

BIBLE STUDY SERIES

# **A FAITH MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD**



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On occasion, I have inserted italics and brackets in Scripture quotations to enhance understanding, not to change the meaning.

May God bless you as you study this fascinating topic!

Larry Wilson

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# Forward

Nothing excites me more than to discover deeper insight from the Scriptures. As I began to focus my study on prophecy, I was amazed how many well-known Bible stories have such profound end time parallels. This is the first of ten stories which were originally published in a monthly newsletter during the first ten months of 2002. Here are my reasons for republishing these stories:

First, I hope each booklet will be widely distributed because everyone needs to know that the Bible has never been more relevant and timely than right now! I realize many other Bible stories have end time parallels, but I have chosen these particular stories because they are rich in content. As each story is placed into proper context, it is easier to understand *how* and *why* God's people will be tested during the Great Tribulation.

Second, I want you to have enough background information about the character in each story to feel as though you were there when the story took place. Understanding the tests, struggles, mistakes, and victories experienced by the characters should encourage and prepare us for the days ahead.

Last, I want you to know that faith in God means to submit to His demands and remain loyal to Him in the face of life-threatening adversities. If any concept stands out, I hope it is this: Faith in God is much more than believing there is a God. When people truly love God, their everyday actions will reflect a dedicated commitment to honor

His ways, which are distinctly different from the ways this world honors. A faith-filled Christian often stands in direct opposition to what the world esteems;<sup>1</sup> therefore, honoring God is not always a pleasant experience.

The pressure to conform to the status quo explains, in part, why ancient Israel frequently apostatized.<sup>2</sup> Tragically, the priests of Israel failed to lead the people to understand that as a nation, they must be vigilant because mankind is inherently rebellious toward God.<sup>3</sup>

When the draw of our carnal nature is combined with the pressure to conform to the world's ways, serving God becomes a frustrating challenge and requires *patient* faith.<sup>4</sup> God understands our dilemma. This is why He preserved so many stories of faith in the Bible. Unless we examine and understand the failures and the victories of our forefathers, we will repeat their mistakes.

The Bible is clear; salvation comes through faith in God. Given this sublime truth, I hope you will gain a new appreciation about many aspects of faith as you read these booklets. Faith in God is so much more than intellectual assent to, or agreement with, an idea. Faith in God leads to adventure and fills your heart with peace and joy. True happiness springs from knowing and loving the great "I AM."

Larry Wilson, September 2020

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1 Romans 8:7

2 2 Kings 17:15

3 Ezekiel 22:26

4 James 1:3

# A Faith More Precious than Gold

Most Christians are aware of the experience of Daniel in the lions' den and how God used Daniel's faith to free His people from their Babylonian captivity. Now, I would like to share a story that explains why God allowed Daniel's three friends to be thrown into a fiery furnace. As you proceed, search for any end time parallels.

## God's Agent of Wrath

King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Even though the secular mind might say that the city was destroyed because of rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, the Bible indicates Jerusalem was destroyed because Israel refused to submit to God's authority.<sup>1</sup> Israel's destruction teaches a profound truth: God's longsuffering and wrath against Israel are but a mirror reflecting how God deals with all nations.<sup>2</sup>

God preserved a biblical record of His actions so future generations could understand *why* "He sets up governments and takes them down." In this story, understand that God selected Nebuchadnezzar to be

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 25; Ezekiel 14

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 18:28; Jeremiah 25:12; Acts 10:34

His servant—His agent of wrath against Israel.<sup>1</sup> In other words, God empowered and enabled the king of the north, Nebuchadnezzar, to destroy His city and His people because of their decadence.<sup>2</sup> The dual role Nebuchadnezzar played as king from the north and king of Babylon, parallels the coming Antichrist. During the Great Tribulation, Lucifer will be the “fierce-looking king” from the north<sup>3</sup> and also the king of modern Babylon!<sup>4</sup>

