31

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Dan 3:28

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

FAITH CONFRONTING DEATH (DAN 3:19-23)

Death commanded by anger (19-21)

Anger because of wanting the same things as others (1 Sam 8:10-19)

Anger because of being envious of others (Matt 20:8-15)

Anger over other's blessings (Luke 15:25-32)

Anger because of not understanding spiritual things (1 Cor 2:12-14)

Anger because of being prideful (Prov 13:10)

Anger because of wanting to be the greatest (Mark 9:33-35)

Anger that lets the devil get a foothold (Eph 4:26-27)

Anger that does not bring about the righteous life (James 1:20)

Anger because of hating others (1 John 3:13-15)

Death brings collateral damage (22-23)

Damage to the whole family (Josh 7:20-26)

Damage because of foolish behavior (Job 5:3-4)

Damage because of wickedness (Prov 14:11)

Damage because of sin (Rom 5:12)

FAITH DEMONSTRATED TO OTHERS (DAN 3:24-28)

Demonstrated by sight (24-25)

Seeing God's power to overcome death (John 11:43-45)

Seeing by Jesus unveiling spiritual eyes (2 Cor 3:13-18)

Seeing good deeds (1 Peter 2:12)

Seeing what God says come true (Numbers 11:23)

Seeing that God saves His anointed (Psalms 20:6)

Demonstrated by action (26)

Action of relying on God regardless of the circumstances (2 Cor 1:8-9)

Action of keeping the faith to the finish (2 Tim 4:7)

Action of faith and actions working together to make faith complete (James 2:22)

Action of throwing off everything that hinders (Heb 12:1)

Action of confirming and proving God's trust (1 Cor 4:2)

Demonstrated by results (27)

Results because God answers the call of prayer (Isa 58:9-10)

Results because of obedience (1 Sam 15:22)

Results because of abiding in Jesus (John 15:7)

Results because God gives the victory (1 Cor 15:57)

Demonstration results in acknowledgment (28)

Acknowledgement of God will happen because God has sworn it (Isa 45:22-24)

Acknowledgement of God at the time of accountability (Rom 14:11-12)

Acknowledgement of God after being humbled by God (Dan 4:31-34)

Acknowledgement of God through revelation (Matt 16:15-17)

Acknowledgement of God through the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:2-3)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Taking the Heat of Nebuchadnezzar's Wrath (3:19-23)

The King's Astonishment (3:24-27)

The King's Announcement (3:28-30)

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews and aids in the understanding and emphasizes the complete dominance Nebuchadnezzar had over his subjects and how the three Hebrew boys maintained **A Bold Faith**. The **study's aim** is to explain and illustrate the total dependence Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had on their God. The **study's application** is to challenge us to realize that the God who delivered the three young men from the furnace can likewise deliver us from distressful circumstances.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Dan 3:28

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God"

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

3:1. The effect of the revelation given to **Nebuchadnezzar** about his significant role in Gentile history (2:37-38) is discerned from his response in the events recorded in chapter 3. Identified as the head of gold (2:38), Nebuchadnezzar then caused **an image of gold** to be erected! (3:1) When he erected this image is not known. It had to follow the events recorded in chapter 2 because Daniel's three companions were in a position of authority (3:12) to which they had been appointed (2:49). The Septuagint adds in 3:1 that this event occurred in Nebuchadnezzar's 18th year (587), one year before the fall of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Kings 25:8). Since the final destruction of Jerusalem was the culmination of Nebuchadnezzar's conquests, that inference may well be true. However, a consideration of Daniel 3 seems to indicate that the events recorded there took place nearer the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's long reign. The events associated with the king's erecting the image suggest that he wanted to unify his empire and consolidate his authority as ruler. The image was to become the unifying center of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. The Aramaic word translated "image" (*felēm*) is related to the Hebrew word for image (*selem*). A general term, it allows for the image to have been in a human form (perhaps like the statue the king saw in his dream), though it does not require it. Perhaps sometime earlier Nebuchadnezzar had seen an Egyptian obelisk, on which were recorded the exploits of one of the pharaohs, and wanted to record his own conquests that way. The dimensions of the image would be fitting for an obelisk, for it was **90 feet high** (about the height of a present-day eight-story building) and only **9 feet wide**. This 10-to-1 ratio of height to width does not fit an image in human form, for it would be too slender. However, the Babylonians often distorted the human figure in constructing their images. Or perhaps the image was in proper human proportions but was set on a pedestal to make it more imposing. Regardless of the image's form, it was an awesome sight (cf. 2:31), both because of its height and because of the gold of which it was constructed. The size and weight of the image seem to preclude that the image was of solid gold. It must have been overlaid with gold. Without doubt the use of gold in this image was inspired by Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream (2:32, 38). The image was **set up... on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon**. Dura was a common name in Mesopotamia for any place that was enclosed by mountains or a wall. "The province of Babylon" (cf. 2:48) seems to require a location close to the city of Babylon itself from which Nebuchadnezzar ruled his kingdom. Archeologists have uncovered a large square made of brick some six miles southeast of Babylon, which may have been the base for this image. Since this base is in the center of a wide plain, the image's height would have been impressive. Also its proximity to Babylon would have served as a suitable rallying point for the king's officials.

