
Day 247 - September 4

The Exiled Nation (585-535 BCE) *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*

Readings: *Daniel 3:1-30*

Reflections:

- The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is a story that is mythical in its proportions: a statue of gold that is 100 feet tall, a furnace so hot that it kills the soldiers who get too close, and three men walking in and out of the very same flames. Now although this seems a bit fantastic to the modern reader, in fact some of these details fit well within some of these ancient empires. The statue was likely decorated with gold and was not solid gold. The brick baking furnace no doubt could have been stoked to such intense heat that it killed the soldiers. The only real fantastic aspect of the story was simply the actual miracle. Three men are protected by God in the blazing fire.
- One of the striking elements of this story is the amount of detail. The musical instruments, the various political leaders, and even the clothing is all carefully noted. It reads very much like an eyewitness account. This makes sense in terms of the book of Daniel as a collection of accounts and visions from the time of Daniel.
- The statement of the three men before the king is an excellent example of faith: "...we do not need to defend ourselves before you on this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know O king that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Faith frees us from having to be defensive. It is confidence in both God's ability and will to save. Yet, true faith also trusts God to know that even if God doesn't rescue in this life, that our eternal salvation is secure. This frees us to walk in obedience regardless of the outcome. See Hebrews 11:34-40 as an example from the early church where people remained faithful to God even when they did not receive salvation in this life.
- Nebuchadnezzar's statement about the men in the furnace is fascinating: "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." How did this fourth man look like a "son of the gods?" Was it his robes? What he a being of light? What caused the king to think that this being was somehow divine? In terms of the Hebrew people, how would they understand a divine appearance? Would they consider this to be similar to the appearance of God when he wrestled with Jacob? What is

clear from hindsight is that God is apparently planting within the Hebrew scriptures a foreshadowing to the coming of Jesus and the idea of God having a divine son. It is a powerful image of God coming to save and his complete authority over all of the elements of creation. The faith of these men is matched by the faithfulness of God.

- The final thought from this story is the impact that this huge miracle had on Nebuchadnezzar. Short-term? Huge. Long-term? Apparently not much. This is a reminder that miracles do not produce faith long-term. It may feel good in the moment but only a true relationship with God and the ability to encounter what God says can produce faith (See Romans 10:17 – “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”) We will see this mirrored in Jesus’ ministry as he produces miracle after miracle and yet none of these miracles caused faith to appear in the religious leaders. God’s word combined with a soft heart can ultimately grow into faith as a true relationship is formed. Like Peter though, faith is not automatic but takes time to form and must be maintained through an ongoing relationship with God.
- This story is a great encouragement and reminder that God is capable of doing whatever he wants at any time. He can stop the sun in the sky; he can break open a prison; and he can protect his servants even from the blazing fire. The God who created the universe is not limited by any circumstance. We can trust him to be faithful and to complete his will for our lives. His will is not open for discussion, it will be done. In this we can rest and know that the God we serve is faithful. May God give us this same confidence in every situation where we are faced with the difficult challenges of walking in faith and obedience, even when it looks impossible!