

SHARING SCRIPTURE

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From Furnace to Palace

For use: Jan 19 - 25

Texts: Daniel 3; Revelation 13:11-18; Exodus 20:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 15:12-26; Hebrews 11

“Our biggest challenge is not when we stand up for our own rights and beliefs. The real test is when we stand up for the rights and beliefs of others.” So declared Lord Ahmad, British Minister of State regarding the August 22, 2019 International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. The incredibly long title for the day accurately describes the intent of the commemoration: there are people around the world who are being victimized for their religious practices.

The founders of the day of commemoration hope that it will become an annual call to action to stand for those who are powerless to stand for themselves. We are only as free as our smallest, most misunderstood minority. [1]

The Jewish exiles in Babylon were certainly a small, misunderstood minority. They were regarded by surrounding nations as a belligerent, rebellious group who needed to be violently conquered. The Babylonians saw no reason to give any respect to their religious beliefs, especially to their disgraced Deity. The only thing that would get the Babylonians’ attention was a public demonstration of a miraculous, divine intervention on the exiles’ behalf by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The prevailing belief was that each nation had its own set of gods, who were bound by the nations’ borders. As such, the God of the Hebrews was restricted to the borders of Judah and could not intervene on behalf of the exiles. The faithful Hebrews, however, did not subscribe to that notion. When faced with the prospect of a painful death, they boldly testified that “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.” (Daniel 3:17 NIV).

Of course, Nebuchadnezzar was as equally confident that such a deliverance was impossible. Not only had the armies of Babylon crushed the Israelites, the Babylonian gods apparently defeated the God of the Hebrews—How could God now travel from Palestine to Babylon and intervene successfully on their behalf? The result of God’s display of power and care by preserving them from the flames prompted Nebuchadnezzar to proclaim that anyone who spoke a word against the God of the Hebrews should be hacked to pieces! Their faithfulness led Nebuchadnezzar to promote these three to government leadership positions where they could then help protect the other exiles.

~Chuck Burkeen

[1] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2019/08/15/the-real-test-is-when-we-stand-up-for-the-rights-and-beliefs-of-others/#2c25269a6dd4>

For Reflection

Connecting: Select two volunteers to act out this scene: A Seventh-day Adventist employee is meeting with a boss who is threatening to fire the employee unless he/she agrees to work on the upcoming Sabbath. Try to express the sentiments of the boss who really needs the employee to work that day. What counter-reasoning should the employee give in response?

Sharing: We would expect that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego would not be the only Hebrews present at this worship event. Why do you think they are the only ones who stood up for their faith?

1. The Babylonians had beaten the others into submission and now they just blindly obeyed their masters
2. Many of the others didn’t really bow all the way, but just hunched down a little bit
3. These three were single and had nothing to lose, but the others all had spouses and children to consider
4. The Babylonians had tried to keep all of the Hebrews out of this event to avoid an embarrassing situation like this, but these three somehow got in anyway
5. Most of the Jews gave up on their faith when the Babylonians took them captive
6. Other:

Applying: Identify some areas where you’ve seen Christians challenged for their faith. Are there practical ways that you or others can support them during these times?

Valuing: What is your greatest fear when it comes to standing up for your faith in challenging circumstances? Share your thoughts with one other person, then pray for each other to have the faith of the three Hebrews at the moments you need it most.

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Three decades ago, we created this resource for small groups and Sabbath school classes, and it continues to bless so many people worldwide. Thank you for your continued interest in these biblical themes and what they mean to your life and those people with whom you share it.

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