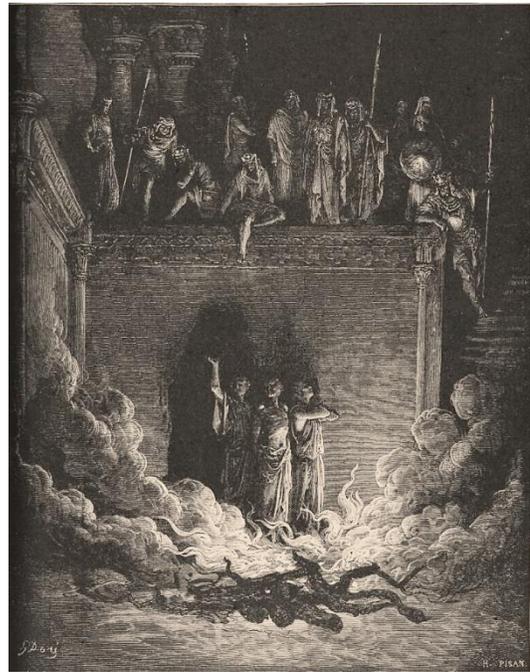


DEFIANCE, OR DEFINITION?
A Devotional Meditation from
Daniel 3:12-18; Job 13:15-16, 19:25-27;
1 Thessalonians 5:8-11; Revelation 12:10-11
Albert J. McCarn
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When it comes to memorable Bible stories, the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace is near the top of the list. What greater drama could there be than three Hebrew men defying the most powerful ruler on the planet, and daring him to do his worst to them? Who could not be moved by their courage? After all, they were willing to risk death in a furnace heated to the point of melting the hardest metals, just to maintain their independence before the great King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon!

Or is that perhaps just our contemporary American way of looking at the story?

Think about this for a moment. The Bible explains that these three young men were gifted administrators who held high rank in the Babylonian bureaucracy. They were also godly men, having faithfully stood with their colleague Daniel to remain pure in mind, body, and spirit according to their understanding of God's instructions. What we often miss, though, is that they were no ordinary young men. They had already been through much more than the average youth in any age or place. Before they reached the age of 20, they had seen their nation of Judah invaded and conquered three times: first by Egypt, and then twice more by Babylon. They had seen Josiah, their last righteous king, die in battle, and the foreign conquerors put their own puppets on the throne in Jerusalem. Then they themselves had been among the captives taken in the first exportation of Jews to Babylon, where they were made eunuchs and placed in service to their captors.



The Fiery Furnace, [Gustave Doré](#).

All of that would have been enough suffering for anyone, but there was more. For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, it was more than personal. As part of the Judean nobility, and perhaps even of the royal house, they had endured tremendous humiliation, and perhaps had seen their parents and close relatives executed. As eunuchs, they had lost all possibility of becoming husbands and fathers, but still that was not the end of it. As part of their humiliation and subjugation, their Babylonian overlords removed from them their identities. Thus the Hebrew boy named Hananiah, meaning "God has favored," became Shadrach, "Command of the god Aku." Mishael, "Who is what God is?" became

Meshach, “I Am of Little Account,” and Azariah, “Yahweh has Helped,” became Abednego, “Servant of the god Nebo.”*

With that as background, it is even more remarkable that these Hebrews chose to defy King Nebuchadnezzar by refusing to worship the idol he had just unveiled. Or was it really defiance of the king? Was it, perhaps, something else – something even more important than their obedience to civil authority? Let’s review the scene from Daniel 3, at the point where Nebuchadnezzar’s servants brought the accusation before the king:

“There are certain Jews whom you appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego—those men pay no heed to you, O king. They do not serve your gods, nor will they worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar ordered Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to be summoned. When these men were brought before the king, Nebuchadnezzar responded to them saying, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you don’t serve my gods or worship the golden image that I set up? Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and pipes and all kinds of music you must fall down and worship the image that I have made. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be thrown into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire! Then what god will be able to deliver you out of my hands?”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king saying, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to answer you concerning this matter. If it is so, our God whom we serve is able to save us from the furnace of blazing fire and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. Yet even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image that you set up.” (Daniel 3:12-18 TLV)

We know what happened next. The king ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, the Hebrews were thrown in, and the soldiers who committed them to the flames died from the heat. Then a miracle occurred: the Angel of the Lord appeared in the fire, preserving the Hebrews from harm. Nebuchadnezzar saw this, brought them out of the furnace, and glorified God Almighty.

So where is the defiance in the answer to the king? It is not there. Instead, all we see is testimony to the King of the Universe. Listen again:

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to answer you concerning this matter. If it is so, our God whom we serve is able to save us from the furnace of blazing fire and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. Yet even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image that you set up.”

No, it is not defiance of an earthly king, but respectful testimony to the King of Kings – the Higher Power whom these men served. No one and nothing could take that away

* Dr. Ralph F. Wilson, “Four Hebrew Youths in Babylon (Daniel 1),” *Jesus Walk* (http://www.jesuswalk.com/daniel/1_youths.htm); Pastor Harold Miller, Jr., “Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,” *A Word In Season*, February 18, 2015 (<https://haroldmillerjr.com/2015/02/18/hananiah-mishael-and-azariah/>), accessed January 15, 2021.

from them, even if they had lost their homes, their families, their manhood, and their names. Their identity in the Creator defined them to a far greater degree than anything else in their existence. Thus, they could testify their certainty that the Holy One could indeed save them from the fire if He so chose, but that even if He did not choose to do so they would not compromise their identity with Him by worshipping an idol.

This is what John wrote about in Revelation:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Anointed One, for the accuser of our brothers and sisters—the one who accuses them before our God day and night—has been thrown out. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives even in the face of death. (Revelation 12:10-11 TLV)

This is the certainty of Job, who testified

Even if He slays me, I will wait for Him; I will surely defend my ways before Him. This, too, will be my salvation for no godless can come before Him.

(Job 13:15-16 TLV)

How could Job be so secure? Because his identity also was in His Creator, which is why he could say:

“Yet I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end, He will stand on earth. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes, I and not a stranger.

(Job 19:25-27 TLV)

We serve an all-powerful, all-loving, redeeming God. That is our identity and the source of our hope. We cannot be certain whether we will live or die, but we can be certain that our faithfulness through all circumstances glorifies the Name of our Heavenly King, and in His glory all the world is redeemed. How, then, shall we approach difficulty? What are we to do when circumstances are hopeless? We rely on the promises of His heart, knowing that, whether we live or die, God is glorified, and great is our reward in heaven.