### Three Sins

God’s patience with Israel ended due to three persistent sins: Israel violated His Sabbaths, engaged in sexual immorality, and preferred to worship idols instead of Almighty God. Do you see an end time parallel in this? Thoughtfully consider God’s words as He laments Israel’s apostasy: **“Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.”**<sup>5</sup>

Also, consider God’s comments about the clergy of Israel: **“And among the prophets of Jerusalem I**

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1 Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6; 43:10

2 Daniel 9

3 Daniel 8:23; 11:36

4 Revelation 17:11

5 Ezekiel 22:26

**have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that not one of them turns from their wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.”<sup>1</sup> “5‘For they have done outrageous things in Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives and in my name they have uttered lies--which I did not authorize. I know it and am a witness to it,’ declares the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> “Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself am against you, Jerusalem, and I will inflict punishment on you in the sight of the nations. Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. Therefore in your midst parents will eat their children, and children will eat their parents. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds.”<sup>3</sup> We learn from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel why God’s anger with Israel reached a boiling point. Israel’s decadence had profaned His holy name among the nations of Earth. As representatives of the most high God and trustees of the everlasting gospel, Israel’s rebellion had degenerated the nation to such a decadent condition that God could no longer use them to benefit the**

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1 Jeremiah 23:14

2 Jeremiah 29:23

3 Ezekiel 5:8-10

world. Destruction was the only solution. Therefore, God chose a “servant-destroyer,” the king of Babylon, to destroy His original plan, His city, and His people.

### **The Vanished Vision**

Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were taken to Babylon as prisoners of war during the first siege of Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. Shortly after they arrived, God exalted Daniel and his friends through a curious turn of events. One night, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a vision that outlined the remaining course of human history.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, the vision consisted of a great statue of a man that was made of various materials. At the end of the vision, the statue was smashed to pieces by a great rock that came out of the sky.

When the king awoke, he became agitated. Nebuchadnezzar knew that he had received an important vision, but could not remember what it was. He initially thought it was from Marduk, the god of the Babylonians. As the king fretted over his loss of memory, he realized that he had no other option but to ask the clergy of Babylon for help. The king did not have complete confidence in the “wise men” of Babylon and anticipated a skirmish with them. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar made it clear that he

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 2



would not tolerate any delay or double talk from the “wise men.”

Behind the scenes, the God of heaven was unfolding a plan to exalt His holy name throughout the world. Nebuchadnezzar’s vision was from the God of heaven, not Marduk, and it was the God of heaven who gave the king amnesia. By doing this, God made fools of Babylon’s clergy and, at the same time, revealed the impotence of Marduk. Even though the vanished vision agitated the king, the agitation became the very means through which young Daniel was exalted to a position close to the king.

### **God Is In Control**

After rising from bed and I am sure, pacing the floor, Nebuchadnezzar called an emergency meeting of all the wise men of his kingdom. Suspecting lame excuses and weasel words, Nebuchadnezzar confronted his wise men. **“So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, ‘I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.’ Then the astrologers answered the king, ‘may the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.’ The king replied to the astrologers, ‘This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what**

**my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.’ Once more they replied, ‘Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.’ Then the king answered, ‘I am certain that you are trying to gain time [so that you can create another one of your incoherent riddles], because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not [immediately] tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. [If you do not tell me the dream, I will know] You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things [during times past], hoping the situation will [favorably] change [in each instance to fit your predictions]. So then [since you claim to have contact with the god of Babylon], tell me the dream, and I will know [beyond doubt] that you can interpret it for me.’”<sup>1</sup>**

Nebuchadnezzar was no dummy. Consider his speech. If the wise men proved to be a bunch of clever liars, he would destroy them. If they really did have a supernatural connection with Marduk, *as they had claimed*, they would be rewarded. The astrologers, magicians, sorcerers, and enchanters represented Babylon’s diverse religion; and they claimed, from

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 2:2-9, insertions mine

time to time, to have received visions from Marduk on behalf of the king. *Their false claims of contact with Marduk almost led to their demise.*

