

DANIEL

Week 10, chapter 3 continued

As we continue in Daniel chapter 3, we'll conclude today the famous story of Shadrakh, Meshakh, and Abednego being thrown into the blazing hot furnace for the sake of their faith. And, I think we are all going to feel the heat of that fire (in one way or another) as we consider the implications that pertain to us individually and as a group of like-minded followers of Yeshua.

So open your bibles and let's read beginning at verse 16.

RE-READ DANIEL 3: 16 – 27

In our previous lesson we discussed the broad impact that the defiant words of these 3 Jewish lads, as they faced down the king of the world, ought to have on the life of every Believer who hears them. But while we all probably intellectually and emotionally agree with the concept of **faith unto death** in our relationship with God, we each put self-imposed limits and boundaries as to just how far we are willing to take that and under what circumstances we might exercise those limits. I illustrated by asking you to consider a laundry list of cases and varying situations where we might or might not be willing to choose strict obedience to God's Word over pragmatism. I provided no solutions or answers because that wasn't the point. The point was to demonstrate that more often than not (at least in the Western world), the limits we place on ourselves regarding carrying out a true and sincere biblical faith do not involve anything as serious as what Shadrakh, Meshakh, and Aved-N'go faced. Rather our circumstances usually only amount to avoiding confrontations, wanting to please people, trying not to be the oddball in the midst of folks we respect or whose relationship we value, choosing where we want to spend our time and money, or simply preferring to maintain a level of comfort or personal liberties that we have grown used to.

We ended our last lesson with a famous quote in Luke 14 where Yeshua not only urges His disciples to faithfulness full of actions, but He also makes it clear who can and cannot be His disciples. In other words, contrary to the way we might prefer it (or perhaps have been taught it as a doctrine), it is NOT only our decision that we want to be His disciples, but that the Lord sets up conditions upon those who would think to undertake such a commitment.

And Messiah says that He will **not** allow the following people to be His disciples:

Verse 26: ²⁶ *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, his children, his brothers and his sisters, yes, and his own life besides, he cannot be my talmid.*

Verse 27. ²⁷ *Whoever does not carry his own execution-stake and come after me cannot be my talmid.*

And **Verse 33.** ³³ *So every one of you who doesn't renounce all that he has cannot be my talmid.*

I hope you hear that I, as your minister and teacher, am not setting the standard or defining the rules on who Yeshua will accept as His disciple and who He will not. But I do want you to hear that walking forward in an assembly, praying a sinner's pray, and then coming to a worship service every Saturday or Sunday are nowhere to be found as the beginning and end of our Salvation experience as far as Yeshua's stated requirements go. Certainly it is not a works-righteousness salvation program that Jesus is describing. But it is definitely that our actions and our decisions are organically connected to our redemption, and that the level of commitment that Christ is seeking from each and every one who desires to be His disciples goes way beyond good intentions or intellectual agreement with biblical principles.

Basically the idea in verse 26 is that you must value Messiah above every living person on this planet including your closest and most beloved blood relatives. In verse 27 Yeshua tells us we have to be willing to give up our physical, fleshly lives if the situation demands it. And finally verse 33 says that everything that we consider as belonging to us, whether that is material possessions, personal liberties, personal finances, social status, etc., must be considered disposable in relation to our allegiance to Him. I'll be the first to admit I simply do not measure up to this standard. I suspect that in one area of your life or another neither does anyone who is hearing this message. Perfection in these areas is our goal, but perfection is also a process and only one human has ever achieved both and it is the one who is speaking those words of Luke 14.

If we compare what we read in the New Testament of the personal cost to be a disciple of Christ, and then read in history books of the many persecutions of Christians who made that commitment of a renunciation of all things worldly, I think we probably need to admit that the standard we have set for ourselves is pretty low and we can do much better. And it seems to me that what we all ought to strive for as our goal is the **faith unto death** exhibited by Shadrakh, Meshakh and Abednego, instead of the **faith unto discomfort** that has replaced it

for the most part. We need to have a faith that is so humble, full of love, and imbedded in us that it will brook no compromise and accept no rule of man that clearly conflicts with what God has clearly laid out in His laws and commandments.

