

QUENCHED THE VIOLENCE OF FIRE

"Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

Hebrews 11:34

Introduction:

1. In light of this morning's study regarding the integrity and authority of the Bible, are we willing to stand aggressively for it against any ridicule, persecution, or opposition?
2. This chapter was not inspired merely for children's story time, as it has a lesson for all of us and should provoke the spiritual zeal of adults as well as children.
3. The small tests of our faith we experience are nothing in comparison with what these three men withstood.

I. The CONTEXT OF THE FIRE (3:1-7).

- A. Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon was the greatest monarch the world has ever seen (3:1).
 1. He had destroyed Jerusalem and Judea and taken Israelites captive (Daniel 1:1-7).
 2. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were promoted in the province of Babylon (2:49).
- B. A ninety foot tall image with a height-width ratio of 10 could well be an obelisk.
- C. As King, Nebuchadnezzar could demand and expect all others to honor his image (3:2-7).
 1. When he invited all the officials of his empire, they all came obediently to Babylon.
 2. They were told to worship the image during the music under penalty of death.
 - a. Everyone should understand a cornet, flute, and harp. But what of the others?
 - b. **Sackbut.** A bass trumpet with a slide like that of a trombone for altering pitch.
 - c. **Psaltery.** An ancient stringed instrument played by plucking the strings with the soundboard behind and parallel with the strings.
 - d. **Dulcimer.** A stringed instrument played by striking the strings with hammers.
 - e. Music has been an important part of religious worship - both Jewish and pagan.
 3. Can you imagine our President, often despised and ridiculed, having the authority to require all government officials, including Bill Clinton, Dianne Feinstein, Hillary Clinton, and Ted Kennedy, to submit to a personal whim under penalty of death?

II. The CONSPIRACY OF THE FIRE (3:8-12).

- A. Certain Chaldeans, most likely jealous peers of these men, accused them to the King.
 1. Character like that of these men will bring the persecution of wicked men.
 2. Living righteously with God's blessing upon you will bring the persecution of men.
 - a. We should be encouraged to suffer reproach for the name of God and Christ.
 - b. We should remember our need for carefulness to avoid any appearance of evil.
- B. Consider prudently the great "care" that these men have for the law of Nebuchadnezzar.
- C. Their accusers (1) point out their nationality, (2) mention their lofty positions, (3) accuse them of disregarding the King, and (4) accuse them of not worshipping his gods.

III. The CONFRONTATION OF THE FIRE (3:9-18).

- A. Nebuchadnezzar's rage and fury show his (1) foolish spirit and (2) accustomed authority.
 1. He shows some discretion in questioning them as to whether the accusation was true.
 2. He shows some mercy in offering them a second chance to worship his golden image.
- B. However, he makes a statement that certainly qualifies for "famous last words."
 1. He either had no knowledge of the true God or foolishly rejected such knowledge.
 2. He had experience in defeating many enemies who put their trust in vain gods.
- C. The answer of these three men to this great monarch should bolster our faith.
 1. They were not careful to answer him - they were not anxious, worried, or fearful; nor did they need any further time to consider or reconsider his merciful offer.

2. They acknowledged God's ability to deliver them from his fiery furnace if He chose.
3. They specifically take recognition of his "hand" and put their confidence in God.
4. They faithfully said they would not worship the image regardless of what happened.
5. The faith of these men understood the secret and revealed will of God (Deut 29:29).
 - a. They did not know God's secret will regarding their deliverance and future.
 - b. They did know that regardless they should not worship his great, golden idol.
- D. Would we be as courageous under similar power, authority, and threats against us?
 1. It is a pity that sometimes Christians are ashamed of (a) prayer before eating in public, (b) their reasons for not doing certain things, (c) certain positions on morality, (d) where they attend church, and so forth.
 2. Many martyrs faithfully followed these three men in their faith toward God.

IV. The CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIRE (3:19-25).

- A. Nebuchadnezzar changed by virtue of their words and furiously gave them to the fire.
 1. The form of his visage was changed - his conciliatory spirit was totally gone.
 2. He ordered this fiery furnace to be heated seven times beyond normal combustion.
 3. He commanded the most mighty men in his army to bind and throw them in the fire.
 4. They were bound with all their clothing and cast into the midst of the furnace.
- B. Because the King's commandment had been to overheat the furnace, the most mighty men in his army were burned up by the great heat as they threw them on their way.
- C. The witnesses were able to see these three bound men fall down in the fiery furnace.
- D. Nebuchadnezzar is greatly surprised to see the three men and an angel in the furnace.
 1. He saw that the three were loose from the ropes/chains in which they were bound.
 2. He saw that the three were walking about in the midst of the fire in the furnace.
 3. He saw that they had no hurt by the way in which they were walking in the fire.
 4. He saw that there was a mysterious fourth man who had the appearance of an angel.

V. The CONVICTION OF THE FIRE (3:26-30).

- A. Nebuchadnezzar came to the mouth of the furnace before all witnesses and called them.
 1. He was not delegating this responsibility to anyone - he wanted to see for himself.
 2. He addressed them as "servants of the most high God." He acknowledged their God.
- B. The crowd of witnesses there was able to verify their condition as they came forth.
 1. The fire had not had its normal power of heat in damaging their bodies (Ex 3:2).
 2. Their hair was as before they were cast into the furnace (Matt 10:30; Luke 21:18).
 3. Their coats and clothing which they wore into the furnace were not damaged at all.
 4. They did not even have the smell of the fire or smoke upon themselves.
 5. Pagans have boasted of walking on coals, but they ought to try this sometime.
- C. Nebuchadnezzar did not see Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, he saw an angel (3:25 cp 3:28).
- D. Nebuchadnezzar responds to the lesson by blessing the true God and enforcing His honor.
 1. He blessed the great God Who sent an angel to deliver those who trusted in Him.
 2. He acknowledged that these three men had changed his word about his "hand."
 3. He identifies their faith as that willingness to yield their bodies for God's sake.
 4. He issues a decree enforcing honor throughout his empire on behalf of this God.
- E. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were then promoted (Jos 1:7-9; I Sa 2:30; I Kgs 2:1-4).

Conclusion:

1. Where was Daniel? Everyone asks this question, and it is one we can only answer partially, since the Bible does not tell us directly. However, there is indirect evidence that he did not bow in idolatry to the golden image.
 - a. We learn Daniel had been promoted by Nebuchadnezzar as a great man to sit in the king's gate, and so we may presume he was not obligated to attend this event, for his office is not listed (2:48-49 cp 3:2-3).
 - b. Also, since the king knew Daniel worshipped the true God, there is further reason to believe he would not have compelled his most trusted advisor to violate his valuable faith (2:47).
2. Let us never be ashamed of our God, His Son Jesus Christ, or His Word. We may have the opportunity to suffer for His name, and it is historical events like this in the lives of other saints that encourage us.