## **False Prophets**

In ancient times, kings often sought the services of religious leaders as counselors and advisors. For example, Jezebel employed 450 prophets of Baal.<sup>1</sup> Even as late as the fourth century A.D., Constantine depended heavily upon the advice and flattery of the theologian, Eusebius. Clergymen were sometimes deemed important because rulers believed that their prosperity depended on staying within the favor of “the gods.” To earn their “salt,” religious leaders had to walk a fine line. They had to be very careful with their words. They not only had to say things that bolstered the ego of their employer, they also had to say things in a way that could not be proven false. For this reason, “wise men” were notoriously difficult to “pin down.” They always had an “out” hidden somewhere in their riddles and prophecies.

The highest rank among the clergy was that of a prophet such as Balaam in Numbers 22. Any person who had direct connection with “the gods” was highly honored, respected, and paid well. It is ironic that God’s prophets in Israel had just the opposite fate. They were often stoned or executed because Is-

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1 1 Kings 18:19

rael's kings did not want to hear the truth!<sup>1</sup> In most cases, to become a "prophet," all a person had to do was claim that he or she had received a message from one of "the gods." Of course, a prophet was validated when his prophecy came to pass, but this was the point that bothered Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon's prophets presented their messages with such slippery words that they always seemed to come true, no matter how the situation unfolded.

A false prophet is a person who claims to speak for God when God has not spoken. As Israel degenerated, she became full of false prophets and this made God angry. Prophets were saying "God showed this to me," or "God said this to me," when, in fact, God had showed or said nothing. The reason this makes God angry is because it is only a matter of time until His Word is defamed and considered worthless because of prophetic falsehoods. God feels so strongly about this that He promises to destroy anyone who uses His name for the sake of credibility, when a false prophet in reality is speaking out of his own imagination.<sup>2</sup> Lucifer is called the "false prophet" in Revelation 19:20 for this very reason. He will speak out of his own evil imagination, claiming to be the almighty God!

In an effort to stay within the king's favor and earn their keep, Babylon's prophets made up fables and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 23:37

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 13

riddles to please and flatter the king. But Nebuchadnezzar was smart enough to know that a dream cannot be validated or studied by other people, and although a false prophet can say that he or she has received a vision, no one can prove otherwise if the message cannot be clearly nailed down.<sup>1</sup> When Nebuchadnezzar demanded the wise men reveal the vanished vision, he turned the tables on them. There was no room for deception.

The king reasoned that if his wise men really had contact with Marduk, if they could actually receive visions from him, and had the ability to interpret those visions, then they *should be* able to determine, describe, and interpret the vision which Marduk gave the king. So, the king was ready to confront his “wise men” and frame his request in a way that left no wiggle room. When the wise men considered the king’s demand, they knew they were in big trouble. This time, they would not be able to weasel their way out of confrontation. Consider their defense: **“The astrologers answered the king, ‘There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.’ This made the**

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1 2 Kings 3

**king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.”<sup>1</sup>**

Can you imagine being summoned to the palace for an emergency meeting only to discover that your execution is minutes away? All of the wise men of Babylon were forced to admit their deceit and failure in the presence of their king Nebuchadnezzar. How effective of the God of heaven to have the wise men confess with their own mouths the impotence of the Babylonian religion. When the moment of truth came, the clergy of Babylon was disgraced and the king was justifiably furious.

### **Marduk Is No God**

Before God would exalt His holy name throughout the Earth, He chose to demonstrate that Marduk was “no god.” It is amazing how a vanished dream turned the world of the pagan religious leaders upside down. Before the vision took place, the prophets of Babylon were highly paid and widely respected as “wise men.” After meeting with the king for only a few minutes, the “wise men” of Babylon confirmed with their own mouths that they were just a “clutch of liars” with a death sentence hanging over their heads. I am reminded of Paul’s words, **“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to**

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 2:10-12

**shame the strong.”**<sup>1</sup> Do you see an end time parallel here? Is it possible that few, if any, of the 144,000 will be theologians?