3:2-3. Nebuchadnezzar **summoned** eight classes of officials **to the dedication of the image**. This may suggest that the image was intended to symbolize the empire and its unity under Nebuchadnezzar's authority. The officers referred to in verse 2 are listed again in verse 3 and four of them in verse 27, thus

emphasizing the political implications of this incident. The **satraps** were chief representatives of the king, the **prefects** were military commanders, and the **governors** were civil administrators. The **advisers** were counselors to those in governmental authority. The **treasurers** administered the funds of the kingdom, the **judges** were administrators of the law, and the **magistrates** passed judgment in keeping with the law. The **other provincial officials** were probably subordinates of the satraps. This list of officers probably included all who served in any official capacity under **Nebuchadnezzar**. On the possibility that Zedekiah, Judah's last king, was summoned to Babylon for this occasion see Jeremiah 51:59. To see so many officials stand before the image in Dura in Nebuchadnezzar's presence to swear their allegiance to him must have been impressive.

3:4-6. In demanding that these officials **fall down** before **the image of gold... Nebuchadnezzar** was demanding a public display of recognition and submission to his absolute authority in the kingdom. The fact that the officials were commanded not only to fall down before the image, but also to **worship** it, indicates that the image had religious as well as political significance. Since no specific god is mentioned, it may be inferred that Nebuchadnezzar was not honoring one of the gods of Babylon, but rather was instituting a new form of religious worship with this image as the center. Nebuchadnezzar purposed to establish a unified government and also a unified religion. The king constituted himself as both head of state and head of religion. All who served under him were to recognize both his political and religious authority. The officials summoned by Nebuchadnezzar to assemble in the plains of Dura had not been told why they were called. When they were all assembled, the king's **herald** then announced that the officials were to recognize Nebuchadnezzar's political and religious power. The herald addressed the officials as **peoples, nations, and men of every language** (cf. v. 7; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14), apparently considering the officials as representatives of the peoples over whom they ruled. So the officials' act of obedience signified submission not only by the officials themselves, but also by those peoples they ruled. Elaborate preparations in the construction of the image of gold made the occasion aesthetically appealing. To this was added musical accompaniment to make the occasion emotionally moving. The orchestra included wind instruments (the **horn** and **pipes**; cf. 3:10, 15), a reed instrument (the **flute**), and stringed instruments (**zither, lyre, harp**). Some critics argue that since the names of some of these instruments were Greek, the book was written later, in the time of the Grecian Empire. But communication between Greece and the Near East had been carried on for years before the Greek conquest by Alexander. Failure to comply to the command to worship the image was penalized by sudden death, being **thrown into a blazing furnace**. The severity of the penalty indicates that submission on the part of every official was obligatory.

3:7. Overwhelmed by the king's command, the awesomeness of the image, and the sound of the **music**, the assembled officials **fell down and worshiped the image of gold**. In this way the officials and the peoples they represented recognized the political and religious authority of **Nebuchadnezzar**.

