

Lesson 108

God Defends His Glory

God is sovereign over earthly rulers.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Even though God had used Babylon to judge Judah, he had not abandoned his people. God continued to demonstrate his power and sovereignty by protecting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and by humbling King Nebuchadnezzar.

Key Passages

Daniel 3:1, 3:22–23, 4:10–17, 4:28–37

Objectives

Students will be able to:

Describe the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Identify Nebuchadnezzar's sin and punishment.

Memory Verse

Isaiah 30:18 Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

When we left Daniel and his three friends in the last lesson, they had been torn from their homeland, had their names changed, and had been trained to serve in the court of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. After three years of training, these young Jews were promoted to places of prominence. God blessed them with wisdom and abilities far beyond any others in the court. Daniel served in the king's presence, and the other three were set in positions of authority in the government (Daniel 2:49).

Sometime after their promotion, King Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image and called all his governors and officials together to dedicate the idol (Daniel 3:1–3). When the musical instruments played, everyone was supposed to bow down and worship the image. If anyone refused, the penalty was death in a fiery furnace. What were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to do? To obey the order from the king would be to bow down to a false god—something they knew was clearly condemned by God in the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4–6).

As they demonstrated in their previous test of being expected to eat the king's food, they were committed to serving God above serving the king. Their failure to bow was brought to the attention of the king by other leaders who may have been jealous of the trio's quick rise to power. When Nebuchadnezzar heard of their disobedience, he was enraged and asked the three if the charge was true. The king offered them the chance to bow down to his image. The three men responded that if they were thrown into the furnace, God could protect them. But even if God did not save them, they would rather face the king's punishment than disobey God.

Enraged even more, Nebuchadnezzar commanded the furnace be superheated and the three men bound and tossed in. Then, the king looked and saw four men walking unbound in the middle of the flames, and one had the appearance as a son of the gods.

Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and knew that something supernatural was happening. As the three men emerged from the furnace, not only were they not burned, but also they did not even have the smell of smoke on their clothing (Daniel 3:23–27).

Nebuchadnezzar recognized that God's angel had protected them. Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree to put to death anyone who spoke anything against God, and he promoted the three men even more. Nebuchadnezzar recognized that there was a God who could thwart his kingly

commands. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had dramatically demonstrated their trust in God. God showed himself mighty to save them from the flames, and he received the glory for their protection.

Nebuchadnezzar's recognition of God's power was short-lived. The very next chapter shows us an arrogant Nebuchadnezzar being humiliated by the sovereign God. He had a dream of a strong tree that reached to the heavens and gave fruit and shelter to all in its shadow. Then an angel ordered the tree to be chopped down, its boughs stripped and fruit scattered, but the stump would remain. He would be given the mind of a beast for seven periods of time, likely years, until he recognized the power of the Lord Most High (Daniel 4:10–17).

Daniel interpreted the dream for him. Nebuchadnezzar was the tree. He would be reduced to a beast of the field, driven away from man, and made to eat grass like the ox. Even after this grave warning, Nebuchadnezzar did not repent. One day as he stood on his roof admiring his city and boasting of his might and majesty, an angel spoke against him and he was driven from men, as the dream had foretold. He ate grass like a beast and slept in the dew; his hair and nails grew long like an eagle's feathers and claws. After the appointed length of time (seven years), he looked to heaven, praising God and recognizing his sovereignty. Then, as promised, his kingdom was restored to the newly humbled

king (Daniel 4:29–36). Just as God had demonstrated his omnipotence over the fiery furnace, he also displayed his sovereignty to all through the humiliation and restoration of Nebuchadnezzar.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Throughout the Old Testament, God appeared to man. The angel that protected the three in the furnace may have been an appearance of God the Son—Jesus Christ before he came as a babe. Though the text is not perfectly clear on this point, some translations render the phrase in Daniel 3:25 as “the Son of God” and the phrase in verse 28 as “His Angel” to make that connection. Christophanies, the appearance of the Son in the Old Testament, are also found in Joshua 5:13–15 and Judges 6:11–24, as well as other places. Likewise, the protector of Daniel in the midst of the lions may have been Jesus himself.

The Apostle Paul told his young disciple Timothy that “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are living examples of that verse. God’s people have always been persecuted for their faith in God and for obeying his commands. We see the apostles in the book of Acts responding in a way similar to the three young Hebrews. When commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus, they refused because God’s authority and commands trump

the commands of men: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:27–32). This is the same refrain, in different words, that Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah proclaimed to King Nebuchadnezzar.

In 1 Peter 3:13–17, Peter also wrote of persecution for the sake of Christ and the gospel. We are called to honor God by telling others of the hope we have but expecting that we will suffer for it. God may choose to protect us from the suffering, as he spared Daniel and the others, or he may allow us to experience imprisonment, beating, or death, as many Christians have suffered throughout the ages. Regardless, we are to take up our crosses and follow Jesus, being faithful to obey everything that he has commanded us. We are to trust his omnipotent care for us and make his name great among the nations. Pray that God would give you the strength to obey him and trust fully in his care for you.

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