



+ **YOU**

Summer 2023
Mentoring: Investing in Others

Sermon Title: The Fiery Trial Of Faith
To be used with Session 4: Mordecai and Esther
Scripture: Daniel 3:1-30

Connection with the Study: This sermon complements the Bible study, “Mordecai and Esther,” by focusing on the Old Testament story of the three Hebrew men in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace of fire. They demonstrated by their actions ultimate trust in God’s providence, whether it be a good result or the loss of life. This sermon explores the situation that brought about their fiery trial and their deliverance.

Introduction: The drama of Daniel 3 occurred in Babylon after King Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city of Jerusalem and destroyed the temple of Solomon in 586 B.C. The three Hebrew heroes in this story, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and their friend, Daniel, were among the captives brought to Babylon to be employed in royal service. They asserted their commitment to God when they refused the food offered them that was forbidden under Jewish dietary laws. The ten-day trial they proposed proved their path of obedience was best, but all four faced further trials as they set about to serve God in a foreign land.

1. The King’s Pride (Daniel 3:1-12)

Nebuchadnezzar was a cruel tyrant. The final days of Judah were terribly sad when he lay siege, breached the walls, and destroyed the city of David. King Zedekiah attempted to flee but was apprehended. Nebuchadnezzar ordered the death of Zedekiah’s sons before him, then blinded the king, taking him in chains to Babylon (2 Kings 25).

The Babylonian king’s conquests gave him a sense of invincibility that brought about awful pride. He erected a golden image of himself and ordered his subjects on command to bow down and worship the image, apparently along with other gods of the kingdom. Later some of the king’s officials, no doubt motivated by jealousy, reported that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused the king’s order. The king was furious and ordered the Hebrew men to appear before him for defense.

One of the Watergate conspirators, the late Jeb Stuart McGruder, who was White House Deputy Communications Director under President Nixon, spent seven months in prison after his conviction. He later graduated from seminary and became a Presbyterian minister. A parishioner in Columbus, Ohio said, "When [McGruder] gets in the pulpit, he knows about the struggles and the pain and the sorrows. He’s not living in some ivory tower. He’s been from the top to the bottom and back up again."ⁱ

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Political power is fleeting, and those “at the top of their game” can be later humbled. Nebuchadnezzar faced his own humanity later as explained in Daniel 4. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

2. The Hebrews’ Courage (Daniel 3:16-18)

The three men stood before the king and respectfully declared their commitment to the God of Judah. They knew their God was omnipotent and could quench the king’s furnace of fire. But they also had an “if not” clause in their faith: “But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up” (v. 18).

Whether the plan of God is to bless us or break us is often unknown to us. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror . . .” (1 Cor. 13: 12). The mirrors in Paul’s day were polished metal and the reflected images indistinct. I’ve seen mirrors similar to this in prisons where broken glass could be harmful to inmates. Paul explained that the will of God sometimes looks indistinct since we cannot know the full design He has for our lives, nor how He engineers the circumstances of our lives for His honor. Another apostle, Peter, preached in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and thousands came to Christ. But later Stephen preached in the same place and was stoned to death by the angry crowd. Both Peter and Stephen honored the Lord with their lives, but the plan of God for each was different. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego teach us to trust in the good plan of God, despite the often adverse circumstances of life.

3. The Lord’s Deliverance (Daniel 3:19-27)

The three Hebrew men faced the awful fury of Nebuchadnezzar and were thrown into his furnace of fire. The king expected a quick result since the flame had never been hotter, but was amazed when he saw not three men in the fire, but four. “Look,” he said. “I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods” (v. 25). It’s natural for Christians to think of Jesus’ unique position as the Son of God, but Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan unaware of the promised Messiah. Most translations correctly render the phrase in lower case: “son of the gods.” What he said was essentially that something or someone “godlike” was in the fire with them. Later he called this person an “angel” (v. 28), so obviously he didn’t fully understand what took place, nor do we. Some believe this was a pre-Bethlehem appearance of Jesus, and it might have been. What we do know is that God was with His faithful servants and delivered them from the king’s rage. But the men had already declared that if they were destroyed in the flames, they would be destroyed as loyal subjects of a greater king than Nebuchadnezzar.

Conclusion: Sometimes the pathway of faith isn’t easy, People of God may face public scorn, discouragement, and even threats. Peter wrote about “the fiery trial” that his readers might face (1 Pet. 4:12). Some scholars believe he referred to the first Roman persecution, and that he himself died under Caesar Nero. Even today Christians in other nations face awful tests of faith that we can’t imagine in our country. But whatever we face, believers must model the

commitment of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Though commitment is costly, we honor God through lives of obedience.

Michael Brooks is pastor of Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster, Alabama. He previously served as professor of communications at Judson College. He earned two degrees at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, and enjoys reading, writing, and collecting political items. He and his wife, Donna, have two children and three grandsons.

ⁱ <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1990-08-19-9003090528-story.html>