



"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:9).

Companionship in Trial

L564. Date: June 1980. **Text:** Daniel 3:19-30. **Topic:** Faith: Trials of; God: Presence of.

Central Truth: The people of God can know His presence in every experience in life.

Today, the lesson is a continuation of the events reviewed in last week's study. But whereas the previous lesson dealt with the importance of loyalty in the face of opposition, this lesson deals with the presence of God when His people are in any trouble.

Review the incidents thus far. All of the officers of the Babylonian empire had been brought to the plain of Dura to share in the dedication of a great image which the king had erected. To fall down and worship the image was an act by which allegiance was declared to the king and his reign. Any person who refused to bow and worship the image was sentenced to death in a burning fiery furnace.

The hour came; the signal was given; all the officials bowed, except three. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego — three companions of Daniel — refused to bow before the image of the king. They were brought before the king and accused of treason. The king gave them a second chance to bow and worship. They refused. They counted loyalty to their God more important than pleasing the king. No fate was left for them but the furnace of fire. That is where today's lesson takes up the story. Read Daniel 3:19-30, looking for evidence of the personal presence of God with His children in their times of trial.

I. GOD'S PEOPLE WILL UNDERGO TRIALS (3:19-23)

The way of obedience is not the way of ease. Sometimes trials come because of obedience. They come to test the allegiance of the people of God to the person of God.

Trials which come upon the people of God are not some small thing. Often the trials are so severe that they actually endanger one's life. The trials are sometimes greater than can be withstood and one is helplessly borne along to his fate.

So it was with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. To the king they said, "God is able to deliver us from the fire and from your hands, if He wills. But whether He does so or not, we will not worship your gods nor the image you have built." King Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage. He became almost irrational in his anger and desire to punish the three.

"Heat the furnace seven times hotter than it is," he commanded. "Let the strongest men in my army come and bind these rebels and cast them into the fire." The brethren were taken. The ropes were put around them and fastened securely. Nebuchadnezzar had said no god was able to deliver them, and he meant to prove it.

What an experience it must have been for the three men of God. They had declared their willingness to die if necessary, but the experience must have been terrifying.

The furnace was roaring hot. The soldiers who brought the captives to cast them in were themselves consumed by the heat. So the three servants of God fell into the flames.

Your trials will be different from theirs, but trials you will have. Jesus said, "*In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). God's people have always been opposed by reviling, persecuting, and evil-speaking enemies (Matthew 5:11, 12). They have endured "*trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth*" (Hebrews 11:36-38). Your trials have not been so severe. If those people were faithful, so can you be also.

II. GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE IN TRIALS (3:24, 25)

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God:

I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

Behold the difference that God makes while the strong soldiers were falling to their deaths outside the furnace because of its heat, the three servants of God were preserved unharmed inside the furnace in spite of its heat. Praise the Lord!

King Nebuchadnezzar could hardly believe what his eyes saw. “We cast three men into the furnace, didn't we? And they were bound, weren't they?” he asked his counsellors. They agreed that was the case. “How is it then,” he asked in astonishment, “that I see four men, loosed and walking about in the furnace, and the fourth looks like the Son of God? And why is it that they show no signs of hurt from the fire?” It was an impossible thing; it was a miracle!

If the king was surprised, how amazed must the three men of God have been? They expected extreme pain from the searing flames. They expected their lives to be snuffed out quickly. Instead, they were enjoying comfort. They were cast in bound and unable to move. Now they could walk about in perfect ease. It is no indication of lack of faith or of devotion when the people of God are surprised at the work of God.

In all the Bible, there is no incident which so perfectly reveals the presence of God with His people when they are in trouble. He did not keep them from being cast into the furnace, but He went in with them to keep them safe. How the three men of God must have treasured that memory the rest of their lives!

III. GOD DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE THROUGH TRIALS (3:26, 27)

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour” (Isaiah 43:2, 3). King Nebuchadnezzar raised his voice so he could be heard above the roar of the flames in the furnace and said, *“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God” come forth, and come hither”* (verse 26). He admitted defeat with those words.

He had boasted that no god could deliver them from his hand. The LORD God had done so. He recognized such a manifestation of divine power and called Him *“the most high God!”* The efforts he had made to destroy them had but magnified the miracle by which God had delivered them.

The three men came forth. Nothing is said of the fourth Person coming out. He remained visibly present with the three only so long as they needed the comfort of His manifest presence in the furnace.

What had happened to the three while under the care of God in the furnace? The most influential men of the kingdom took notice (verse 27). (1) The fire had not hurt their bodies, for their skin was not burned. (2) Their hair was not singed. (3) Their garments were not changed, not even by smoke or soot. (4) There was no smell of fire about them. The only thing that had been destroyed was the king's rope by which they had been bound! What a testimony to the power and protection of God.

Thank God for all the faithful men who “*through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens*” (Hebrews 11:33, 34). It can be so with you, too.

IV. GOD WORKS OUT GOOD FROM TRIALS (3:28-30)

A. Glory came to God from the trial (verses 28, 29). An official decree was issued by King Nebuchadnezzar pronouncing the death penalty upon any person who spoke to the detraction of the LORD God. The decree was issued to the whole kingdom, to the anguish of the priests of other religions and to the glory of God. Who would not be willing to undergo trials if it would work to the glory of God?

B. Good came to men from the trial (verse 30). The three servants of God had resolved to be faithful when it appeared that they would lose all. They were faithful and found they were actually receiving much more. It always pays to serve God faithfully.

1. What events preceded today's lesson?
2. Why does God permit His people to undergo trials?
3. How can one keep faith strong in the midst of trials?
4. What does Hebrews 11:36-38 reveal about trials?
5. How does John 16:33 prepare Christians for trials?
6. What encouragement is given in Isaiah 41:10?
7. How might Christians be tried today?
8. What victory is indicated in Hebrews 11:33, 34?
9. How can good come out of trials?

10. How can you share the insight you gained from this study?