In an era in the democratic West where most of our highest government leaders on the one hand will still maintain that they are Believers, but at the same time passionately advocate as the best choice for modern society a secular humanist government system that distances itself as far as is possible from the God of the bible, Christians and Jews face a stark point of decision. Shall we agree with our leaders that in the 21st century we must modify or even redefine the ancient biblical definitions of good and evil, moral and immoral, and in some cases recast the very nature of our lifestyle choices as a range of permissible preferences as opposed to how we formerly saw them as issues of obedience to the divine Creator? Or shall we spend our time and effort endlessly plowing the fertile fields of the Holy Scriptures, learning God's ways and living them out, and being content to bear the earthly consequences of a steadfast faith that manifests in actions and deeds that won't always agree with many of our government's edicts or win the approval of our evolving societal norms?

The bottom line is: How can we say with sincerity and honestly that we are willing to die for our faith, if we won't even face people who simply disagree with us and thus label us primitive and ignorant for our beliefs? How can we call it taking up our cross if we find it too challenging to merely be laughed at, or excluded from a group of friends and acquaintances who have chosen obedience to an ever-transforming social system over a biblically based faith to the Lord? Those 3 Jewish youth didn't just suddenly make that choice as they stood in front of Nebuchadnezzar. They had prepared for that day. Long before they were called to be questioned by the king they had decided what mattered most to them but only now was there an opportunity to live it out.

Thus verse 19 says that King Nebuchadnezzar followed through with his threat to burn alive anyone in his vast empire that refused to pay homage to the symbol of the Babylonian government, the enormous golden statue at Dura. This verse speaks of his volcanic anger that was more the result of his pride being pricked because this kind of world-government can stand no opposition. Thus his command to make the furnace 7 times hotter is an absurdity. Are the 3 Jews going to burn up better in a furnace 7 times hotter than normal? After all, this furnace was probably either a lime kiln or it was meant to separate large quantities of copper from its ore in a smelting process; it wasn't designed to bake bread. So it was a furnace that operated nominally at between 900 to 1200 degrees F; plenty enough to do the job without making it even hotter.

I'll be reminding you of this a couple of times, but let's remember that here in Daniel 3 we have a pagan king who is giving the orders, and he is operating through his pagan worldview. That even the Scriptures were written in the gentile language of the era, Aramaic, helps that important point to come across. So whereas if we were reading Hebrew and dealing with an

Israelite king the number 7 would have divine significance, here it is just a number to connect the king's almost comical wrath to his determination to make the execution as horrific as possible. The truth is that the ancients had no means to create a 7000 degree heat, something almost as hot as the surface of the sun.

Then we hear that the king ordered some of his "strongest" men to bind up the 3 Jews and toss them into the fire. But that's a poor translation and misses the point. The Aramaic word is ***gibbar*** and it is the same as the Hebrew word ***gibbar***, and it better translates as mighty men, not strongest men. Mighty men is a title for the top warriors in the army, the best fighters, and usually the most highly decorated of the soldiers. And it also almost always indicates that they were the military leaders, which fits the context here. So these highly decorated soldiers, who were also symbolic of the most loyal and thus allowed near the king, were given the honor of executing these Jews who refused to bow down to the one-world power of Babylon.

Apparently they were taken, as is, to the furnace in their fancy court-dress to be burned alive. But when the mighty men went to throw the 3 into the furnace it had been heated to the point that their clothing combusted and they went up in flames. The way a furnace of this type worked is that it had an opening at the top to put in the ore, and then an opening at the bottom to put wood and coal and other materials for the fire. So the idea is that Shadrakh, Meshakh, and Aved-N'go would be thrown in from the top.

The action picks up as our heroes are indeed cast into the furnace. Even more they were bound, so if for some unknowable reason they weren't immediately charbroiled, they wouldn't be able to make a mad dash out through the hole at the bottom. So, we have the 3 youth in the belly of the furnace, the king and some of his highest government officials are watching at a safe distance looking through the hole at the bottom of the furnace, and then something completely bizarre happens that astounds and perplexes Nebuchadnezzar.

But; if one has a bible based on the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and/or what is called the Old Greek, the text of the story makes a break and a long prayer and then a song are inserted. The prayer is called the Prayer of Azariah (or as he is now known by his new Babylonian name, Aved-N'go). Then follows the Song of the Three Youths. Why these 2 works are inserted here in Greek bible versions and not those based on the Hebrew texts is not certain. Rather in some Protestant and Catholic versions the Prayer and the Song are part of the Apocrypha, a separate section of the bible. But they are worth reading if nothing else for the sake of familiarity and the form of their petition to God.

