

## **“THERE WAS ANOTHER IN THE FIRE”**

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**Text: Daniel 3:19-30 NLT**

**God’s Word: Daniel 3:1-18 NLT**

### ***Daniel 3:19-30 NLT***

*<sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. <sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> 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.” <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> 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>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> 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.” <sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

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Hananiah ... Mishael ... Azariah never thought that the Temple ... the House of God ... would ever be destroyed. That Jeru-salem ... the city of God’s shalom ... God’s peace ... would ever be reduced to rubble. They never thought that they would be led away in chains and forced to be slaves and servants in Babylon. They never thought that they would lose everything ... their families ... their homes ... their friends ... even their names ... names given to them by their families ... names that held special meaning for them ... names that described their connection to the great God of Israel. Hananiah’s name meant “Jehovah was gracious.” Mishael’s name meant “God is our resemblance.” Azariah’s name meant “God is my helper.”

You see, for centuries it had been the custom of captors to change the names of their slaves as a way of disconnecting them from their past ... their history ... their heritage ... and their hope of ever seeing their family or their home again. When we don’t know our history, we lose our sense of connection to our past ... to our families ... to our traditions ... our heritage ... our homeland ... when we lose those things, we lose hope. Think about how degraded and powerless you would feel if someone with authority came along and just took your name away and gave you another ... zap! Just like that ... whether you wanted them to or not.

Hananiah ... whose name meant “Jehovah was gracious” ... was changed to “Shadrach” ... which, in Babylonian, means “Under the Command of the Moon God Aku.” Again, think about this. Every time that someone called Hananiah by name ... “Hananiah” ... he would be reminded of his connection to God. God was part of his name. And then to be called “Shadrach” ... a reminder that he was now a slave to a pagan people every time he heard it ... “Under the command of the moon god Aku.”

Mishael’s name meant “God is our resemblance.” His name was changed from Mishael to “Meshach” ... which means “Who is like Aku” in Babylonian. He went from being reminded that he resembled the God of Israel to being called someone who resembled a pagan god.

Azariah’s name meant “God is my helper.” He would go from being reminded that God is his helper to being called “Abednego” ... “a servant of the Babylonian gods.”

From “God is gracious” to “under the command of the moon god Aku.” From “God is our resemblance” to “Who is like Aku.” From “God is my helper” to “a servant of the Babylonian gods.” And yet, even though Jerusalem lay in ruins ... its walls and towers destroyed ... the gates ripped off their hinges ... Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah knew that Jehovah was still gracious. Even though their families had been decimated or scattered, perhaps led off as slaves as they had been ... Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah still believed that their lives could be a reflection of Jehovah. Even though they were being forced to serve their captors, they would never serve their gods.

The Babylonians were a pagan and polytheistic people who worshipped many gods. One of the unique features of Babylonian religion was its focus. Whenever a new king would ascend the throne, they would introduce a new god or gods ... create a new order of worship ... and institute new ways to practice their faith. In other words, they would switch gods when they switched kings. It might sound strange and confusing to us, but the Babylonian people were accustomed to this practice. As soon as a new king was appointed, they would drop the old god or gods and dutifully begin to worship the new god or gods chosen by the new king.

When King Nebuchadnezzar came into power, he erected a solid gold image on the plain of Dura ... a province in Babylon. It was 60 cubits tall and 6 cubits wide. I know ... what’s a “cubit”? By our measurements, the tower was 90 feet tall and nine feet wide. Imagine a nine-story tall golden needle standing in the middle of a vast, flat plain that could be seen from a very long ways off.

Nebuchadnezzar’s plan was to kill two political birds with one stone ... or one god ... if you will. The first was to unite his polytheistic empire under one god ... symbolized by the towering gold monument. The other was to inspire tribute to himself ... King Nebuchadnezzar, the “Golden King.” It was an attempt to unify his nation around a single religion with himself at the center of that religion. Imagine getting this party invitation in the mail:

“Come to the Plain of Dura on Saturday, July 21st, and gather with us to meet the new king ... and the new god of Babylon. There will be lots of food and celebrities ... along with live music ... so bring your appetite and your dancing shoes.

P.S.: Any time you hear the music start playing, you must immediately stop whatever you are doing and begin worshipping the golden image of our new god or, by order of the new king, Nebuchadnezzar, you will be thrown into a furnace and burned alive. Hope to see you there ... if not, we’ll come and find you.”

It is estimated that over 300,000 people gathered to worship the “Golden King” and to bow down before the golden monument to Babylon’s new god. Like all good subjects, once the music started to play they all obediently bowed down before King Nebuchadnezzar and his golden image ... everyone that is, except ... Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

They may have lost their families ... they may have lost their homes ... all their possessions ... even their Jewish names ... but they never lost their love and their faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God's laws were still deeply etched upon their hearts. One of them ... carved on a stone tablet and brought down from Mt. Sinai by Moses commanded: *"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them"* (Exodus 20:4-5). For Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah that meant not even under the threat of death from some mega-maniac king like Nebuchadnezzar.

It is hard for us to imagine the courage that it took for them to do that. Two hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-seven subjects of the king ... from the highest to the lowest ... dutifully bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image ... while you and your two friends stand there ... sticking out like sore thumbs ... three sore thumbs that are about to be burned alive.

