

Daniel and His Friends Face the Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3:9-28

“Your Majesty,” said Nebuchadnezzar’s high officials, “you made a law that everyone must fall down and worship the gold statue when the band begins to play, and that anyone who refuses will be thrown into a flaming furnace. But there are some Jews out there-Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whom you have put in charge of Babylonian affairs-who have defied you, refusing to serve your gods or to worship the gold statue you set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar, in a terrible rage, ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought in before him. “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,” he demanded, “that you are refusing to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I set up? I’ll give you one more chance. When the music plays, if you fall down and worship the statue, all will be well. But if you refuse, you will be thrown into a flaming furnace within the hour. And what god can deliver you out of my hands then?”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not worried about what will happen to us. If we are thrown into the flaming furnace, our God is able to deliver us; and he will deliver us out of your hand, Your Majesty. But if he doesn’t, please understand, sir, that even then we will never under any circum-

stance serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have erected.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury and his face became dark with anger at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He commanded that the furnace be heated up seven times hotter than usual, and called for some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and throw them into the fire. So they bound them tight with ropes and threw them into the furnace, fully clothed. And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames leaped out and killed the



soldiers as they threw them in! So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell down bound into the roaring flames.

But suddenly, as he was watching, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisors, “Didn’t we throw three men into the furnace?”

“Yes,” they said, “we did indeed, Your Majesty.” “Well, look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire, and they aren’t even hurt by the flames! And the fourth looks like a god!”

Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the open door of the flaming furnace and yelled: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God! Come out! Come here!” So they stepped out of the fire.

Then the princes, governors, captains, and counselors crowded around them and saw that the fire hadn’t touched them-not a hair of their heads was singed; their coats were unscorched, and they didn’t even smell of smoke!

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, for he sent his angel to deliver his trusting servants when they defied the king’s commandment and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own. ■



Nebuchadnezzar's Pride is Punished

Daniel 4:20-33

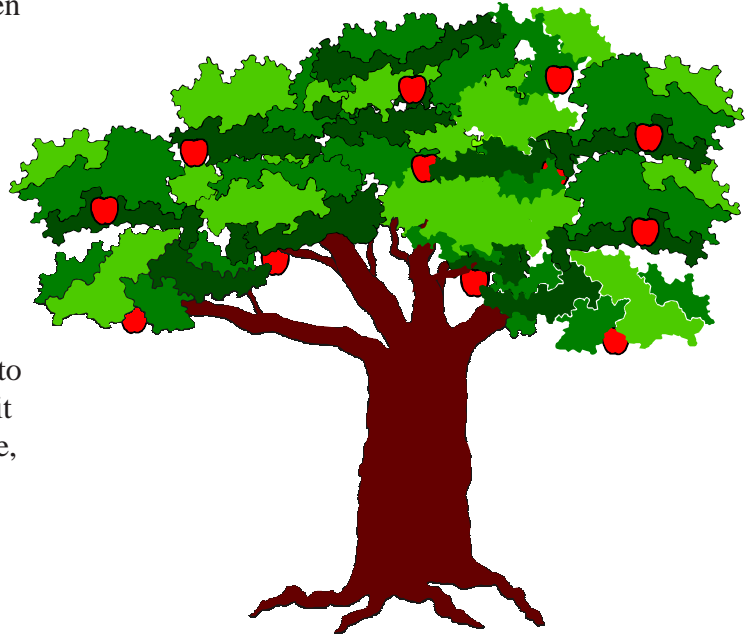
In Nebuchadnezzar, was living in peace and prosperity, when one night I had a dream that greatly frightened me. I called in all the wise men of Babylon to tell me the meaning of my dream, but when they came-the magicians, astrologers, fortune-tellers, and wizards-and I told them the dream, they couldn't interpret it. At last Daniel came in-the man I named Belteshazzar after my god-the man in whom is the spirit of the holy gods, and I told him the dream.

He said, "The tree you saw growing so tall, reaching high into the heavens for all the world to see, with its fresh green leaves, loaded with fruit for all to eat, the wild animals living in its shade, with its branches full of birds- that tree, Your Majesty, is you. For you have grown strong and great; your greatness reaches up to heaven, and your rule to the ends of the earth.

"Then you saw God's angel coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump and the roots in the earth surrounded by tender grass, banded with a chain of iron and brass. Let him be wet with the dew of heaven. For seven years let him eat grass with the animals of the field.'

"Your Majesty, the Most High God has decreed- and it will surely happen- that your people will chase you from your palace, and you will live in the fields like an animal, eating grass like a cow, your back wet with dew from heaven. For seven years this will be your life, until you learn that the Most High God dominates the kingdoms of men and gives power to anyone he chooses. But the stump and the roots were left in the ground! This means that you will get your kingdom back again when you have learned that heaven rules.

"O King Nebuchadnezzar, listen to me-stop sinning; do what you know is right; be merciful to the poor. Perhaps even yet God will spare you."



But all these things happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months after this dream, he was strolling on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, and saying, "I, by my own mighty power, have built this beautiful city as my royal residence and as the capital of my empire."

While he was still speaking these words, a voice called down from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, this message is for you: You are no longer ruler of this kingdom. You will be forced out of the palace to live with the animals in the fields and to eat grass like the cows for seven years, until you finally realize that God parcels out the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he chooses."

That very same hour this prophecy was fulfilled. Nebuchadnezzar was chased from his palace and ate grass like the cows, and his body was wet with dew; his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws. ■

Daniel Reads the Handwriting on the Wall

Daniel 5:1,2,5-12,23-29

Belshazzar the king invited a thousand of his officers to a great feast where the wine flowed freely. While Belshazzar was drinking, he was reminded of the gold and silver cups taken long before from the Temple in Jerusalem during Nebuchadnezzar's reign and brought to Babylon. Belshazzar ordered that these sacred cups be brought in to the feast.

Suddenly, they saw the fingers of a man's hand writing on the plaster of the wall opposite the lampstand. The king's face turned white with fear, and such terror gripped him that his knees knocked together.

MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN

"Bring the magicians and astrologers!" he screamed. "Bring the Chaldeans! Whoever reads that writing on the wall and tells me what it means will become the third ruler in the kingdom!" But when they came, none of them could understand the writing or tell him what it meant.

The king grew hysterical; his face reflected the terror he felt, and his officers, too, were shaken. But when the queen-mother heard what was happening, she rushed to the banquet hall and said to Belshazzar, "Calm yourself, Your Majesty, don't be so pale and frightened over this. There is a man in your kingdom who has within him the spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father this man was found to be full of wisdom and understanding. And in the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar he was made chief of all the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers of Babylon. Call for this man, Daniel, for he can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems. He will tell you what the writing means."

When he arrived Daniel explained the writing. "You have defied the Lord of Heaven and brought here these cups from his Temple; and you and your officers and wives and concubines have been drinking wine from them while praising gods of silver, gold, brass, iron, wood, and stone. But you have not praised the God who gives you the breath of life and controls your destiny! And so God sent those fingers to write this message:

"This is what it means:

"Mene means 'numbered'. God has numbered the days of your reign, and they are ended.

"Tekel means 'weighed'. You have been weighed in God's balances and have failed the test.

"Upharsin means 'divided'. Your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was robed in purple, a gold chain was hung around his neck, and he was proclaimed third ruler in the kingdom. ■