The ultimate point of this story is that God wanted to vindicate His holy name before the nations of Earth. He wanted the whole world to know that He is a God of love and salvation, a God of mercy and justice, a God of fairness and truth, and a God of compassion and majesty. Unfortunately, just the opposite had occurred. The Jews had made enemies of almost everyone on Earth. They had slandered and profaned the exalted name of God, trampled upon His law, and rejected every prophet He sent to them. So, God implemented a plan to restore His good name and He chose to use the mouth of a heathen king to do it! A sovereign God can make a servant out of anyone.

## **The Death Decree**

News of a sudden and unexpected death decree for all the wise men of Babylon raced from Nebuchadnezzar's palace as fast as a swift horse. The “news media” was on this story in a heartbeat. The threat of death for all the wise men of Babylon did what Nebuchadnezzar would later regret. The king had unwittingly informed the whole world of the impotence of Babylon's wise men by putting a death decree on their heads. Even worse, the entire kingdom

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1 1 Corinthians 1:27

became eager to know the contents of the vision as they wondered what was so urgent about it that the king would kill all of his wise men.

## **Daniel Exalted**

Through a series of providential events, Daniel eventually stood before the king. He not only revealed the vanished vision, but interpreted it for the king. The king immediately recognized the veracity of Daniel's words. Daniel was a "true" prophet speaking clearly and decisively. He did not use weasel words! This pleased Nebuchadnezzar more than words can express. When the king heard Daniel's testimony, he promptly promoted Daniel above all the prophets in Babylon: **"Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.' Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men."**<sup>1</sup>

After pondering the consequences of his rash decisions, the king had a change of heart. He must have

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 2:46-48



grimaced as he faced three sobering truths: First, Daniel had informed Nebuchadnezzar that Marduk did not give him the vision. The king's vision had come from the most high God *of the Jews*; the most despised people in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. How could he admit that the lowest class and most despicable of people had a God greater than Babylon's god Marduk?

Second, Daniel told the king that the God of the Jews was sovereign over all the kingdoms of the world, even Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar heard how God sets up kings and takes them down according to His sovereign authority. The king was flattered to learn that it was the God of heaven who had given *him* a throne. At the time, Nebuchadnezzar did not comprehend the reality of Daniel's words. God wanted Nebuchadnezzar to know that he had not gained the throne by human prowess, but this lesson would not be learned until later when the king was humbled and spent seven years living as an animal.

The third truth was the most chilling of all. God told the king *his* kingdom would fall and it would be destroyed. As the king churned on the vanished vision and the train of events that it produced, he must have thought his vision to be more of a nightmare than a revelation from God.

## **The King Distressed**

Nebuchadnezzar's impatience with his advisors had created a political nightmare. The king had publically humiliated and discredited the wise men of Babylon. He had tested Marduk and proved that the god of the Babylonians was inferior to the God of the Hebrews. Worst of all, he had fueled the curiosity of his subjects by putting a death decree on the heads of Babylon's wise men. Everyone wanted to know the contents of the king's vision! The seriousness of a death decree for Babylon's religious leaders indicated it was not a trivial matter. Furthermore, when the Jewish teenager, Daniel, was promoted above all the wise men of Babylon, it was obvious that Daniel had successfully recalled and interpreted the dream for the king, but what did the dream reveal?

We know the vision predicted the fall of Babylon and other world empires; still, Nebuchadnezzar did not want his subjects to know. The king knew that if this information leaked out, his authority would collapse. A government cannot survive without the submission and loyalty of its subjects. If the word of Babylon's predestined fall reached the ears of his top administrators, Nebuchadnezzar knew he would soon be deposed. How could anyone maintain confidence in a king which the most high God had predestined for destruction? Nebuchadnezzar realized that

a long tenure on the throne was only possible for as long as people *were loyal* to him and his regime. If his subjects knew that God had numbered his days, they would rise up in rebellion and he would perish.