3:8-12. No indication is given of the size of the multitude that assembled on this occasion. But because it included all the kingdom's officials (vv. 2-3) it must have been huge. **Some** court advisers (**astrologers**; cf. 1:17) were quick to bring an accusation against **the Jews**. The word translated **denounced** is strong, meaning "to tear in pieces." The accusation was severe, intended to destroy the accused. The accusers were evidently motivated by jealousy for they referred to the fact that **Nebuchadnezzar** had set **some Jews... over the affairs of the province of Babylon** (3:12; cf. 2:49). The jealousy evidently sprang from the king's recognition of the unusual ability of these men (1:20). Subjugated peoples, such as the Jewish captives, were normally relegated to positions of servitude, not elevated to authority in a realm. So the high positions of "some Jews" were resented. The counselors evidently sought to curry favor from the **king** by contrasting the three Jews' refusal to bow to **the image** with their own **worship** of it. Interestingly they accused Daniel's three friends—**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**—but not Daniel. Since Daniel was appointed to a higher office (2:48) he may not have been required to attend (cf. 4:8) or perhaps he may have been elsewhere in the empire carrying out his duties. Or maybe the astrologers did not dare accuse Daniel, who was present but like the other three did not bow. Whatever the reason for his not being mentioned, Daniel's dedication to his God and submission to the Law certainly precluded his bowing before the image.

3:13-15. How significant this event was to **Nebuchadnezzar** is seen by his response to the astrologers' accusation of the three noncompliant Jews (vv. 9-12). When he heard that the three refused to bow, he became **furious with rage** (cf. v. 19; 2:12). The high esteem with which these men had previously been held by Nebuchadnezzar (1:20) did not exempt them from submission to his authority. Nebuchadnezzar did not pass an immediate judgment on the three but asked them if the accusation against them were **true**. He gave them another opportunity to bow before **the image**. By doing so they could prove the falsehood of the accusation (or show a changed attitude). The king impressed on them the importance of such submission,

warning them that the penalty for rebellion (being **thrown... into a blazing furnace**; cf. 3:6) would be carried out **immediately**. Nebuchadnezzar considered himself above all gods, for he asked, **What god will be able to rescue you from my hand?** Again this shows that he claimed absolute authority in both political and religious realms. He was challenging any god to circumvent his authority. The matter then became a conflict between Nebuchadnezzar and Yahweh, the God of Daniel's companions.

3:16-18. The three showed absolute confidence in God, stating that their God was greater than **Nebuchadnezzar** and was **able to** deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar's judgment in a display of His superior power. Their words, **the God we serve** (cf. 6:16, 20), show they recognized that God's authority was greater than the authority claimed by Nebuchadnezzar. Though they were employed by Nebuchadnezzar (2:49), they "served" Yahweh. Their God demanded implicit obedience and had forbidden them to worship any other gods. One who obeys God is not presuming when he expects God to protect and deliver him. Obeying God was more important than life to these three, so **if** God chose **not** to deliver them, they would still obey Him. Therefore they refused to **serve** Nebuchadnezzar's **gods (or worship the image** he made, possibly meaning to worship *him* as god) even if it meant they would die.

3:19. In spite of the high regard with which **Nebuchadnezzar** had held these three (1:20), he determined to demonstrate his authority by ordering their immediate execution. This would serve as a lesson to any others who might consider rebelling against his political and religious authority. In a fit of anger (cf. 2:12; 3:13) Nebuchadnezzar had **the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual**. A low fire would have increased their torture by extending the duration of the punishment. A hotter fire would be expected to kill them instantly. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to display publicly the cost of rebelling against his authority.

3:20-23. The king ordered **some of his strongest soldiers... to tie up** the three **and throw them into the blazing furnace**. The furnace was probably constructed with an opening in the top, through which fuel could be fed, and an opening in the lower side from which ashes could be taken. **Soldiers** threw or lowered the **three... into the blazing furnace**. It was customary to remove the clothing of those being executed, but because of the haste in which the king wanted his command carried out (**the king's command was... urgent**) this practice was not followed this time. **The flames** leaping through the top opening of the furnace **killed the men who had thrown** the three into the fire.