Well ... it doesn't take a genius to figure out that word of this got back to the king! Nor is it difficult to imagine what King Nebuchadnezzar's reaction was going to be. Verse 19 says that Nebuchadnezzar heard about what Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had done ... well, more accurately, hadn't done ... and it says that Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage that his face was "distorted." "Distorted" is putting it mildly. A more accurate interpretation of the scripture would be that his face was twisted into a mask of rage. These young men ... slaves no less ... had the nerve ... the unmitigated gall ... to openly disobey him ... publicly ... during one of the most significant and important ceremonies of his reign as the king of one of the most powerful kingdoms at the time. There were no words to describe their insolence and his indignation and rage ... no excuse. "Fire up the furnace, boys! ... make it good and hot ... make it glow! ... it's time to make an example of these ... these ... well, just go get them and bring them to me!"

In verse 15, King Nebuchadnezzar offered them a second chance. "Look here, boys," he tells them, "all you have to do is go back out there and bow down to my golden statute when the music starts. Why are you making such a big deal out of this? Nobody else seems to be having any trouble following my orders. Just bow down and I'll forget the whole thing. What'd ya say, huh?"

Nebuchadnezzar doesn't make this offer because he respects the boys or has compassion on them. It's a purely political move. If Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah back out ... if they go out before everyone and bow down to the golden statute in public ... it would make a powerful statement about the power and authority of Nebuchadnezzar's new god over the God of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and it would make a powerful statement about Nebuchadnezzar's power and authority over his subjects. It would be better for him to publicly break their wills than to have them be celebrated as martyrs ... although, throwing them into a super-heated furnace alive would make a pretty clear and powerful statement about what happens to anyone who disobeys or opposes him.

For Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah there was nothing to discuss. They didn't need any time to think the matter over. "King Nebuchadnezzar," they reply, "we don't need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God that we serve may deliver us from the fire and from your hand ... and He may not ... that's up to Jehovah. Either way, we'd rather die in a blaze of glory than live in shame because we betrayed our God" (Daniel 3:16-18; paraphrasing mine).

Obedying Nebuchadnezzar meant disobeying God. Obeying God meant that they would be disobeying Nebuchadnezzar. For them, the choice was clear and they were ready to face the consequences of their decision no matter how hot Nebuchadnezzar made things for them.

I want you to understand this. When they told King Nebuchadnezzar that they would rather defy him than disobey Jehovah, their strength didn't come from some misguided hope that God would somehow pluck them from the flames. They said it knowing that they were absolutely going to be thrown into an incredibly hot furnace. Maybe God could change Nebuchadnezzar's mind at the last minute and give them some royal pardon or reprieve ... other than that, however, their fates were pretty well sealed ... I mean, sealed. They were pretty certain about what lay ahead but more importantly they knew who was right beside them and that gave them all the strength they needed.

Verse 22 says that Nebuchadnezzar was angry, so "hot," that he ordered that the furnace be made seven times hotter than usual. Yikes! The furnace was so hot that the heat killed the soldiers who lifted up Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to throw them into the fire. When Nebuchadnezzar looked in the furnace to admire his handiwork ... well ... the only way to explain it was the power of God. What he saw were three men walking about in the flames unscathed ... but then he saw something even stranger than that. "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" he asked. His servants answered him: "Certainly, your majesty." "Well, come over here and take a look. I see four men walking around in the fire, unburned and unharmed" (Daniel 3:24-25; paraphrasing mine).

Nebuchadnezzar described the fourth man as the "son of the gods" ... "gods" ... plural ... but we know who he saw, don't we? He didn't see the son of the gods but Jesus ... "THE" Son ... singular ... of the Living God ... singular.

Do you remember what God said to the Prophet Isaiah about experiences like this? In Isaiah 43:2, He told Isaiah that when the prophet passed through the waters, He ... meaning God ... would be with him; and when the prophet passed through the rivers, they would not sweep over him and drown him because He ... God ... would be with him; and when the prophet walked through fire, he would not be burned ... why? Because God would be with him.

Have you ever passed through the waters and felt like God was holding you up so that you would not drown? Have you ever walked through rivers of trouble and they didn't sweep over you because God had a hold of your hand and wouldn't let you get swept away? Have you ever been in the midst of the fires of hell and looked around and felt God's Presence in the flames with you? Maybe it was when you were sick in the hospital. Maybe it was in the middle of a divorce. Maybe it was when your family was being torn apart by a crisis. Maybe it was during something unexpected, like losing your job or your home. God is always present but we become ... well ... more sensitive ... more aware of God's Presence when we are in the midst of the flood or the fire, don't we?

The Bible says that not a single hair on the heads of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were burned ... they weren't even singed or smelled like smoke.

Now ... you've got to admit ... that's a God thing, am I right? Who else but God ... Jehovah ... could pull off something like that? In fact, God loves to do stuff like that ... impossible, unbelievable things ... things so impossible, so incredible, so amazing that there could only be one possible explanation for it!

Friends ... it takes courage to be a Hananiah, Mishael, or an Azariah. It takes the ability to say, "I don't care what my friends are going to think or say about me. I don't care what my friends or the world are doing ... I am a Christian! I'm gonna stand up for what I believe and let the chips fall where they may. I am going to be God's person in the midst of this world ... no matter what it may cost me."