Kings may conquer nations and kill thousands to secure their authority, but no king can thwart the God of heaven. The rumor began to spread that the fall of Babylon was imminent; that it had been ordained by the God of the Jews. Based on Nebuchadnezzar's subsequent actions, I believe the administrators from the far reaches of the empire sent requests for clarification, so that they could deal with the rumors about the vision. As the situation worsened, Nebuchadnezzar consulted with his embarrassed wise men and they decided to resolve the rumor by mixing error with truth. The wise men owed their lives to the king because he had relented on the death decree. Subsequently, they were eager to help the king solve this political dilemma.

Nebuchadnezzar and his wise men conspired to tell the world that Marduk had given the king a great vision of a "golden man." The people would be told that the golden man represented the kingdom of Babylon, *which would last forever*. Based on the course of events, Nebuchadnezzar alleged to his subjects that he "was commanded" in vision to empty the golden coffers of Babylon to erect a great golden replica of his dream. Because the rumor had

circulated that Babylon was predestined to fall, the king decided to use the golden image as a way to renew loyalty to his government. He planned to require all of his administrators and governors travel to the province of Babylon to be present on the day that the “golden image” would be dedicated.

The construction of a 90-foot-tall, golden man began in earnest. It is believed that a cubit in ancient Babylon equaled 18 to 20 inches, so 60 cubits in height would equal about 90 feet. For comparison’s sake, the Statue of Liberty is 111-feet tall, but Lady Liberty stands on a pedestal that is 194-feet high, which makes her total height 305 feet. Due to the swiftness of rumors and the irreparable damage they could cause, there was no time for delay. Riders on horses were dispatched to the ends of the Earth calling the administrators and governors to be present on the Plain of Dura at an appointed time. Nebuchadnezzar anticipated some resistance to his plans, so he ordered a giant smelting furnace used to cast the metal man to be kept burning during the dedication service. The loyalty test would be “real simple.” If anyone refused to bow down and worship the golden image, he would be thrown into a furnace. The king calculated his loyalty test would force everyone back into “the fold” if any loyalties had been compromised. The immediate death of rebels would

reduce potential problems. The king was satisfied this course of action would protect his throne.

## **I Did It My Way**

Nebuchadnezzar believed that he had *earned* his throne through political savvy and military prowess.<sup>1</sup> He had heard, but did not comprehend, the words of Daniel indicating that the God of heaven had *given* Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom. Therefore, the king thought a golden image and loyalty test would bring an end to the rumor that Babylon would fall. It is possible that this is the most expensive lie ever told. Consider the amount of gold required to cast a statue 90-feet high; consider the labor for making such an image; and consider the logistics and travel necessary to bring thousands of administrators from the farthest corners of the Earth to the Plain of Dura.

This whole story highlights an interesting point about the carnal heart: Power can be of greater value than money. Men will go to extremes to gain or hold on to power. We regularly see politicians spend millions to win a government office that pays little money. To keep his lie hidden, Nebuchadnezzar prevented Daniel from attending the service. He had honored Daniel for telling the truth, but now that he was implementing a great lie, he did not want Daniel to attend the service.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 4:30

## **A Time of Testing**

When Daniel was promoted above the wise men of Babylon, Daniel asked that his friends be recognized for their contribution toward solving the mystery of the vision.<sup>1</sup> Their promotion almost proved to be the cause of their death. The king wanted everyone who was someone in his government to be present at the dedication. In a political setting, the question of loyalty is paramount. *One man can exercise power over others only if the others are willing to submit.*

Daniel's friends, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego, knew the test of loyalty was coming. What should they do? They could not run and hide because the king had given them high positions in the government of Babylon. Furthermore, the impotent wise men of Babylon were jealously eager to have Daniel and these other "three Jews" removed from their high offices. Therefore, if they were to avoid the dedication of the golden image they would show reluctance in honoring the king. Hesitation on this point could be regarded as treason. As the date approached, I am sure Daniel and his friends met together to ask the Lord for divine intervention. On the basis of their testimony during the dedication service, it is safe to say that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obediently went to the service expecting

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 2:18, 49

to be thrown into the fiery furnace. What courage! This is exactly what God wanted! God needed three young men who were willing to go to their death so He could exalt His holy name. Remember, this story began when God wanted to correct the false impression that the nation of Israel had given of Him. The Jews had profaned His holy name and God wanted to set the record straight. In order to do this, God used an expensive golden image, a pagan king who knew the truth, a large crowd of world leaders who were confused by rumors, a very hot fiery furnace, and three young men who would be faithful unto death.