3:24-26a. **Nebuchadnezzar** was watching the proceedings intently from a safe distance. As he peered into the furnace, probably through the lower opening, what he saw amazed him. The men who had been **tied up** were **walking around in the furnace, unbound**. And instead of seeing **three men** in the furnace, he saw **four**, and he said **the fourth was like a son of the gods**. This One was probably the preincarnate Christ (cf. Gen. 16:13). Though Nebuchadnezzar did not know of the Son of God, he did recognize that the Person appearing with the three looked supernatural. **Nebuchadnezzar... approached** as near as he dared to **the opening of the... furnace** so that his command could be heard. He ordered the three to **come out** of the furnace and to approach him. In giving this order he called them **servants of the Most High God**. Thus Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the God these three faithfully served (cf. Dan. 3:17) is truly God. The term "the Most High (lit., the Highest) God" or "the Most High" occurs 13 times in Daniel, more than in any other book except Psalms. Of those 13 occurrences 7 pertain to Nebuchadnezzar (3:26; 4:2, 17, 24-25, 32, 34) and 2 to Belshazzar (5:18, 21). The other 4 are in chapter 7 (7:18, 22, 25, 27). This was a remarkable admission by Nebuchadnezzar. Up to then he had believed that his Babylonian gods were superior to Yahweh (though he had once acknowledged the greatness of Yahweh, 2:47). After all, he had taken captives from Judah and vessels from the Jews' temple. But his gods could not deliver anyone alive from a furnace! (cf. 3:29) As the three had predicted, their God (Yahweh) was able to deliver them from the furnace (v. 17). Though the king recognized the unusual nature of Yahweh, he did not acknowledge Him as *his* God.

3:26b-27. When the three walked **out of the fire** and were carefully examined, Nebuchadnezzar's officials (cf. v. 2) saw that the **bodies** of the three men were unharmed, their clothing unaffected, and that the **smell of fire** was not even on their clothes.

3:28-30. In view of the evidence presented to him, **Nebuchadnezzar** declared that this was an act of **the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** who had **sent His angel** (cf. v. 25) to rescue the three who served this God (cf. v. 17). Nebuchadnezzar was moved by the devotion of the three to their **God** (he knew **they trusted in Him**), even though it entailed their disobeying the king and jeopardizing **their own lives**. As a result the king decreed that **the God** of the three young men was to be held in honor and that anyone who dishonored this God would lose his life (he would **be cut in pieces** and his house would be burned to **rubble**; cf. 2:5). **The king** then honored **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** by promoting them to

positions of greater honor and power in the kingdom. This historical incident seems to have prophetic significance as well. In the coming Tribulation a Gentile ruler (7:8) will demand for himself the worship that belongs to God (2 Thes. 2:4; Rev. 13:8). Any who refuse to acknowledge his right to receive worship will be killed (Rev. 13:15). Assuming political and religious power, he will oppress Israel (Rev. 13:7). Most of the people in the world, including many in Israel, will submit to and worship him. But a small remnant in Israel, like the three in Daniel's day, will refuse. Many who will not worship the Antichrist will be severely punished; some will be martyred for their faithfulness to Jesus Christ. But a few will be delivered from those persecutions by the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming. In the forthcoming Tribulation period God will do for this believing remnant what He did for Daniel's three companions. They withstood the decree of the king, and though they were not exempted from suffering and oppression they were delivered out of it by the God they trusted. No doubt the remnant of believing Jews in that coming day will find great comfort, consolation, and instruction from this incident in the lives of Daniel's three companions, as those in Daniel's day must have found as they were living under Gentile rule.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

