

Sabbath School Today

With the 1888 Message Dynamic

Daniel

Lesson 4: From Furnace to Palace

Is the story of the “burning fiery furnace” in Daniel 3 pious fiction? Or authentic history?

Historical and archaeological research confirms supportive details: such as brick kilns that were common. Jeremiah 29:22 tells the history of how King Nebuchadnezzar “roasted in the fire” two seditious Jews; another Babylonian king boasted of burning some political enemies—evidence that this method of execution was actually practiced; Herodotus and Pliny tell of ancient kings who built huge statues covered with gold leaf. The deliverance from death by fire had been promised: “When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.” Doubtless the three Hebrew youth thrown in the fire had cherished this assurance. The promise “I will be with you” was literally fulfilled (Isa. 43:2). “The Son of God” shared the “furnace” with them, as even the pagan king confessed (Dan. 3:25).

How did that heathen king know what the Son of God looked like? God’s people in Old Testament times looked forward to the coming of Christ, while we look back to His first coming. Alike, we all see Him by faith. No one has ever been saved except by the power of Christ. The Hebrews had preached in Babylon of Christ, the Redeemer to come. The king remembered their teaching, and from their message recognized the Son of God when he saw Him.

Incidentally, they seem in no hurry to come out of the fire. God provides air-conditioning where and when it is needed. They will be happy to stay there, if only they can walk and talk with Christ. To be with Him is sufficient reward for all the trials of earth! When we suffer for Him today, we too may enjoy His presence with us in the same way (see John 15:18; Isa. 63:9; James 1:2). You may think this is hard to believe. But you’ll know it next time you are thrown into your “fiery furnace” for your faith in Christ; He’ll make Himself preciously near to you as ordinarily you never know Him in times of peace.

This is the point of Daniel 3: will we believe that the Son of God shares our sufferings for His sake? Will He give divine courage to “stand up” when everybody else bows down? The apostle Peter collapsed when the test came to him (Matt. 26:69-75); in fact, all the eleven disciples ran away.

Many Israelites had been exiled to Babylon when Daniel and his three companions went, but none of them had the courage to obey God’s Ten Commandments except these four! Granted, the three who faced the fiery furnace were terrified at the prospect of death by fire; but they sensed that they were called to honor the truth of God before the assembled leaders of an empire. He gave them courage, even if God should choose

not to deliver them from death (Dan. 3:16-18; this was a selfless motivation inspired by *agape*). A similar final test will come to us all in the “mark of the beast” crisis (Rev. 13:11-17).

And so there is a beautiful illustration of genuine faith in the story of the three Hebrews of Daniel 3 who were thrown into the fiery furnace. They told the insanely angry king that: the living God whom they served was “able” to deliver them from his power, but; it might possibly be that He would be unwilling to do so—they didn’t know for sure—but if He were unwilling to deliver them they would serve Him nonetheless, and they would not cast contempt on His holy law by bowing down to his golden image.

In this way these three men demonstrated that their faith in God was the New Covenant kind, not the Old Covenant kind. (They probably had been studying the writings of Jeremiah!)

So here we find the two kinds of covenant-faith expressed in the 1888 message. The Old Covenant kind of “faith” is a counterfeit of the genuine: it’s making a “bargain” with God. Old Covenant faith says, “Lord, if You will deliver us, then we’ll keep Your commandments.” Sometimes preachers lead their people into Old Covenant faith when they tell them that if they take the initiative to “pay tithe,” then God will bless them financially. New Covenant faith is a choice to pay tithe whether or not the Lord rewards us.

The New Covenant is God’s out-and-out promises to His people, and their heart response is to believe and appreciate what He promises. His love, not fear, “constrains” them to loyalty and service (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). The Old Covenant is “bargaining” with God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego rebuke us for that. Jeremiah promises (31:31-34) that the time will come when God’s people graduate completely out of the Old into the living faith that is in the New. As God’s people face the trials of the last days, their faith will mature into that of “the Lamb’s wife”—a church that has grown up into that “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). It’s time for the New Covenant, now.

The good news is that right now worldwide the Holy Spirit is preparing, nerving, strengthening, and training willing people to endure the test. Fellowship with Christ in “fire” is precious, even today as we honor Him in school, in our community, at work, and at home.

—Paul E. Penno

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5vHqRQWHq0&list=PLsjY9Yfwx9Nx1uiXLI_c49fae41rrkqPO

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