

THE PURPOSE OF TESTING #9

Faith in the Fiery Furnace

Introduction

One of the most amazing miracles in the Bible is the deliverance of the 3 Hebrew children out of a fiery furnace.

The story is recorded in chapter 3 of the Book of Daniel; and it contains a powerful prophetic warning for the Christian church in America today. And the message is this:

Theme

A fiery trial of our faith in God is coming; a conflict with the culture over who we will worship.

I. Setting the Scene of the Story: God's People in Captivity

A. Babylon: A Spiritual Principle

1. The events in the Book of Daniel take place in Babylon-where Israel was taken into captivity because of its backsliding away from God.

2. But the Bible teaches us that Babylon is more than a geographic location. Babylon, from its beginning, represents a spiritual principle;

3. **The origin of Babylon is found in Genesis 11**; with the creation of a humanistic political system that rejects God; so spiritually speaking, Babylon represents any political system or secular culture that chooses to be ruled by men rather than ruled by God.

4. So remember that the story of the fiery furnace in Daniel 3 takes place in Babylon, where the faith of God's people will be tested by the question, "**Who will we worship?**"

B. American Babylon

1. There was a time when it would be unthinkable to compare modern America with the heathen kingdom of Babylon.

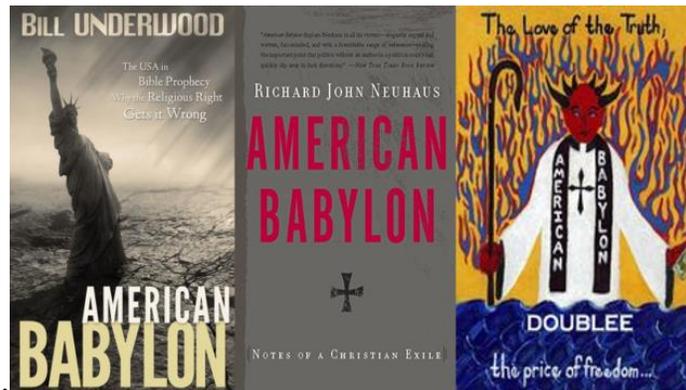
2. America’s founding fathers framed the constitution on Christian principles and spoke of our new nation as “the new Jerusalem” and a “city set on a hill”.

George Washington

“It is impossible to govern a nation without God and the Bible.”

3. But it is now well documented that we have backslidden away from the original vision into a highly secularized society where prayer is banned from our schools and abortion on demand is the law of the land.

4. We’ve backslidden so far that Christian authors are now referring to our nation as “American Babylon”. (Here are 3 examples)



5. The story of the fiery furnace in Daniel 3 shows how biblical faith was put to the test in Babylon; spiritually speaking, it is how the Christian faith is being put to the test in modern America...

6. In both cases, it is a conflict with the culture over the question of who we will worship!

II. Daniel 3: The Fiery Test of Faith

A. The Issue of the Golden Image

1. The story begins with the King of Babylon’s construction of an idol.

Daniel 3:1

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

- a. Notice the prominent number in measuring the statue is “6”; the number of the Antichrist.
- b. In modern measure, it was 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide.
- c. It was an image of *himself* as an object of worship.

Daniel 3:2-3

Then he sent messages to the high officers, officials, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up. So all these officials came and stood before the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Daniel 3:4-6

Then a herald shouted out, "People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king's command! When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments,* bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue. Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

2. Notice first that the spirit of Babylon allows no diversity! Everyone must conform to its demands. (The original tower of Babel was made of bricks; spiritual Jerusalem is constructed of “living stones”).

3. The command was, “When you hear the sound...bow and worship”!

Daniel 3:7

So at the sound of the musical instruments, all the people, whatever their race or nation or language, *bow*ed to the ground *and worshiped* the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

4. This is the ancient version of “dance to the music”; political power calls the tune and demands that we support it.

- We are *required* to support a woman’s desire to abort her baby
- We are *required* to accept homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle

(And woe be to anyone who makes any other “sound”!)

5. It says “all the people” bowed and worshipped. But 3 young men refused to bow; and were ratted out by the “whistle blowers”.

Daniel 3:8-11

But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews. They said to King...You issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments. That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace.

Daniel 3:12

But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. *They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up.*

Daniel 3:13-15

Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! *But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?*"

6. Conflict with an unchristian culture cannot be avoided; sooner or later it comes down to who will we worship.

Daniel 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty that *we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.*"

7. This is a perfect picture of true faith.

“Our God is ABLE to save us; but EVEN IF HE DOES NOT”, we will never “serve your gods” or “worship the gold statue” you have set up.