### **The Moment of Truth**

**“So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, ‘Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.’ Therefore, as**

**soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”<sup>1</sup>**

All of a sudden, the dedication service was interrupted. As far as the eye could see, all but three Jews had bowed down before the golden image. The wise men wasted no time reporting this anomaly to the king. The music stopped. The three men were arrested and presented to the king. As they approached the king's throne, the king must have uttered some profane Babylonian words under his breath, “How did *they* get here?” Each eye focused on the three young Jews who dared to rebel against the monarch of Babylon! Everyone strained to see what was about to happen. For a moment, the golden image was forgotten. The king was embarrassed and frustrated. The whole dedication service could unravel and the result could be worse than the truth he was trying to hide!

Did you notice who reported the insolence of the three Hebrews? The jealous wise men were the first to denounce the Jews. This is amazing. The wise men owed their very lives to these three young men and yet, the wise men were the first to report

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3:3-8



their disobedience to the king. There is an end time parallel here. **“They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘May the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.’ Furious with [embarrassment and] rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, ‘Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?’”**<sup>1</sup>

The king personally knew Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He knew their integrity and loyalty. He knew they were close friends of Daniel, but somehow they had been overlooked. They should not have been present. Now, he had no other option but to destroy them if he wanted to protect his throne. The king was “up the creek.” Nebuchadnezzar, the

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3:9-14, insertion mine

king of Earth, had created a big lie, but the God of heaven had gathered everyone to hear and see the truth. God's truth is best seen when it is confronted with a great lie. The king responded to the rebellion of Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego with feigned generosity, hoping they would humor him on this matter. The king had an enormous political problem which he had created by threatening the wise men, and he knew he did not want a showdown with the God of these three men. So the king tried to appear generous: **"Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"**<sup>1</sup>

The words Nebuchadnezzar spoke are interesting. The king honestly knew these three lads were not rebellious toward him. After all, they had joined with Daniel in seeking an answer to his dream. But the king was haughty enough to taunt the lads with the remark, **"Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"** The king uttered these words because *he knew* of their loyalty to their God. He may have even known about the second commandment. Nevertheless, the king's action reveals that

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3:15

a miracle does not always change the carnal heart. Centuries later, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in the presence of many unbelievers and some of them still refused to accept Christ as the Messiah!

In Nebuchadnezzar's case, the king had personally experienced the vanished vision and witnessed a second miracle when Daniel told him what he had dreamed, but neither event changed the king's heart. When confronted with their loyalty to the King of kings, the king of Earth thought he had the high ground, but as it turns out, he was on holy ground! To protect his lies, the king had to kill those who *knew* the truth. He knew they knew what had really happened. He also knew he could never recover from public disgrace if he showed any sign of weakness or timidity in the presence of thousands of his administrators. So, the king did what any carnal heart would do. The young men did what every born-again believer would do. The metal (mettle) in each heart was revealed.

**“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter [because you know the truth and we know the truth about the vanished vision]. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from**

**Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.'"**<sup>1</sup>

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had prepared for this moment. Through prayer and fasting, they had strengthened their resolve to stand firm for God. When the king saw that these young men were not going to acquiesce and "go along" with his plan, he became very angry. They had publically rejected his authority and this was the very thing he was trying to protect with the creation and dedication of the golden image!