The book *Hearts of Fire*, published by Voice of the Martyrs, tells the stories of eight women who chose God in extreme circumstances. These women were forced out of their homes, watched loved ones perish in front of their eyes, and even faced death. Despite this, they boldly spread the gospel. To some of us, stories like these are just that—stories. We hear them in church, read them in our daily devotionals, or see them in the magazines we buy. But then we forget about them and move on. Perhaps we even think, "Well, God would not ask that of me. He only asks that of extraordinary people, those super believers with some special call on their lives. I am just an everyday person. I do not have that kind of courage." The truth is that the women featured in *Hearts of Fire* were also just ordinary women. They were not given some kind of special endowment, some special brand of courage. In the same way, the men in this week's lesson text were regular men trying to survive in an environment hostile to God. They were up against great opposition. The message given to them was clear: follow this way or die. It would have been easy to make an accommodation. That would have been the path of least resistance. These three could have said, "We can do this just this once. God knows we do not mean it, and He will forgive us. He will understand why we did it." That would have been the outwardly comfortable path to take. What happened became a testimony extending not only to a pagan kingdom but also to every believer reading the Scriptures. They emerged from the fire to an awestruck ruler and a new mission field. There will be times when God calls us to have great courage. As the time for His return draws closer, this will become even truer. Christ warned His disciples about this (cf. John 15:18—16:4). We must be bold. If you are like me, you are thinking that you are just an ordinary person with a normal amount of courage. When we read scriptural accounts of courage, we must dismiss the idea that it has no application to us. In fact, God loves best to use the everyday person, someone we might least expect. That is often the person He calls. As He does, that person's faith grows deeper and God's name and kingdom receive even greater glory. As believers, we need to remember that God will provide for our every need (Phil. 4:19). When He promised that, He was not simply speaking of material possessions. He was referring to the intangibles as well. He promised that we would not face anything alone (Heb. 13:5-6). Is God calling you to something daunting? Is He asking you to take a risk? Answer His call! We do not need to be some special breed of believers. All we need to do is have faith in Jesus. When we are lacking in courage, we need to trust Him to make it complete. Let us go forth and spread His gospel with confidence, trusting that He is with us every step of the way!

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

We all struggle with doing the right thing—when to speak up and when to shut up. Sometimes we don't even know what the "right" thing is! It can be the same when it comes to our faith. Because we love God, there will be times when we may face derision, isolation, or worse for standing up for him. Three captives in a foreign land give us a great example of refusing to compromise in the face of deadly consequences.

Last week's study focused primarily on the young man Daniel, although his three friends in captivity were involved in everything that occurred (Daniel 1:11-20). All four of them had been taken into exile in Babylon in about 605 BC. Daniel is described as having the ability to "understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (Daniel 1:17). He was able to relate to King Nebuchadnezzar the content of his dream when no one else could, then provide the interpretation. Daniel left no doubt as to the accuracy of his words when he concluded by telling the

king, "This is the meaning of the vision" (2:45). In response the grateful king acknowledged Daniel's God as "the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries" (Daniel 2:47). He also made Daniel "ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men" (2:48). Daniel then requested that his fellow countrymen Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be placed as "administrators over the province of Babylon" (2:49). But their new positions of authority did not make them exempt from tests of their faith. Today's lesson text finds Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego on "the plain of Dura" (Daniel 3:1). Its location is not known; some suggest it was a few miles south of the city of Babylon. There King Nebuchadnezzar built an image of gold. Some scholars propose that the image depicted the king himself (based on 2:38). But another possibility is that the image represented the king's patron god, Nabu (or Nebo in Isaiah 46:1), which the first part of Nebuchadnezzar's name refers to. Anyone who refused to bow to the image faced death (Daniel 3:6). Obedience to such a command clearly violated the first two of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-6), so the young Hebrew men refused to worship the image. Their disobedience was reported to King Nebuchadnezzar, who had the three brought before him. The king offered them a chance to change their minds (Daniel 3:15), but the three restated their determination not to bow to the king's image. They affirmed that their God was able to deliver them from the furnace, but whether he would choose to do so or not made no difference in their devotion to him. They would not yield to the king's demand (3:16-18). We note that this test was quite different from the one recorded in last week's text from Daniel 1. There Daniel was in a position to suggest an alternative concerning the diet that he and his friends were to eat. But in Daniel 3 no alternatives were available. The choice was clear: bow and live, or refuse and die.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Faith Confronting Death (Dan 3:19-23)

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.
20 And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace.
21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.
22 Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.
23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Death commanded by anger (19-21)

Anger because of wanting the same things as others (1 Sam 8:10-19)

10 Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. 11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. 12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. 14 He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. 15 He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. 16 Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. 17 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. 18 When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day." 19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us."

Anger because of being envious of others (Matt 20:8-15)

8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' 9 "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. 12 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.' 13 "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius?' 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

Anger over other's blessings (Luke 15:25-32)

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' 28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' 31 "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Anger because of not understanding spiritual things (1 Cor 2:12-14)

12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Anger because of being prideful (Prov 13:10)

10 Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

Anger because of wanting to be the greatest (Mark 9:33-35)

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

Anger that lets the devil get a foothold (Eph 4:26-27)

26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Anger that does not bring about the righteous life (James 1:20)

20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Anger because of hating others (1 John 3:13-15)

13 Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. 15 Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.

