

The Hebrew Children and the Fiery Furnace

AIM: to teach my pupils to stand up for Christ in the face of all odds

POINT OF CONTACT: Ask the pupils if they ever stood for something they thought was right when they were in the minority. It would be very interesting to ask them to give a few facts concerning this experience. Do not let them elaborate too much, but give them a chance to give brief details about the experience.

INTRODUCTION: Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were contemporaries of Daniel. They were among the Jewish boys of good breeding and good stock who had been chosen to study in Babylon to become leaders of the Jewish people while they were captives. They, with Daniel, refused to eat the king's meat or drink of his wine.

Let us notice the story of their refusal to compromise and the results that followed.

I. THE DECREE

1. Nebuchadnezzar had made an image of gold.

Read Daniel 3:1. You will notice the image was threescore cubits high. A cubit is about a foot and a half, which means that the image was approximately 90 feet high. It was six cubits wide, or about nine feet.

2. Those who helped make the decree. See Daniel 3:2.

1) *The princes.* This word comes from two words, one which means "great" or "eminent" and the other which means "to go about freely." Actually there is a third word involved too, which means "the presence." Probably this means these were private counselors who had free access to the king's presence.

2) *The governors.* This word means "lieutenants" or "viceroys." Actually, these were the deputies of the high priest, or shall we say, the high priest's bodyguards.

3) *The captains.* This comes from a word which means "to extend." These were men who had been set over property annexed to the kingdom by conquest. In other words, they were men who were running the extended portions of the kingdom.

4) *The judges.* This word comes from the words, "noble" and "magnificent," and the words, "to decree." These were the men who helped to make the laws.

5) *The treasurers.* This means "to treasure up" or "to keep up." In other words, these were the ones who kept the treasury, the ones over the mint, etc.

6) *The counselors.* This word comes from a word which means "statued" and another word which means "to declare the meaning of the law." We could say then that these were the judges, as we would call them, or the Supreme Court.

7) *The sheriffs.* This word means "to set in order." In other words, these were the civil officers.

8) *All the rulers of the provinces.* In other words, this includes all the other officers of the kingdom.

These were the men who made the decree, or at least those who enforced it and were present at its reading. Let us apply this to our day.

The "princes" would be the President's cabinet.

The "governors" would be the F.B.I.

The "captains" would be the ambassadors.

The "judges" would be the Congress.

The "treasurers" would be the Treasury Department, the Department of Internal Revenue, etc.

The "counselors" would be the Supreme Court.

The "sheriffs" would be the governors, mayors, etc.

The "rulers of the provinces" would be the city council men, the state legislators, etc.

3. The decree was put into effect with music.

Notice Daniel 3:5, 6. At the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer and all kinds of music, all had to fall down and worship the golden image the King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Those who would not fall down and worship the golden image would be cast into the fiery furnace. The instruments mentioned here are very interesting.

II. THE COURAGE.

We are referring to the courage of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in not bowing down and worshipping the golden image.

1. They were away from home.

It is much easier to compromise away from home. When one is away in the service, away in college, away on a vacation, etc., it is easy to compromise. (Teacher, dwell here a while. This is very important.) Someone has said that the test of true character is what you would do if nobody found out about it.

2. They were in the minority.

Right has always been in the minority. Because most people are doing it is not a sign we should do it, but a sign that we probably should not do it.

3. They were facing the biggest men in all of the kingdom.

Bear in mind, the Babylonian Empire was the greatest the world had ever seen. From the king down to the local county sheriff, these men stood before them as they faced their temptation.

4. Their jobs were at stake.

These young men held positions of authority. They would no doubt suffer great loss if they stood.

5. They stood together.

Look at Daniel 3:16. The first word they said to King Nebuchadnezzar is "we." This is very interesting. There were three of them, which made it easier for them to stand. It is very important that at school, at work, etc. we find others of like mind and like convictions with whom we can stand.

6. They were not standing just because God was going to deliver them.

See Daniel 3:17, 18. They felt that God would deliver them, but this was not the reason for their standing. They wanted to do right, even if it didn't turn out as they thought it should.

7. The furnace was heated "seven times more than it was wont to be heated."

Read Daniel 3:19. This was as hot as it could be made. Seven expresses God's complete number. The furnace was at its hottest.

8. They were placed in the fiery furnace with their clothing.

See Daniel 3:21. Notice, even their hats were on them. Then they were bound. The enemy did not even want their clothing to remain.

III. THE DELIVERANCE.

1. Jesus was with them.

Study Daniel 3:24, 25. This is very interesting. In the Bible when Jesus appeared to people, invariably they were standing alone or standing for Him against opposition.

When John was exiled on Patmos, Jesus appeared to him.

When Paul was stoned outside the city of Lystra and caught up to the third heaven, he saw Jesus.

Stephen was being stoned for his strong preaching when he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on His right hand.

Joshua was about to fight the battle of crossing into the Promised Land when he saw the Unseen Captain beside him.

So it is with these three Hebrew children. Jesus came to them because they were standing for Him.

2. They were completely delivered.

Read Daniel 3:27. Not a hair of their head was singed. Not even their clothing was burned. In fact, they did not even smell like they had been in the fire. What a miracle!

IV. THE PROMOTION.

Notice Daniel 3:30. The Scripture here seems to imply that they were promoted over all the Jews that were in the kingdom. In other words, they had stood the test, and they were promoted even above their original position.