

## **BUT IF NOT**

**Daniel 3:16-18** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, 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.

**Daniel 3:24-25** Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He 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.

**Acts 5:29** Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

- There is no guessing as to the message of this familiar Bible story, as Babylon has always been the archenemy of God's people throughout man's existence.
- At the time of Daniel's writing, the city of Babylon had reached the height of its glory in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, about 600 years before Christ. He made the city splendid with canals, temples, palaces, famous streets such as the Processional, fortifications such as the Ishtar Gate, and of course, the Hanging Gardens, which were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The empire of Babylon had been founded centuries before by Nimrod, the "mighty hunter" (mighty rebel, mighty in sin) according to Genesis 10:8-10.
- The key to Babylonian worship has always been the exaltation of the individual to become his own God. The very word "Bab-el" means "the gate of God," and this is what those first Babylonian citizens of Genesis 11:1-9 were trying to build when they constructed their famous tower – AN EASIER MAN-MADE WAY TO GET TO GOD.
- God brought confusion to their languages in order to scatter them, but Babylon has been working feverishly to re-unify itself against God ever since! Both the political and religious aspects of Babylon will continue to war against the true people of God until the "world government" and the "world church" are defeated by God, as recorded in Revelation 17 & 18.
- Babylon is a powerful opponent, but Babylon will be defeated!

- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn't realize it, but they were to become players in an ancient cosmic war between God and Satan when they first heard the command of Nebuchadnezzar. Nowhere are we told that this image was an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. It is always referred to as "the image that [he] set up." Since worshipping the image is obviously connected to worshipping Babylonian gods (Daniel 3:12, 3:14, 3:18), this image was not a likeness of Nebuchadnezzar himself, but of the gods he served.
- THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A CHOICE BETWEEN "THE BABYLONIAN WAY" AND "THE FIRE"!
- Nebuchadnezzar was serious about his threat of destruction should the three Hebrew boys not submit. The "furnace" was the preferred method of tortuous death in Babylon; even Jewish kings had been captured and put to death in this manner. He would tolerate no exceptions to his decree!

**Jeremiah 29:22** And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying, The LORD make thee like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire;

- But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego wouldn't bow because joining the crowd around the image would have violated the first two of the ten commandments given by their God.

**Exodus 20:2-6** I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

**Deuteronomy 6:4** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:

- Jesus called it the first (preeminent, chief, principle) commandment!

**Mark 12:29** And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

- Nebuchadnezzar had taken measures to make the worship of the image palatable to all of his subjects. The ceremony was attended by beautiful music that drowned out any "reservations" the captives from other nations might have – EXCEPT FOR THE THREE HEBREW BOYS! They weren't the only Jewish captives in the crowd, but even though others bowed all around them, they stood tall – and alone! "Everybody else is doing it!" But that didn't matter to servants of God!

- What the Babylonian mind doesn't understand is that God's commands refuse even to BEND – not even when it is expedient! TRUTH CANNOT BE CHANGED EVEN SLIGHTLY, OR IT BECOMES ERROR! The three Hebrew boys heard a nobler music than Babylon's! (They marched to the beat of a different drummer)

- God had commanded their forefathers, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil!" (Exodus 23:2). Furthermore, the boys remembered Israel's recent history, under the reigns of Asa, Jehosphat and Hezekiah, when God had delivered their small nation from a much larger multitude:

**2 Chronicles 14:11** And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude.

**2 Chronicles 20:15** And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.

**2 Chronicles 32:7** Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him:

- It was a multitude that rebuked the blind men crying out to Jesus:

**Matthew 20:31** And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.

- It was a multitude that chose Barabbas, the Zealot, over Jesus:

**Matthew 27:20** But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

- Multitudes are often wrong! There is only one multitude I am interested in being part of!