**"Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be [normally] heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen [trousers], and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace."**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3:16-18, insertion mine

<sup>2</sup> Daniel 3:19-21, KJV, insertions mine

I used the KJV for these verses because I like the language. The Bible says **“the form of his visage was changed.”** I understand this to mean that Nebuchadnezzar’s face turned fiery red. Maybe his blood pressure hit the dangerous level of 220/160. He was hotter than a firecracker on the fourth of July because his kingly ego had been hammered.

Here is a mystery: *Even though the carnal heart is full of rebellion, the carnal heart hates rebellion more than anything else.* When the carnal heart cannot get its way, its fury knows no limit. The king was rejected and no king or carnal heart can tolerate rebellion. Rejection or the fear of rejection is the underlying basis for peer pressure and a lot of social torment. To successfully deal with rejection, a person must receive daily injections of spiritual courage and stamina. Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego were at peace with their fate on that day because they had walked and talked with God. Loyalty that can withstand the prospect of a fiery death does not come overnight. This was not their first test. Because they had practiced obedience in small matters, they were able to withstand the ultimate test.

### **The God of Heaven Takes Over**

**“The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed**

**the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, ‘Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?’ They replied, ‘Certainly, Your Majesty.’ He said, ‘Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.’ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, ‘Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!’ So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.”<sup>1</sup>**

While the three Hebrews were being bound and thrown into the furnace, the king’s mind was in turmoil. How would he recover from the showdown caused by these three Jews? He watched with interest as the young men were bound and thrown into the furnace. As he observed their fate and his authority over their lives, the king was surprised! Instead

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3:22-27

of seeing three bodies consumed by fire, he saw *four* men walking in the furnace. The king jumped to his feet and asked, **“Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”** His attendants assured him this was the case. Then, the king exclaimed, **“Look! I see four men walking around in the fire.”**

Nebuchadnezzar immediately recognized this had to be God’s presence with the three Hebrews. Nebuchadnezzar knew the golden image service was a charade. He also knew it was wrong to send Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the fiery furnace. In spite of knowing this, the king acted to protect his material interests because he was self-centered. In this sense, Nebuchadnezzar demonstrated the carnal heart which plagues all mankind. Nothing on Earth is more selfish and self-seeking than the carnal heart. The root of the world’s problems is selfishness.

The death of Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers proved to the vast audience that the heat of the furnace was extreme. The soldiers who threw the three Jews into the furnace went to their death because they were loyal and obedient to their earthly king. The three Hebrews who were sentenced to death were obedient and loyal to their heavenly King.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:4-6

**“Then Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.’ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.”<sup>1</sup>**

What does a humiliated king say to an enormous gathering of world governors when a miracle nullifies his death decree on three Jews? The king did not admit defeat, nor did the king offer an apology to the God of heaven. Instead, he turned to his impotent wise men and confused administrators and said, “If any of you speak evil about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you will be cut into pieces!” Wow! The king deflects his responsibility once again. The carnal heart of the king rejected another chance to be transformed. Later, the God of heaven finally seized the king’s attention by exiling him to a field as an animal for seven years—but that’s another story.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3:28-30



## **The End of This Story**

When the administrators and governors returned to their distant homes, each one had a story to tell! “Yes, I saw that big golden statue, but that was nothing! Let me tell you about the God of the Jews! He delivered three young men out of a roaring fiery furnace. I saw it with my own eyes. The fire was so hot it killed the king’s soldiers that threw them in, but the flames did not hurt those three Jews! That is some God the Jews have!” This story, repeated by a thousand pagans all over the world, exalted the God of heaven. As a nation, the Jews had profaned the wonderful name of God, but God found three Jews who had a faith more precious than pure gold and He was able to exalt His holy name through their obedience and loyalty.

There are many important end time parallels in this story. During the Great Tribulation, there will be an “image to the beast” and all people will be required to worship it or be killed.<sup>1</sup> Those alive during the Great Tribulation will be players in the forthcoming drama. It is possible that we may have to stand before Lucifer, the dreaded king of Babylon. Will we have a faith of pure gold?

**“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and**

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 13

true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 3:14-22

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