

A FAST Biblical Portrait: Daniel and His Companions

Tested by Fire

John Kain, 2010

Having been taken from his homeland to the pagan world of Babylon, Daniel might easily have turned away from his God—but he didn't. Daniel also might easily have chosen to go along with the ways of the Babylonian world—but he didn't do that either. Despite overwhelming pressure, Daniel lived a life of integrity and continued to follow God's ways, not the world's.

Around 600 B.C., when Judah was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel and three friends (who were also among the young Jewish nobility) were carried off to Babylon. Once there, Daniel and his companions were chosen—based on their intelligence and good looks—to be trained for service to the empire (Daniel 1:4). During this period, Daniel continued to observe Jewish guidelines in everyday life, specifically in his diet (Daniel 1:8-16). As he chose to stand for what he believed in, Daniel gained the respect of his supervisor.

During Daniel's three years of training in the Babylonian schools, the Lord blessed him with "wisdom and understanding," and soon this faithful servant of God became known for his skill in the interpretation of dreams (Daniel 1:17; 2:16). Yet the countercultural choices he made along the way in obedience to God's laws had exposed Daniel as well as his companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to persecution by jealous rivals within the king's administration. Having found favor in the eyes of the king, Daniel was initially untouchable.

His companions, however, were more vulnerable but no less bold in their faith. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the Babylonian king as a god (an act of submission to his rule), nor did they take part in the worship of pagan gods. Their resistance was punishable by death. Faced with the choice between death in a blazing furnace or worship of the king's gods, the three Jews chose death.

Before they entered the furnace, **they expressed their confidence that God was definitely able to save them, but even if he chose not to, they would remain faithful to him** (Daniel 3:16-18). God did, however, choose to save these three men, and a fourth being—perhaps God's son or an angel—joined the three faithful men in the furnace (Daniel 3:25). What a picture of integrity as God preserved these three men for their steadfast devotion to him!

Years later Daniel had problems of his own, this time with jealous administrators. Unable to find fault with his exceptional leadership or his honest, trustworthy ways, they determined to make Daniel's prayer commitment to God illegal. Even after the edict was issued, Daniel continued to pray daily. Caught in the act, he was cast into a den of hungry lions. He was miraculously delivered (joined by an angel), his enemies were punished, and King Darius issued a decree imposing on his countrymen reverence for "the God of Daniel" (Daniel 6:26).

In these biblical accounts, Daniel and his friends demonstrated courage rooted in their commitment to God. They lived out this commitment with integrity, they continued to trust in the Lord, and they chose to live for him, to obey him rather than the commands of the captors' government. **We know that God can save us from any injustice, but he does not always do so** (see the portrait of Joseph presented earlier in this chapter). Godly men have the courage to endure the unjust consequences that may come even when they make the right choices.