Death brings collateral damage (22-23)

Damage to the whole family (Josh 7:20-26)

20 Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: 21 When I saw in the plunder a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver underneath." 22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent, and there it was, hidden in his tent, with the silver underneath. 23 They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the Lord. 24 Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. 25 Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The Lord will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. 26 Over Achan they heaped up a large pile of rocks, which remains to this day. Then the Lord turned from his fierce anger. Therefore that place has been called the Valley of Achor ever since.

Damage because of foolish behavior (Job 5:3-4)

3 I myself have seen a fool taking root, but suddenly his house was cursed. 4 His children are far from safety, crushed in court without a defender.

Damage because of wickedness (Prov 14:11)

11 The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish.

Damage because of sin (Rom 5:12)

12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—

Faith Demonstrated to Others (Dan 3:24-28)

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

25 "Look!" he answered, "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."

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire.

27 And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!

Demonstrated by sight (24-25)

Seeing God's power to overcome death (John 11:43-45)

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." 45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

Seeing by Jesus unveiling spiritual eyes (2 Cor 3:13-18)

13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Seeing good deeds (1 Peter 2:12)

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Seeing what God says come true (Numbers 11:23)

23 The Lord answered Moses, "Is the Lord's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

Seeing that God saves His anointed (Psalms 20:6)

6 Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand.

Demonstrated by action (26)

Action of relying on God regardless of the circumstances (2 Cor 1:8-9)

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

Action of keeping the faith to the finish (2 Tim 4:7)

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Action of faith and actions working together to make faith complete (James 2:22)

22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

Action of throwing off everything that hinders (Heb 12:1)

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Action of confirming and proving God's trust (1 Cor 4:2)

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Demonstrated by results (27)

Results because God answers the call of prayer (Isa 58:9-10)

9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

Results because of obedience (1 Sam 15:22)

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Results because of abiding in Jesus (John 15:7)

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

Results because God gives the victory (1 Cor 15:57)

57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Demonstration results in acknowledgment (28)

Acknowledgement of God will happen because God has sworn it (Isa 45:22-24)

22 "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. 23 By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. 24 They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.'" All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.

Acknowledgement of God at the time of accountability (Rom 14:11-12)

11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Acknowledgement of God after being humbled by God (Dan 4:31-34)

31 The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes." 33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. 34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

Acknowledgement of God through revelation (Matt 16:15-17)

15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

Acknowledgement of God through the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:2-3)

2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Taking the Heat of Nebuchadnezzar's Wrath (3:19-23)

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. 20 And he commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. 21 Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. 22 For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. 23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.

We can almost see the redness of Nebuchadnezzar's face when he hears these men will not obey this command, even if it means the furnace. Thousands of his subjects must have been listening and looking on. The orchestra was set, ready to play once again. All of Babylon's political leaders were assembled, ready to bow down once again. The masses stood by too, ready to bow as well. Only these three Hebrews would not bow down.

Nebuchadnezzar was so hot, he commanded that the furnace be fired even hotter. This furnace may have been a brick-kiln, perhaps used in making the base for the golden image. The top was like a chimney, where smoke from the fire could escape. It could serve a second purpose as well—offenders could be cast into the fire by being thrown down from above. At the bottom there was a door or hole through which fuel could be added and air for combustion introduced.

The three Hebrews, bound tightly and still in their festive dress, had to be carried to the furnace and then thrown in. The fire was so intensely hot that those charged with the unpleasant task of throwing the men into the fire were consumed by the flames which belched from the furnace. These three men did not stand a “prayer of a chance,” unless their God was able to deliver them. They were cast into the top of the furnace, bound hand and foot.

The King's Astonishment (3:24-27)

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he responded and said to his high officials, “Was it not three men cast bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “Certainly, O king.” 25 He answered and said, “Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!” 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them.

The king's vantage point must have afforded him a view of the furnace from below so that he could look into the flames through the bottom door where fuel and air were introduced. With utter amazement, the king looked inside. He was astonished! While the executioners were slain by the flames, the three Hebrews were not. They were walking about inside the furnace. Their bonds had been loosed, but the flames did them no harm.