B. Into the Fire

Daniel 3:20

Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. (NLT)

Daniel 3:21

So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. (NLT)

Daniel 3:22

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.

Daniel 3:23

And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

C. Out of the Fire

Daniel 3:24-25

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." "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."

1. We are told 3 times the 3 men went into fire “bound”. (‘Bound’ in v.20; tied up’ in v.21; ‘securely tied’ in v.23.)

2. But now there are FOUR men, “loosed” and “walking in the mist of the fire”! And the 4th looks like “a son of the gods.”

Daniel 3:26

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."

Daniel 3:26

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire.

3. Then we have a list of 4 details of the miracle:

Daniel 3:27

And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, **and they saw (1) these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; (2) the hair of their head was not singed (3) nor were their garments affected, and (4) the smell of fire was not on them!**

D. The Purpose of Testing

1. The story could have stopped in v.27 and it would be a mighty miracle; the boys were saved! But there was more...

Daniel 3:28-29

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! 29 Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

2. The story could have stopped in v.29 and it would be amazing; a King was converted and God's name was glorified. But there was more...

Daniel 3:30

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

3. The story began as a conflict over who they would worship; but it ends with everyone worshipping God!

4. I took a lot of time to go through the story; but now need to apply it to our modern situation and the current culture. Let me repeat my theme:

A fiery trial of our Christian faith in God is coming; it will be a conflict with the culture over who we will worship.'

III. Application

A. Are We Prepared for a Fiery Test?

1. The 3 Hebrew children lived peaceful and prosperous lives in Babylon until they were confronted with a choice about who they would worship. They knew they could never compromise on that point.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

“What we are worshipping is what we are becoming.”

a. So we have been at peace so far in America; but the times are changing.

2. I warned you several years ago that one of our nation’s major political parties has basically abandoned God. I quoted this:

Hillsdale College “Imprimus”, April 2013

“For the first time in American political history, the winning party deliberately attacked religion (at its) national convention, where they famously struck God’s name from its (party) platform, only to have it restored by anxious party leaders in a comical session characterized by the frivolity that comes when people recognize that it doesn’t really matter.”

a. If you remove God from your platform all you have left is a Gospel of Salvation by politics! The government will replace God.

b. The purpose of the Constitution will be turned upside down.

Patrick Henry

“Our Constitution is not an instrument of the government to restrain the people, it is an instrument of the people to restrain the government-lest it come to dominate our lives and interests.”

3. More voices than ever are calling for the repeal of the 2nd amendment, which would take away our constitutional right to bear arms; our 1st President, George Washington, warned about this very thing.

George Washington

“When any nation does not trust its citizens with guns, it is sending a clear message. It no longer trusts its citizens because such a government has evil plans.”

B. There is a Place for Civil Disobedience

1. The 2nd lesson of the Hebrew children is that there IS a place for civil disobedience! They were subject to the laws of Babylon; but only up to a point!

2. We need to pause here to clear up any confusion:

- God commands us to honor all authority, including the government
- We are to obey the law; submit to the courts; pay our taxes

**BUT THERE IS A PLACE FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE!
WE DRAW THE LINE OVER WHO WE WORSHIP
OR WHO HAS THE FINAL SAY IN OUR LIVES.**

3. We obey proper authority up to the point where obeying men means disobeying God.

Acts 5:27-29

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

a. There was not fiery trial for them; but there was a beating;

Acts 5:40-42

And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And

daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

b. In “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”, Dr. King said

...

Dr. Martin Luther King

“If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country’s irreligious laws.”

c. An American poet philosopher put it this way...

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

“If the machine of government requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-balance to stop the machine. But I must not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.”

c. The last line means that while we refuse the demand to worship other gods we must refuse to demand others worship our God!

4. Many of us remember this picture from **2/24/15**:
21 Coptic Christians beheaded by Muslim extremists. They were not Pastors or Priests, just Christian. Their crime? They were “People of the Cross”.

5. God forbid we face that kind of furnace; but what if we did? Will our kind of Christianity stand up to the fire? I’m reminded of what God said to Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 12:5

“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?”

6. If our faith can’t stand the tests of living in the greatest country on earth, what will we do if it ever becomes a “Babylon”? Let’s claim this promise:

Isaiah 43:2-3

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior...