

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego In the Fiery Furnace

Our study is about three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were thrown into a fiery furnace. Our last study occurred about ten to twelve years after the events in chapter 1. In Daniel 1:1 we were told that King Nebuchadnezzar defeated in battle and captured the city of Jerusalem. That was in 605 B.C. We believe the events in chapter 3 took place about 595 B.C. Archaeological records tell us that a rebellion occurred in the Babylonian Empire in about 595 B.C., ten years after King Nebuchadnezzar defeated the city of Jerusalem and took some Jewish captives to the city of Babylon. We also believe, based upon archaeological evidence, that the statue discussed in chapter 3 was completed just after, or perhaps at the time of this rebellion.

We believe that the king's summons of all the administrators in the empire to the Plain of Dura where the statue was located was a call for them to demonstrate their loyalty. If you have just had a rebellion in the empire, why not call all of your important leaders to come and demonstrate their loyalty to you?

The statue that was completed is described in verse one. It was ninety feet tall. We understand from history that

there was a statue that was even taller than the one King Nebuchadnezzar built. It was the Colossus of Rhodes. King Nebuchadnezzar's statue stood at ninety feet. The Colossus of Rhodes stood at ninety-eight feet. The Colossus of Rhodes was plated with brass plates. Some have been doubtful that King Nebuchadnezzar would have built a statue of ninety feet that was solid gold.

It does not need to be solid gold in order to be referred to as a golden statue. Very likely it was plated in gold to keep the cost down. It would also fit into a timeline of roughly ten to twelve years to build.

In the opening part of chapter three, we learned that the invited guests were referred to as satraps, prefects, governors, and some lower-level politicians as well. Interestingly, we understand there are some bas reliefs or engravings that archaeologists have found that provide a picture of how the satraps might have appeared. Now the summons to these individuals was sent. They came to the Plain of Dura to see the statue. We are also told in chapter 3 that an orchestra was present. When the

herald made the announcement and the music began to play, everyone was to bow down before the great statue. Just imag-



ine, the music began to play and everybody fell with their faces to the ground. But there were three men who did not obey. They remained standing up. Everybody could see who did not bow down low to the earth. It would have been very obvious to all that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not fall to the ground.

Verse 8 of Daniel 3 states:

**For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans . . .
Daniel 3:8 (NASB)**

The Chaldeans were astrologers. I have been asked before, “Is not the term Chaldeans also used to refer to all of the people in the Babylonian Empire and later on to residents of the Medo-Persian Empire?” Yes, that term is used on occasions in that manner. But in the book of Daniel it is used to refer just to astrologers. These astrologers came forward and brought charges against the Jews: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three men did not bow down, and some jealous leaders did not like that they were in key positions of the government. Daniel 2:49 says,

And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon. Daniel 2:49 (NASB)

Here we learn that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in key governmental positions. You can imagine what happened when some Jews who were recent captives were put in key positions. The Chaldeans had grown up in Babylon and were long-time residents. Suddenly these Jews were put in positions above them. Jealousy and envy would have taken hold.

You can be assured that the Chaldeans were looking to see whether or not these three men bowed down, because they knew that they were Jews and worshiped God. The Jews were not polytheists as the Babylonians were. Jews worshiped only Jehovah God. When the Chaldeans saw that the three Jews did not bow down, they brought charges against them. The Aramaic has the idea to “chew them in pieces.” The meaning is vicious. They were really upset.

The charge is simple: lack of loyalty. You can see that in verse 12. Verse 12 conveys the Chaldeans charged that these men were unfaithful or unloyal to the king. But who is not named here? Verse 12 names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as the Jews against whom the charges were brought. Daniel is not listed. Some people have said, “What happened to Daniel? Did he bow down?” I do not believe he bowed down. Remember, he was the man in chapter one who refused to eat the king’s meat and drink the king’s wine because that would not please God. I believe that the issue is described in Daniel 2:49 which states Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were put over the administration of the province of Babylon. Then it adds, “while Daniel was in the king’s court.” Where was Daniel? He was not in the same position as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He was in the king’s court in the palace in a higher position. The logical explanation is that he was at the king’s court attending to the administration of the empire while the king and everybody else was at the Plain of Dura getting ready to worship the statue. I believe Daniel was at the king’s court where he would not have been subject to this test. For the Jews, this was a test or a trial. Daniel was spared the trial that his friends had to go through.

Over the years I have noticed by experience and through Scripture that God does not give us the same tests. God seems to tailor-make tests and trials to fit our particular personality and spiritual walk with Him. What will be a test for me is not necessarily a test for you. I have noticed in my relationship with my wife that there are situations that come along that might bother her, but for me is not a problem. Then there will be situations that really irritate me, and here she is with the same biblical perspective and she is giving me the objective, logical response as to how I should be responding. What is a test for someone else may not be a test or problem for you. I believe God chose to not put Daniel through this test; but He put Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego through a fiery furnace trial or test for His own purposes.

I want to show you why I believe that God custom designs tests for each of us. In 1 Corinthians 10:13 we read,

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not

allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NASB)

This verse says that from a big perspective, God brings tests into your life. He will not let the test be so difficult that you are going to fail, but He instead provides a way of escape. The word “temptation” here is an important Greek word that has the idea of “test” or “trial” or “tempt.” I believe that every challenging situation you are in is really a test or a trial. It can end up being a temptation. It can be a test of having to speak with someone. It could be a test of trying to park your car. There are no parking spaces nearby, and you have pain when you have to walk. You know you are not able to walk easily and you are having to park a long way away. How you respond to the situation is a test. It starts with an inner attitude and ends up in what you say and in how you respond.

Many of us have been in that situation, and some of us have failed that test. God allows tests in our lives so that we can see how we respond and if we will fail. If we fail, He allows another similar kind of test to retest us in the same area. It does not matter how far along you are in your walk. Some of us have not yet applied Scripture to our lives as we should, and some of us have really jagged edges. What God does is to bring out His file (the test) and starts filing on our jagged edges. He allows a difficult situation in our life. Then how we respond reveals our attitude. God keeps doing this and some of us are asking, “Why do I just keep going through all of these difficult situations?!” That is because we have not yet learned to respond as God wants us to and so we are still failing the test. When we finally learn the lesson, He moves on to another test, all the time refining us to be more like Jesus.

There were some sins in my twenties with which I really struggled. I prayed and God gave me victory by teaching me to be filled with and to walk in the Spirit. What I have found as years go by is that there are other sins with which I struggle. Even though I am having victory over one sin, I find other sins that I thought were just “little sins,” now appear as big sins. So I am convicted and want victory over them.

This is a great illustration: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-

nego were in this trial - but not Daniel. Daniel will get his test in the lions’ den. Who were not in the lions’ den? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God makes a test that He knows will help you and might not impact me at all. So He has to test me differently to get to my rough edges.

God said, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man. God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted.” When it says “not allow,” that is another indication that He has tailor-made the test. God is careful that the test that comes along is not more than you can handle. He said He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able. God knows what you can tolerate, what you can stand, and He tailor makes the test for you. If you pass it, then He might bring along another one, as He keeps trying to file down those rough edges. Now notice the rest of the verse, “but will provide a way of escape so that you will be able to endure it.” We do not want to be able to endure it—we want it to go away! The Greek word is *hypophero*. It means “to continue under a difficult situation, a situation where you are suffering and having difficulty. Do you know what God does? A trial comes along in your life, that He has tailor-made to you. The way of escape is not out of the trial. The way of escape is to check your attitude, to check your words, and to go through the trial content. Many of us are not content to go through the trial. We want it to go away. But that is not what the verse says. It says, “will be able to endure it.” The idea is that God brings trials in your life designed to “scrape you” with His file to get that rough edge down. He wants you to endure it, not look to get out from underneath it. You say, “I do not like that.” But the question is, are you more interested in being spiritually mature or content to be immature? We often do not understand how immature we are.

Faith Believes God Can Rescue. God put Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego through a trial. The accusation is brought in verse 12. In verse 13 the king gave them a second opportunity. Now verses 16-18 say,

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of

blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Daniel 3:16-18 (NASB)

We love the boldness of these men. They said, “We are trusting God that He is going to deliver us. If He does not, we are willing to die anyway.” That was their response.

Verse 19 gives us the king’s response,

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. Daniel 3:19 (NASB)

What is the king’s response? The king was “filled with wrath.” The actual Aramaic has the idea that he was filled with anger. He was filled up with anger. This king was not just a little bit angry, he was very angry. He was filled up with wrath. Have you ever been out of control when you were angry? That was King Nebuchadnezzar. It showed on his face. In fact, most of our emotions show on our faces. We are told the king’s face was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. We can imagine that he was staring at them. The king thought he was in control. His soldiers were there, but he was angry, even furious! He answered by giving orders.

Now the Aramaic is interesting at this point when it says “giving orders.” The verb tense is a participle. It has the idea that he is repeating his orders. He is not getting his desired response, so he repeated his order. The idea is that he was impatient. He wanted the furnace to be quickly heated up. Verse 20:

He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. Daniel 3:20 (NASB)

He picked some of his key valiant warriors and he ordered

them to tie up the three men “in order to cast them in.” Maybe he was concerned that they might resist and fight the soldiers. We are not really sure why he wanted this to be done. But we are told,

Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. Daniel 3:21 (NASB)

When it says “blazing fire,” the Aramaic has the idea of burning fire. Most of us would assume that a fire is burning! But it says “burning fire.” The idea is that this is not just hot, this is a blazing, very hot fire.

We are told that they wore trousers, coats and caps. Then we are told “other clothes” in addition. If you were to look at some bas reliefs or engravings that archaeologists have found, the pictures of how individuals dressed at that time is that they wore caps, coats, and trousers. Archaeology and history supports what Scripture states here. Verse 22 says,

For this reason, because the king’s command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot . . . Daniel 3:22a (NASB)

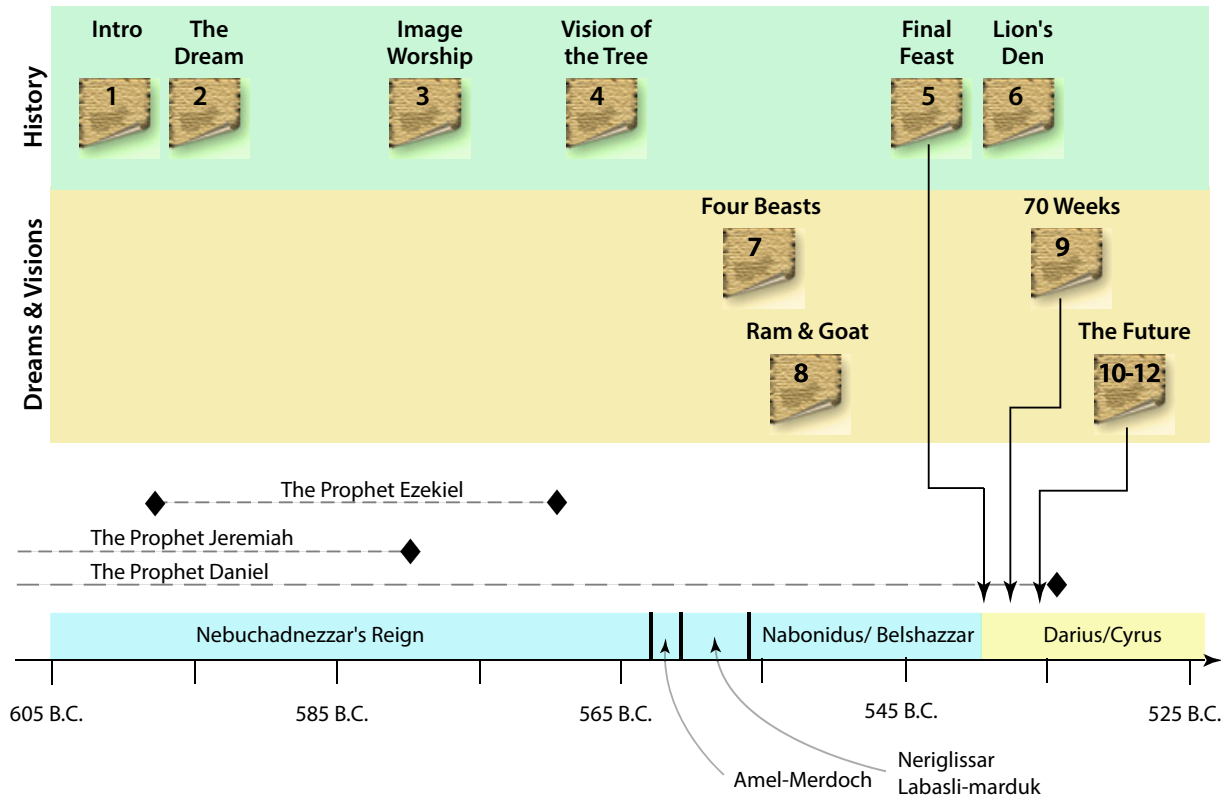
When it said “seven times,” there are some who say it was just a figure of speech. I do not think so. I believe he ordered seven times the normal amount of wood and coal into the furnace to make it as hot as he could. The king wanted these three men to really suffer.

. . . the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Daniel 3:22b (NASB)

Faith Submits To God’s Decision. The king was not expecting his valiant soldiers to be killed carrying out his orders. We are told in verse 23:

But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire

Outline of Daniel



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still tied up. Daniel 3:23 (NASB)

The soldiers are killed and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fall into the fire, all tied up. Archaeology indicates that it was common at this time in both the Babylonian and Assyrian empires to punish people by putting them in a burning fire to roast them, as Jeremiah 29:22 says happened to Zedekiah and Ahab. Babylonians at times placed people into dens of lions, or other wild beasts. Archaeological evidence supports the fact that this was a common means of execution.¹

Bas reliefs of the era demonstrate that the Babylonians used smelting furnaces to make brick or to smelt metals to refine gold, silver, and bronze. We have discovered that these furnaces were usually in the side of a hill, and were shaped like

an upside down glass milk bottle. They would take the ore and dump it in at the top. At the bottom of the furnace where it was narrower was an opening where they put in the wood and charcoal to heat the furnace. Then they could make the brick, or smelt the ore as it went in. King Nebuchadnezzar asked for seven times the amount of wood and charcoal to be put in at the bottom of the furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were dropped into this furnace at its top. As the Bible records, they fell into the furnace. Verse 24:

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded. Daniel 3:24a (NASB)

The word for “astounded” has the idea that he was alarmed.

... and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials . . . Daniel 3:24b (NASB)

¹ H. T. Talbot. Transaction of the Society of Archaeology. 1874. pp. 360-367. Journal of Biblical Literature. Ed. 69. pp. 375-376

That tells you that there were other people around.

“Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?” Daniel 3:24c (NASB)

He said three important things in this little statement that I want you to see. He said “three men,” “bound,” and “midst of the fire.”

They replied to the king, “Certainly, O king.” Daniel 3:24d (NASB)

The message is, “Yes, O King. That is what happened.” Verse 25:

He said, “Look! I see four men . . . Daniel 3:25a (NASB)

Not three men.

. . . loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire . . . Daniel 3:25b (NASB)

If they are walking about, what does that mean? They are not bound! But they are walking around in the fire! Then he said,

. . . without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!” Daniel 3:25c (NASB)

The king is a polytheist. He was trying to do his best to describe what he saw, how this fourth person appeared. We immediately want to think of Jesus Christ or God. The king was a polytheist and believed that Marduk was the chief god. He may at this point have believed that Daniel’s God was the chief of all the gods, but he was not a follower of Jehovah God. So he did his best to describe what he saw. Verse 26:

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!” Then

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. Daniel 3:26 (NASB)

God rescued them. We have no idea how much time elapsed from when they were dropped into the furnace until the time that the king noticed that they were there. Apparently their ropes were untied, but the men were not burned, not their hair, not their trousers. The ropes were gone, but nothing had harmed them. Psalm 139:8 is a psalm of David. David says,

**If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold,
You are there. Psalm 139:8 (NASB)**

This verse states that it does not matter where you go, God is there. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus made the following promise to His disciples. He said,

**Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28:20 (NASB)**

Do you realize what that means? It means that it does not matter where you are. Jesus is with you. God is with you. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in the furnace. I am sure they did not expect a Christophany. That would be an Old Testament physical appearance of Christ, or we might say Theophany, but Christophany is more accurate. I believe that this fourth person was an Old Testament appearance of Christ. But you do not need a Christophany in your life! Jesus is with you always no matter where you are, no matter what trial you go through. Verse 27:

The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king’s high officials gathered around . . . Daniel 3:27a (NASB)

This verse reveals for the first time that spectators present. The king had invited people for this execution to see these three men burned up. Instead, all these men became witnesses of a miracle!

The governors and the king’s high officials gathered

around.

... and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men . . . Daniel 3:27b (NASB)

Now notice what happens. When it says “no effect,” the Aramaic means “no power.” There was no power from the fire on the bodies of these men.

... nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them. Daniel 3:27c (NASB)

Now, we all know that if you have ever been in a place where there was a fire and you walk in and then out and you have rubbed against some-

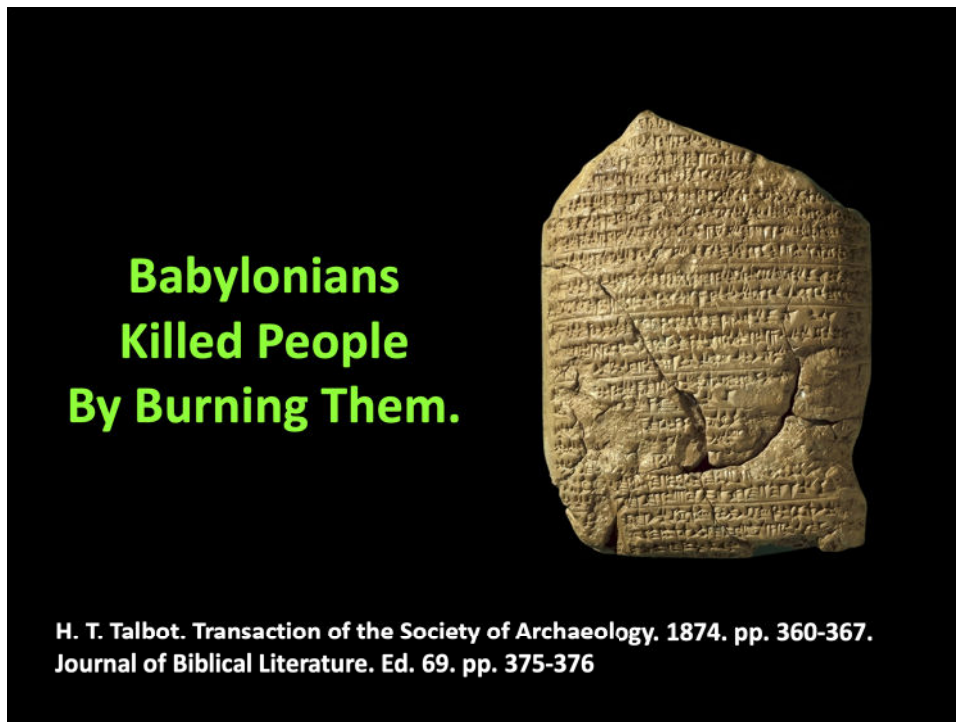
thing there, you smell like smoke. You do not even have to get it on you; you can still have the odor of smoke on you. These men did not even smell like smoke.

Faith Is Willing To Die For God. Verse 28:

Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.” Daniel 3:28 (NASB)

He knew that they had violated his command. He understood exactly what they did. I thought to myself that this was a great example of faith; faith that God could, not would, deliver them. Too often when we get into a trial, we want God to deliver us out of our trial. These men said that God could deliver them out of the trial, but they did not know if He would deliver them out of their trial. They said, “If God will not deliver us out of our trial, we are ready to die.” May I ask you an important question? Are you willing to suffer if your trial does not go your way? I find it wonderful that these men did not say, “Oh, this is not fair! This should not have

happened to me! This is not fair, God! O King, this is not fair, you should understand that we worship a different God than you do.” They did not do that. These men are bold; they said, “We are ready to die.” They did not say it is unfair. “This is not just!” They said, “We are



ready to die.” They were ready to endure their trial. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:13? They were ready to endure or to go through the trial knowing God would be with them.

Would it not be great if when we have a trial, we would say, “Thank you, Lord, for my trial. Help me to stand that file scraping across me.” Would it not be wonderful if we would all do that? Remember Job did nothing wrong but he lost everything. Would it not be really good if we just changed our attitude when we had a difficult situation and just said, “I am ready to go through this, God. Help me to learn what you want me to learn.” I will tell you what one of the benefits would be. I believe the trials of that kind would stop coming

your way because you would have learned the lesson God was teaching you. Then God could move on to the next lesson.

Faith Brings Glory To God. Verse 29 says,

Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.” Daniel 3:29 (NASB)

That is the same threat he kept giving again and again. This is the standard threat. Verse 30:

Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon. Daniel 3:30 (NASB)

What faithful men! I am absolutely thrilled with the faith and integrity of these men and the way they stood. These men were godly men of faith. Look at James 1:4. It says:

And let endurance have its perfect result . . . James 1:4 (NASB)

Most of us cannot take it anymore and want out! What does James say? “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter a difficult situation.” Actually, the word for “trial” here is the same word we saw for “temptation” in 1 Corinthians 10:3. Then he tells you why. Verse 3:

. . . knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. James 1:3 (NASB)

It says that your faith is being tested and the reason that we are to be joyful is not because we enjoy the pain, but because we know that the finished result is going to make us a better Christian, make us more like Christ. Verse 4:

And let endurance have its perfect result . . . James 1:4a (NASB)

That is the idea of letting that file just keep filing across your rough spots, just let it keep going ...

. . . so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:4b-5 (NASB)

Remember that God says He will provide a way of escape. The idea is that you need wisdom as to how to get through it—not escape, but how to cope with the feelings and emotions that you have so that you can respond biblically as a holy person, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did and be willing to go through the trial—even to die if you must. Most of us do not want to die. We tend to think the trial is not fair, that God should understand! But God does understand. He knows what we need, so He is going to allow you to go through the trial. The question is, do you understand?

But he must ask in faith without wavering, without any doubting. James 1:6 (NASB)

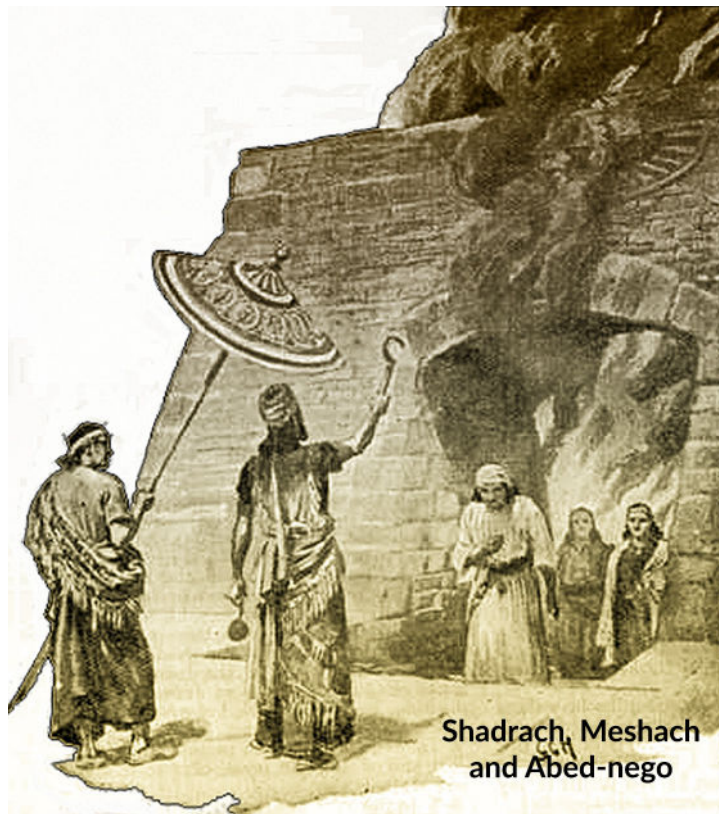
He must ask in faith, without any doubting. Some people say, “You just need faith, and if you have faith, God will bail you out of the situation.” That is not what that verse is saying. Even the king understood that they had faith. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are great examples of faith. They knew that God could take them out. They did not know if He would take them out. But they did not care if God would not take them out. They were going to be obedient. God was more important in their life than bowing down and worshiping an idol. When James says “as the man who has faith without doubting,” this does not mean that you are convinced that He is going to bail you out. Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They knew that He could. That is faith. They did not know if He would. If you say, “Oh God, you have to take me out of my difficult situation!” maybe God does not want to take you out because He is putting you through a trial. He wants to change you, He wants to shape you.

Some years ago I was counseling with a couple and the

wife said, “He has to accept me the way I am. I am not changing for him.” I looked at her and then said, “You may well be divorced in years to come. Your marriage is not going to last if you are unwilling to change.” God wants to change you. You need to be willing to be changed. The question is, “Are you willing to be changed?” You are not perfect yet. I am not perfect. We have not arrived yet, and God is at work in our lives.

Another thing we like about these men is they were bold for God. Their boldness potentially cost them their lives, but God came to their rescue.

I want to close with a statement given to us by Eusebius, an early church father. He wrote in his book about a man named Polycarp, a Christian martyr who died about 100 A.D. Polycarp’s life was taken because he remained faithful to Christ. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were rescued. Polycarp was a pastor, and you would think that if God would rescue anyone, it would be a pastor. We close with this.



And when he came near, the proconsul asked if he was Polycarp. After he confessed that he was, the proconsul tried to persuade him to deny Christ and said, “Have respect for your old age. Swear by the fortune of Caesar. Repent.” Then the proconsul urging him, “Swear, and I will set you at liberty. Reproach Christ.” Polycarp declared, “Eighty and six years I have served Him. He never did me any injury. How, then, can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” And when the proconsul again pressed him and said,

“Swear by the fortune of Caesar,” he answered, “Since you are vainly urging me to swear by the fortune of Caesar, and pretend not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness that I am a Christian.” The proconsul then said to him, “I have wild beasts at hand. To these I will cast you, except you repent.” But he answered, “Call them, then. It is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous.” But again the proconsul said to him, “Seeing that you despise the wild beasts, I will cause you to be consumed by fire if you do not repent.” But Polycarp said, “You

threaten me with fire, which burns only for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgement and of eternal punishment reserved for the ungodly. Why do you delay? Bring forth what you will.”²

I love Polycarp. History tells us he died by being burned at a stake. Are you so bold? Let us pray.

² Eusebius. The Encyclical Epistle Of The Church At Smyrna, chapters 9-10.