

Daniel 3: - Surviving a Fiery Trial

Daniel chapter 2 describes a succession of world empires as depicted to King Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. The image that he saw was the form of a man, made up of different metal sections which represented different empires, starting with Nebuchadnezzar's own dominion, followed by the Medo-Persian empire, the Greek empire, and finally the Roman Empire. This Roman empire would then become fragmented into 10 'toe' kingdoms, as the final stage of the 4th empire before the whole body is broken into pieces by the crushing blow of Messiah at his coming. Then the kingdom of God is established, and the nations subjugated under the rule of the Son of God.

Daniel Chapter 3 describes Nebuchadnezzar's response to this. He set up his own image instead, but the difference was that his image was all of gold (Dan. 3:1). In other words, his dominion would not be replaced by a succession of empires – it would last for ever. In fact, it was only following the events of chapter 4, that he recognised the true situation, that it is only the kingdom of God that will have no end "... I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation ... now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase" (Dan. 4:34, 37).

But this image that Nebuchadnezzar set up wasn't only an expression of his desire to last for ever, it was set up as an idol for his people to worship – and by setting this up, he was challenging the God of Israel whose purpose he was seeking to nullify. He sent out the decree to all his subjects thus:

"To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:4-6).

Here is the command, and the punishment for failing to obey it. All people were called upon to bow before this golden image, and give homage to it, as if it were a deity that would not pass away, but endure for ever. So, the chapter continues to describe how that the music began, and all the people fell down and worshipped the image – except for three faithful Jews, who refused to deny Yahweh their God. So the report came;

"... there are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego; these men, O king have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:12).

This is what it means to stand up for the Truth: when all around them men and women were bowing before the god of this world, these three men literally stood tall, and refused to conform. It is difficult to be in the minority, especially as the consequence seems to be certain death. Yet we also must refuse to conform to the ways of the world in which we live:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And **be not conformed to this world**: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:1-2).

PASSING THROUGH THE FIRE

The punishment for refusal to comply with the king's demands was to be cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. A point that has been made previously, is that the fiery furnace would have been needed to melt the gold to create this great image. It came out of the fiery furnace, and those

who refused to bow before it would also be placed into the furnace. It is as if the king was commanding that if anyone refuse to bow the knee before his god, they would be burned alive by the fire – they would be a burnt offering to the god of fire. But these three men had confidence in the power of Yahweh to deliver them:

“we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:16-18).

Their lives were more precious than the valuable gold that came from the furnace, and their faith was strong in the power of Yahweh to save. So we read the words of Peter:

“... now for a season ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith being much **more precious than of gold that perisheth**, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

Nebuchadnezzar was attempting to portray his dominion and his gods as lasting forever, but even gold will perish, and his idols would pass away. The lives of the faithful few were more precious than the valuable image of gold, and though they would be tried by fire, they would come forth with salvation – ultimately to be in the kingdom of Yahweh that will never be destroyed (cp. Dan. 2:44).

This theme of passing through the fire, yet being unconsumed by it features elsewhere in Scripture, most notably in the burning bush that Moses saw:

“... and the angel of Yahweh appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the **bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed**” (Exo. 3:2).

One of the principles being exhibited here, is that Yahweh would be with his people as they passed through a furnace of affliction. They would be tried with a fiery trial, but would be unconsumed by it:

“But now thus saith Yahweh that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: **when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.** For I am Yahweh thy God, the Holy One of Israel ...” (Isa. 43:1-3).

So the faithful trio, doubtless knew this passage and trusted in the power of Yahweh to save them from the hand of the dumb idols of Babylon.

The record in Daniel continues to recount how that these men were cast into the furnace, even by “the most mighty men that were in his army” (Dan. 3:20). Notice this: the most mighty men in the Babylonian army were used to put just a few unresisting men into the furnace – far more than what was needed. But the furnace itself was heated seven times more than needed, and “because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, and these men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the mist of the burning fiery furnace” (Dan. 3:22-23).