The Prayer of Azariah in the Furnace

¹ They^[a] walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the

Lord. ² Then Azariah stood still in the fire and prayed aloud:

³ Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and worthy of praise;
and glorious is your name for ever!

⁴ For you are just in all you have done;
all your works are true and your ways right,
and all your judgments are true.

⁵ You have executed true judgments in all you have brought upon us
and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our ancestors;
by a true judgment you have brought all this upon us because of our sins.

⁶ For we have sinned and broken your law in turning away from you;
in all matters we have sinned grievously.

⁷ We have not obeyed your commandments,
we have not kept them or done what you have commanded us for our own good.

⁸ So all that you have brought upon us,
and all that you have done to us,
you have done by a true judgment.

⁹ You have handed us over to our enemies, lawless and hateful rebels,
and to an unjust king, the most wicked in all the world.

¹⁰ And now we cannot open our mouths;
we, your servants who worship you, have become a shame and a reproach.

¹¹ For your name's sake do not give us up for ever,
and do not annul your covenant.

¹² Do not withdraw your mercy from us,
for the sake of Abraham your beloved
and for the sake of your servant Isaac
and Israel your holy one,

¹³ to whom you promised
to multiply their descendants like the stars of heaven
and like the sand on the shore of the sea.

¹⁴ For we, O Lord, have become fewer than any other nation,
and are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins.

¹⁵ In our day we have no ruler, or prophet, or leader,
no burnt-offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense,
no place to make an offering before you and to find mercy.

¹⁶ Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted,

¹⁷ as though it were with burnt-offerings of rams and bulls,
or with tens of thousands of fat lambs;
such may our sacrifice be in your sight today,
and may we unreservedly follow you,^[b]
for no shame will come to those who trust in you.

¹⁸ And now with all our heart we follow you;
we fear you and seek your presence.

¹⁹ Do not put us to shame,
but deal with us in your patience
and in your abundant mercy.

- ²⁰ Deliver us in accordance with your marvelous works,
and bring glory to your name, O Lord.
- ²¹ Let all who do harm to your servants be put to shame;
let them be disgraced and deprived of all power,
and let their strength be broken.
- ²² Let them know that you alone are the Lord God,
glorious over the whole world.'

And then next is inserted the Song of the 3 Youths or Song of the 3 Jews.

The Song of the Three Jews

²³ Now the king's servants who threw them in kept stoking the furnace with naphtha, pitch, tow, and brushwood. ²⁴ And the flames poured out above the furnace forty-nine cubits, ²⁵ and spread out and burned those Chaldeans who were caught near the furnace. ²⁶ But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace, ²⁷ and made the inside of the furnace as though a moist wind were whistling through it. The fire did not touch them at all and caused them no pain or distress.

²⁸ Then the three with one voice praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace:

- ²⁹ 'Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors,
and to be praised and highly exalted for ever;
- ³⁰ And blessed is your glorious, holy name,
and to be highly praised and highly exalted for ever.
- ³¹ Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory,
and to be extolled and highly glorified for ever.
- ³² Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne on the cherubim,
and to be praised and highly exalted for ever.
- ³³ Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom,
and to be extolled and highly exalted for ever.
- ³⁴ Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven,
and to be sung and glorified for ever.
- ³⁵ 'Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ³⁶ Bless the Lord, you heavens;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ³⁷ Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ³⁸ Bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ³⁹ Bless the Lord, all you powers of the Lord;

- sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
40 Bless the Lord, sun and moon;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
41 Bless the Lord, stars of heaven;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- 42 'Bless the Lord, all rain and dew;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
43 Bless the Lord, all you winds;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
44 Bless the Lord, fire and heat;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
45 Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
46 Bless the Lord, dews and falling snow;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
47 Bless the Lord, nights and days;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
48 Bless the Lord, light and darkness;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
49 Bless the Lord, ice and cold;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
50 Bless the Lord, frosts and snows;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
51 Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- 52 'Let the earth bless the Lord;
let it sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
53 Bless the Lord, mountains and hills;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
54 Bless the Lord, all that grows in the ground;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
55 Bless the Lord, seas and rivers;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
56 Bless the Lord, you springs;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
57 Bless the Lord, you whales and all that swim in the waters;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
58 Bless the Lord, all birds of the air;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
59 Bless the Lord, all wild animals and cattle;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- 60 'Bless the Lord, all people on earth;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.

