

THE FIERY FURNACE

Daniel 3

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction

If you want to buy pure gold, you want it tested to be sure that it is not mixed with some other metal that would reduce its value. God wants pure believers that are not mixed with the teachings of this world. God tests believers for holiness. He wants them to be like His Son; He wants them to be holy as He is holy (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:15, 16). God expects us to live godly lives in this world (Titus 2:12), because the world is examining our character to see if what we say is what we genuinely believe.

Aim of the Lesson

Teach that consistent obedience to God's Word with no thought of the consequences is the way to live a godly life and have a meaningful witness to the unsaved.

"Wherein we greatly rejoice ... that the trial of your faith being more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:6, 7).

THE FURY OF THE FIERY FURNACE

Outline of the Lesson (Use the Study Notes to add to this lesson plan as the Spirit leads you.)

I. Dedication of the Golden Image (3:1-7)

After Nebuchadnezzar heard Daniel's interpretation that he was the head of gold on the image in the dream that God had given him, he made a golden image for his leaders to worship (3:1). The image represented him, his kingdom and everything Babylonian. In like manner Satan places before all people, including Christians, objects, people and traditions to worship, which ultimately represent him, his kingdom and everything ungodly (1 Pet 5:8). Satan also concentrates on the leaders to submit to him (cf. 3:2, 3), for he knows that if those in leadership bow to him and his demands, those who are following them will also bow. Nebuchadnezzar made his golden image attractive and majestic by music (3:5), just as Satan continues to do today. Nebuchadnezzar also threatened those who refused to bow to his image with death in the fiery furnace. So Satan still uses threats for non-conformity. Unfortunately, the majority of the people bow to the ungodly "golden images" in the world.

We must not bow to ungodly pressures at work or at school, or to the pressures of our peers that would lead us away from complete obedience to God's Word. Satan wants to deceive you into believing that the pleasures of this world are more satisfying than the promises of God for living a holy life. We must never forget that the most blessed and peaceful life is given to those who bow only to God and obey only His words. Conformity to the world may seem more attractive and much easier to follow, but a true Christian will never be happy outside of a life of obedience to God. A Christian who strives to obey God will never be disappointed!

II. Determination of the Hebrew Youths (3:8-18)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had been led by the godly influence of Daniel to keep themselves pure before God regarding the king's food (Dan 1). Daniel also led them to pray to God in faith to receive the king's dream and its interpretation. Now Daniel was absent and they faced a difficult test of their faithfulness to God without him. They faced the threat of death in the fiery furnace, if they did not bow to the golden image. Yet when everyone else bowed to the golden image, these three young men refused to bow before the idol and sin against God. It was not easy to take such a stand. They were falsely accused by their colleagues that they did not respect the king (3:8, 12). However, they did respect the king, but not his idols. This accusation was made by men who owed their lives to Daniel and them (2:16-24), but they were jealous and wanted to get rid of these non-conformists who were given special privileges by the king (2:48, 49). The Hebrew men were

publicly hauled before an angry king (3:13). They were interrogated concerning their non-conformity (3:14), threatened for their non-compliance (3:15) and mocked for their ignorance if they thought that their God was greater than he, the great king of Babylon. Believers today are sometimes threatened with the loss of a job, the ridicule of fellow workers, the confiscation or destruction of personal property and even physical harm, imprisonment and death, if they do not conform to the demands of the unsaved people in the world.

But these three determined young men were unmoved by half-truths and betrayal, by threats and mocking. They simply admitted the fact of their non-conformity (3:16), placed their destinies in God's hands (3:17) and testified before all that obedience to God's Word was far more important to them than any ill consequences (3:18). What God commanded, they did. It did not matter what those around them did (3:7); it did not matter what others said (3:12); it did not matter how angry, vindictive or disbelieving others were (3:14, 15); nor did it matter whether God's willingness to "bail them out" of this trouble would be manifest. All that was important to them was their obedience to God.

Is our obedience to God dependent on the actions and reactions of those around us, or are we willing to obey God no matter what the consequences might be? We must obey God even when it is unlikely that we will be delivered from hardship and difficult trials. Are we willing to obey Him even if He might choose to let us suffer and possibly die for our obedience? This is the true test of our spiritual character!

III. Deliverance from the Fiery Furnace (3:19-27)

Nebuchadnezzar was not impressed by the willingness of these three men to die for their convictions, when they defied his ungodly command. He was furious and commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than it had previously been heated and summoned his strongest men to bind them and cast them into the fiery furnace. But God was still in control, even when the situation looked like it was out of control. Nebuchadnezzar's actions made God's salvation of the three faithful men all the more glorious. God showed the king and his servants that He could overrule his commands and judge the men that dared to hurt His servants (3:22). God allowed the fiery furnace to test the faith of His servants and to magnify His greatness and power to this absolute monarch (3:26, 27; cf. Ps 23:5). God used His servants to diminish the worship of the king and to exalt the worship Him.

We must be sure that we have surrendered our bodies to the will of God when the fiery trials of this world encompass us. We must let God make the choices on how He wants to use us. Then we will be satisfied with the end result. Our daily walk with God needs to be such that when the temptations of the world suddenly confront us, we are prepared to respond in faith and obedience to God. Only a consistent and obedient walk with Him will prepare us for the fiery trials of life and make us the testimony before others that pleases God.

IV. Decree of the Great Nebuchadnezzar (3:28-30)

Nebuchadnezzar recognized that these men worshipped the God that truly cared for them and protected them. He recognized that their God was greater than he was, even though he had just commanded all his officers to worship his image. He perceived in these young men a rare character, one that caused them to obey their God in spite of the consequences (3:28). Though Nebuchadnezzar was not converted by this encounter with the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, he did gain a new respect and fear of this powerful yet loving God (3:29) and he promoted these three Hebrew youths to prominent positions in his kingdom because they had displayed a godly character in the face of great danger.

Are our deeds and words such that the world can see in us a deeper, richer life than they have? When they see our dedication to God, do they see that something is missing in their lives? Do those near us respect our God by what they see Him do in our lives? They will judge our character when we are tested. Hopefully we will pass the test and be a good testimony to them for God. An honest unbeliever when confronted by the life, deeds, and words of a faithful believer will eventually have to admit that the believer's life has something far deeper and richer than his life.

BE OBEDIENT TO GOD AT ANY COST AND YOU WILL GLORIFY HIM BEFORE THE LOST.