**Revelation 7:9-10** After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

**Revelation 19:6-9** And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

- But when you don't bow, YOU STAND OUT! Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could have said, "We will just conform outwardly. We will bow with our bodies, but continue to serve God in our hearts. After all, it's the heart that matters." But they knew that attitude would not please God!
- The weapon of the world is no longer CRUELTY, but CONTEMPT; no longer TORTURE, but RIDICULE. It was not Nebuchadnezzar who noticed them standing, but "certain Chaldeans" (Daniel 3:8). The people who opposed them were others who bowed!
- It is when they refuse to compromise that the wrath of the king is incurred. He orders the furnace heated seven times hotter than normal. This is not a numerical expression, but a figure of speech portraying "utmost intensity" – as hot as possible – a raging inferno!
- Their immortal declaration is "We know God is able to deliver us, BUT IF NOT we still will not bow!" They did not know the miracle that God was going to perform; they did not know whether He would honor them before the heathen king. They were standing for TRUTH!
- Some people say, "I will serve God if He helps me," or "I will walk through the fire if God delivers me from the pain of the fire." That is never the feeling of the true people of God.
- Peter said, "I'll suffer if others have to suffer." (John 21:21-22)

- God's people walk through the fire whether it hurts them or not, because they know truth lives in the fire!

**Job 13:15** Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

**Isaiah 42:1-2** But now thus saith the LORD 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.

- We live in the last days, when Babylon has made the furnace "seven times hotter!" The devil has launched an all-out attack of sin against the world in an effort to destroy mankind!
  - The Canadian divorce rate has increased more than five times since the late 1960's.
  - Single parent families in Canada have increased over 35% since 1981. 81% of teen mothers are single.
  - By age 19, 96% of Canadian males and 68% of females have engaged in sexual intercourse.
  - Nearly half of the Canadian teens who become pregnant end that pregnancy in abortion. Our current abortion rate wipes out the equivalent of more than 2500 school classrooms every year. We abort one of every five children conceived in our country!
  - Abortion was supposed to eliminate child abuse ("every child a wanted child"). Instead, the number of abortions has risen nearly 700% since 1971, bringing with it an increase of child abuse cases – a staggering rise of over 1700%!
  - Every year, Canadian abortionists kill enough babies to populate the city of Saint John, and Canadians abuse enough children to populate the city of Fredericton.
  - Violent youth crime increased by nearly 120% since 1986.
  - The suicide rate for youth ages 15-19 has increased by over 600% since 1955 – they literally have no reason to live!
- I cannot guarantee to you that your life, your body, your health, your mind, your family, your home, your marriage, your children, your possessions, your finances, your friends, or your comfort will not be viciously attacked by the enemy. In fact, the truth is that I can just about guarantee the opposite!
- But it was when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to enter the fire – without any assurance of deliverance from their trial – that the miracle happened!

- The men who threw them into the furnace were slain – but the fire didn't touch them! They "fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace," but Nebuchadnezzar was amazed to see them rise up "loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt." In Heaven, God said, "Those are brave boys; I think I'll go down and stand by their side." On earth, Nebuchadnezzar said, "I see four men ... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."
- When Nebuchadnezzar called them, they came out of the fire by themselves – without their bonds! The only thing they lost when they stood up for God was their bonds! There is freedom in the furnace when God is there with you! They were LOOSED in the flames!
- When they came out of the fire, everyone "saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them" (Daniel 3:27) – the fire couldn't touch them!
- God did not save them FROM the fire – He saved them IN the fire!
- This resulted in a testimony to all of Babylon, a chance to hear about the only God "that can deliver after this sort." (Daniel 3:29)
- Why is the fire so much hotter today? Because Satan knows that his time is short! He is a powerful opponent, but he labors under one crippling fact – he faces a dreaded sentence of eternal imprisonment without possibility of parole! He works under this terrifying reality every moment of his existence, and he knows this is his last chance! That's why every time you pray, obey God, etc. his wrath is stirred up!
- Jesus ties Satan's fall not only to Calvary's victory, but to the exploits done by His disciples!

**John 12:31-32** Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

**Luke 10:17-19** And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

**Revelation 12:10-11** And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.