- ⁶¹ Bless the Lord, O Israel;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ⁶² Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ⁶³ Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ⁶⁴ Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.
- ⁶⁵ Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.

- ⁶⁶ 'Bless the Lord, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him for ever.

For he has rescued us from Hades and saved us from the power^[c] of death,
and delivered us from the midst of the burning fiery furnace;
from the midst of the fire he has delivered us.

- ⁶⁷ Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his mercy endures for ever.
- ⁶⁸ All who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods,
sing praise to him and give thanks to him,
for his mercy endures for ever.'

I'm not going to spend much time with this, but perhaps you can detect why the Hebrew texts might not choose to include these extra words. The words in some cases just don't seem to agree with what is happening. For one thing, Azariah tells God that Nebuchadnezzar is unjust and the most wicked king ever; something God certainly doesn't agree with (although I suppose if I were in that furnace I wouldn't be singing the king's praises, either). For another thing we read of the furnace flames leaping 49 cubits, or 75 feet high, which (like a 7000 degree heat) is not possible, and there is certainly no divine action causing such a supernatural thing to happen. And then we also find that the Angel of the Lord is identified as the one who was in the furnace with the boys. While that is, I suppose, possible one would think that such a critical piece of information would be included in the Hebrew bible version if it were true, rather than leaving it as a complete mystery.

In any case, as the king and his company were watching the show, things didn't go as planned. Not only didn't the Jews burst into flame, Nebuchadnezzar saw 4 figures moving around freely inside the furnace and not 3. In a kind of dumbfounded rhetorical comment to those near him he says, "didn't we put only 3 people in the furnace, bound up?" And they reply: "Of course!" "But I see 4 men in there", says the king. It is unclear whether the other officials that were with the king saw the 4th figure or not. But the part that makes this really interesting is that the king says that the 4th figure looks like "a son of the gods".

Language scholars say the phrase **son of the gods** is not a reasonable English translation. Rather the Aramaic is **bar elahin**, and in the Babylonian culture it more has the sense of **a son**

of deity. If this were a Hebrew speaking in the Hebrew language in a Hebrew context, then we would rightly translate this as **son of God** because the ONLY deity a Hebrew acknowledges is Yehoveh. So let me again remind you that this is the speech of a pagan king, taken within the context of the Babylonian theology, which is quite different from the Hebrew theology. And for Babylonians, angelic beings were also considered deity although they weren't classified as highly as gods. Hebrews of course did NOT classify angels as deity, but rather as merely spiritual servants of the one deity, YHWH.

That said, even though the king is using Aramaic words in a pagan sense, it doesn't answer the question of who that 4th person was that was in there with those 3 young men and who apparently virtually changed the environment inside the burning hot furnace to something more resembling a lovely day at the beach. What we can be certain of is that it was no pagan god or angel because they don't exist!

I don't want to spend much time with this, but in modern Christian doctrine it is typically said that the mysterious 4th figure was Jesus, and I think that is a pretty big stretch. That belief comes from 2 things: 1st, because of the poor English translation that makes **bar elahin** as son of god instead of a son of deity, and 2nd, because of the rather more rigid version of the Trinity Doctrine that was established at the end of the 4th century by Basil at the Council of Constantinople. It is that version of the Trinity (after a few had come and gone) that has in general been carried over from Roman Catholicism to Protestantism although it isn't entirely accepted by all of Protestantism or the Eastern Orthodox Christianity for a couple of good reasons that we don't have time to delve into. Of course I cannot possibly say with certainty that the 4th figure was NOT a pre-figuration of Yeshua, but the earliest Christians and all of the Jews thought it was a heavenly angel since it completely fits the context. It was only after this newest version of the Trinity Doctrine was accepted that the idea sprung up that it was the Messiah in the furnace with the 3 Jews. I'll let you be the judge. Either way it doesn't change the miraculous and supernatural nature of what happened nor that this was clearly an intervention by God.