Something else puzzled Nebuchadnezzar. There were not three men walking about in that furnace, but four. More troubling was that the fourth person in the furnace was not like the other three. The king turned to his high officials, who were looking on. He asked them if there were not three men cast into the fire. They wisely agreed. He called their attention to the fact that four men were now in the fire, and one had a god-like appearance. Whatever that appearance was, he knew it was not human and assumed it to be divine.

Drawing near to the door of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar called into the flames, telling the men to come out. He referred to these men not only by name, but also as “servants of the Most High God.” This was perhaps motivated by the fourth man in the fire. Fortunately for the king and the rest, the fourth person did not come out with the other three.

The king and his officials now witnessed the full extent of the miracle God had performed in their sight. Neither the clothing nor the bodies of the men had been harmed by the intense heat and the flames. Their hair had not been singed; their clothing was not damaged. There was not even the smell of smoke to be detected. Their deliverance could not have been more complete. The only thing they lost in those flames were the ropes which bound them.

The King's Announcement (3:28-30)

28 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.” 30 Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

Before we consider the words Nebuchadnezzar spoke at the end of Daniel 3, let us recall what we have read at the beginning of the chapter. Nebuchadnezzar had planned to further his kingdom by assembling a large crowd,

all of whom would bow in worship to an image he had made. Men had to choose between bowing down to the idol or being burned in the flames of the furnace. The “god” represented by this idol was to be honored and worshipped. Those who resisted were to be destroyed. Yet Nebuchadnezzar’s final words are praise and adoration for these three “rebels,” who refused to bow down, and for the God whom they served, even to death.

This day’s events had not turned out the way the king had planned. He intended to turn the nation to worship his idol. That failed. He planned to subordinate all worship to this “god.” That failed, too. All of the energy and expense to produce worship of a false god was to no avail, and the king fell to his knees before the God of Israel.

His question, asked only moments before, “What god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?” is now answered by the king who asked it. Nebuchadnezzar blessed the God of these three Hebrews, as the God who had delivered them from death. He praised them for their faithfulness in obeying their God, even unto death. Significantly, the king praised these men for their exclusive (monotheistic) worship of their God. Unlike the rest, they were not willing to serve any other god in addition to the one God they worshipped and served.

The king’s decree goes beyond praise. It declares punishment for any who interfere with the free worship of the Jews. Nebuchadnezzar tried to interfere with the religion of the Jews. Their God had intervened and delivered them from the king’s wrath. Now the king seeks to insure this will not happen again. Anyone, the king declared, who so much as speaks against the worship of these men will be torn limb from limb and their property confiscated. All this because no other God had shown himself able to deliver as their God had done.

Finally, the king promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, causing them to prosper in their administration of the province of Babylon.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/faith-and-furnace-daniel-31-30>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The title “The Flames of Fellowship” is used by Dale Ralph Davis in his commentary on Daniel as he discusses the events described in Daniel 3:19-30. While he is not certain that the “fourth” man in the flames was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, he does see the miracle of their deliverance as “a sample of the way Christ preserves his people but not a guarantee of his dramatic deliverance in every case.” When the writer of Hebrews is describing the various accomplishments of those who chose to walk by faith, he refers to those who “quenched the fury of the flames” (Hebrews 11:34). Most likely he is alluding to the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Even so, some Christians who lived in the first century (the time during which the writer of Hebrews lived) experienced being burned alive during persecution instigated by the emperor Nero (reigned AD 54-68). The apostle Peter may have been referring to such persecution when he wrote of being “refined by fire” (1 Peter 1:7) and of the “fiery ordeal” (4:12). Yet we do not read any accounts of Nero witnessing (as did Nebuchadnezzar) someone escaping from the fire unscathed. Nor do we know of any instances where someone similar to the “fourth” man appeared alongside someone for rescue as the flames burned the person alive.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. Bold faith reveals and provokes God's enemies (Dan. 3:19)
2. Persecution is not always the result of our wrongdoing (vs. 20)
3. Our enemies cannot bind what God has set free (vss. 21-22)
4. Even in our greatest trials, God is present with us and is in control (vss. 23-25)
5. God's power and protection exceed our human understanding (vs. 26)
6. Our trials provide opportunities to trust God and see His power at work in our lives (vs. 27)
7. God uses our trials for His glory so that even His enemies acknowledge His power (vs. 28)