So it was, that the most mighty men of the Babylonian army were slain by the folly of the king’s commandment.

ANGELIC DELIVERANCE

In Psalm 34 it is written:

"the angel of Yahweh enampeth round about them that fear him, **and delivereth them**. O taste and see that Yahweh is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psa. 34:7-8).

An example of this, is the miraculous deliverance of these three men from the fires of destruction. As Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace, he saw a fourth figure – an angel of Yahweh. The fire had burned away their bonds, yet they were alive, and walking around in the furnace. Then the king "answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Dan. 3:25).

He recognised who this fourth man was:

"then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, **who hath sent his angel**, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God" (Dan. 3:28).

Through the angelic ministration, Yahweh saved his people from certain death. But there is another principle to be observed here: these servants of Yahweh were not spared being cast into the furnace. In Psalm 34 (above), the angel does not stop difficulties from coming: rather the faithful will be delivered out of the trials. So these men in question did not presume upon their God: they said to the king:

"... if it be so, Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace ... **but if not**, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up ..." (Dan. 3:17-18).

So it is, that we might be required to undergo a fiery trial – as Peter describes:

"Beloved, think it not strange **concerning the fiery trial which is to try you**, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Our brethren in times past have literally passed through a fiery trial, being burned alive by the blasphemers of latter-day Babylon. In our day, particularly in the western world, we have the freedom to choose which God we worship without such penalties: but the principle remains, we must remain faithful in a world that is all around us bowing before the altar of Mammon, whatever the consequences might be.

THE MAN OF SIN

The image of Daniel 2 is the likeness of a man. Being made up of different elements, it depicts the development of the kingdom of sin throughout its different phases. This continuation can be seen, when we come to the New Testament, and its depictions of the latter-day power, also under the heading of "Babylon":

"so he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and

filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, **BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH**" (Rev. 17:3-5).

This is Daniel's fourth beast system (see Dan. 7), and answers to the 4th Iron kingdom depicted by the image shown to Nebuchadnezzar. This is the later day development of the kingdom of sin: a falling away from the purity of Yahweh's Revealed Truth, into spiritual harlotry. The situation is so bad that the system is described in terms of the most disgusting of all women: a drunken whore. It's thinking is like Nebuchadnezzar's head of gold: based upon the pagan myths of ancient Babylon: it is a modern day revival of that system instituted in Daniel's day. The system is also described in terms of a man: a Man of Sin! So the apostle wrote concerning the day of Messiah's return:

"let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called god, or that is worshipped; so that he as god sitteth in the temple of god, **shewing himself that he is god**" (2 Thes. 2:3-4).

This is the final stage of the Image, when the kingdom of men shall be judged, and it's body given to the burning flame:

"... then shall the Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (2 Thes. 2:8).

Revelation chapter 13 also describes this latter day power setting up an image to be worshipped:

"saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast ... and he had power to give life to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that **as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed ...**" (Rev. 13:15).

Here, though the timing is different, the principles are the same. There is an image, or replica of that which had gone before, which men and women must worship under pain of death if they refuse: this is plainly a false religious system of worship. But those who do worship the image will not be partakers of Yahweh's Everlasting kingdom "all they that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, **whose names are not written in the book of life** of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). We must therefore refuse to worship the Image, lest we deny our Lord who suffered at that hands of the same power.

Revelation chapter 19 describes the ultimate end of the image, and the false system of worship that it represents:

"the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone ..." (Rev. 19:20).

How ironic it is, that whereas the faithful few were spared death in the fiery furnace for refusing to bow before the Image, those who do bow the knee to the false latter-day Babylonian system will be destroyed in a lake of fire – a symbol of utter destruction. May we be like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and bow the knee before the Lord only, so that we might be preserved into the coming kingdom which shall break in pieces and consume all others, and shall endure for ever.

Christopher Maddocks