Even if it was only Nebuchadnezzar who saw the 4th figure in the furnace (and that is not at all certain), we're explicitly told that a bevy of high government officials witnessed the exit of these 3 Jewish youth who were not only unburned, but their clothing wasn't singed and they didn't even have the odor of smoke upon them! Earlier the king had issued a challenge that I don't doubt was, to him, just an expression of regal **chuzpah**. In verse 15 he said to the 3 defiant Jews:

But if you won't worship, you will immediately be thrown into a blazing hot furnace- and what god will save you from my power then?"

Apparently the Lord took that to be a legitimate question rather than an insult, and now the

question was answered. What god could save the youth from Nebuchadnezzar's power? The God of Israel, that's who. And so the suitably impressed king understood that what he personally witnessed was miraculous and so he sang the praises of the God of Israel and also of the courage and faithfulness of these 3 boys who were faithful unto death towards their God. What a witness.

RE-READ DANIEL 3:28 - end

While in verse 29 the king decrees that from here forward that no one is to speak against this God of Shadrakh, Meshakh, and Abednego, this by no means is a statement of his conversion. Rather this is one smart and pragmatic king. Any god who can deliver these boys from the belly of a fiery furnace not only deserves respect, he ought not to be tempted to wrath because there's no telling just what else this god might be able to do. But of course, being the king of the largest empire history had ever known Nebuchadnezzar had an ego as big as his land holdings. And so in an official letter sent out to the many nations and small kingdoms that forms his empire, he puffs himself up. First, his letter is literally addressed to everybody on the earth, because from his standpoint he sees himself as the literal King of the World. And in many ways Yehoveh has inasmuch said that he is. Second, verse 32 has the king viewing the miracle of the 3 Jews' deliverance as a sign and wonder done for his benefit. And in truth, that played a significant role in why God did it. And lastly the king remarks that this God's kingdom is an eternal kingdom and that this god rules over all generations of humans. So this amazingly powerful god is of course on Nebuchadnezzar's team of gods for the king to call on as needed.

The truth is that these verses are problematic and bother even the most conservative scholars. For one thing it seems as though this pagan king is uttering a quote from the Psalms. In high praise of Israel's God the king says in verse 33: "His kingdom lasts forever, and He rules all generations." This is nothing we would expect to hear from a pagan monarch. Now listen to Psalm 145:

^{CJB} **Psalm 145:13 *Your kingship is an everlasting kingship, your reign continues through all generations.***

Some scholars think that this proves that the entire Book of Daniel is contrived by a not-very-smart Jewish author who doesn't realize that people will soon figure out that a pagan king wouldn't quote the Hebrew Psalms, even in his praise of the Hebrew God. While that viewpoint generally sums up the attitude of many of the modern bible criticism school's commentators, other scholars point out that it is logical that Daniel would be consulted to help with finding a suitable blessing by the king for Israel's God. Why wouldn't a king as pragmatic, wise and smart as Nebuchadnezzar choose a Hebrew familiar with Hebrew ritual and tradition to formulate a praise to the Hebrew God? So the bottom line is that the letter being sent

throughout the empire (that ends chapter 3) was likely penned by Daniel, but sent in the king's name. Such a thing was common and customary in that era (that was one of the several purposes for Scribes), just as leaders of nations have speech writers and PR people and so on today, and merely attach the gravitas of their name to the document or speech. Nothing can be proved either way, however.

I want to close today with this thought. In the gentile Nebuchadnezzar we have a good example of a person who professes belief in the God of Israel, but does not acknowledge the fullness of just who that God is, nor His exclusivity. A few weeks ago I told you of a term I have invented for a growing group of people who insist on calling themselves Christians, but who also deny the deity of Christ, deny that He is the Messiah, and scoff at the idea that He saves. That term is Jesusites. Like Nebuchadnezzar who believes that Yehoveh exists and is a great god, so do Jesusites believe that Jesus existed and was a great man. And like Nebuchadnezzar who relates to Yehoveh in the worldview of paganism, so do Jesusites relate to Jesus in the worldview of secular humanism.

James 2:19-20 CJB

¹⁹ You believe that "God is one"? Good for you! The demons believe it too- the thought makes them shudder with fear!

²⁰ But, foolish fellow, do you want to be shown that such "faith" apart from actions is barren?

Neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Jesusites have a true understanding of who God is, and they do not have a saving faith, even though God may choose to use them (just as He did Pharaoh) in His plan of redemption.

We'll take up chapter 4 and examine another troubling dream visited upon Nebuchadnezzar, the next time we meet.