

Daniel 3:8-30

Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that be the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

The story of the courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is one of the most inspirational in all of Scripture. It has historically inspired art and song and continues to do so to this day.

There is some discussion over whether the golden image was one of the gods or if it was an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. The question is probably not that important as far as the response of the three Hebrew children is concerned but I am inclined to believe that the image was of Nebuchadnezzar himself. Polytheism had no problem with the addition of another god and so if a king were to make such a claim, there was no reason to stand against it.

We continue to run into the gap between the king's world and the real world. In the king's world, his subjects were honored to be called to the worship of the golden image and would be delighted to do so whenever the band played. In the real world, the king had with his new inspiration become even more the tyrant and thus less popular than ever before. In the king's world, the three rebellious Hebrews were the only exceptions to an empire full of subjects who felt only pride for their great king who had made such a remarkable image of himself of gold for them to worship. In the real world, the three men were the only ones to have been reported and they were only the tip of the iceberg. In the king's world, the accusers were motivated by their devotion to the king and their outrage that the king had been disrespected. In the real world, the accusers came forward as a way of disposing of their rivals and had no actual respect or devotion for the king themselves. The further that we are removed from reality in our lives the more vulnerable we will be to the manipulations of those who want to use us for their own ends.

The stand taken by the three Hebrews is an example of courage in the face of oppression. It also demonstrates the

wisdom of the young men as they were able to choose the right moment for such a stand. It is apparent that they had avoided other potential crises in the past. They were also able to separate their sense of God's direction from the principle of God's sovereign rule.

Surviving oppression is a life skill that we will all need at one time or another. Our experience of oppression will almost certainly be mild if compared to that of the Hebrew young men in Babylon but oppression is a dark experience in whatever form it may take. It is not oppression that destroys but our response to it. Any suffering, no matter how acute, can be handled with and through the power of God. Jesus specifically spoke to how to counter oppression when He gave us the teachings of turning your cheek, giving up your cloak and going the extra mile. These are actions that free the spirit while the body may remain enslaved. He told us how to triumph over oppression while it still persists. This is normative. The exception is found in circumstances like that of the Hebrew young men where no accommodation with the oppressor is possible and the alternative to resistance is sin.