

FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

*Our God is able to deliver us.***The STORY**

Pray with children to start class.

Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

King Nebuchadnezzar set up an image and demanded worship – King Nebuchadnezzar created a huge image (ninety feet tall and nine feet wide) of gold. He commanded the people of his kingdom to worship this god. They were to do so every time they heard the instruments play the music. This would have been an easy command for the people of Babylon to obey. They were polytheistic (believing in many gods). But for the Jews who lived there in captivity and believed in the one God, this would have been an impossible. Doing so meant breaking the first of the Ten Commandments. Three men were charged with violating the king's command and brought before the king. It is likely that this happened out of jealousy because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given a special gifting from God far above the other wise men of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (Daniel 1:17-20). Later Daniel appointed them to leadership positions in Babylon (Daniel 2:49).

We do not have kings who set up tall statues for all of us to bow down to today. But there are many things which the culture around us worships, and we are also tempted to love them too much.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship and trusted God for deliverance – After refusing to worship the idol, the three young men were brought before the king. Rather than immediately bringing judgment, the king gave them an opportunity to avoid punishment by bowing down to the idol. Of course, not wanting to disobey God, they refused to do this. It is interesting to note their trust in God. They would trust God no matter what the consequences were (Daniel 3:17-18). These three men believed that God was able, but not required, to deliver them. Their defiance infuriated the king. He ordered them thrown into a large furnace. The men placed no demands upon God. Whether God delivered them or not, He was still God. They would not disobey the Lord's command to worship Him alone.

FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

God delivered His people – The fire was so hot that the soldiers who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace were consumed by the flames. At this point the king observed and reported that there were four men walking in the fire - unbound and unharmed! The three men were called out from the fire by the king. The king called them “servants of the Most High God.” Nebuchadnezzar, in awe of what he saw, issued a proclamation that any one speaking against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would be torn limb from limb. What a radical transformation! In the end the king promoted these men.

God used events like this to protect His people while in captivity. Later, when the exiles returned to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple, it was obvious that the Levites had kept up their traditions. It says they took up their places for worship. The courage of Daniel and these three men in the furnace gave all of Israel courage. God protected and gave favor to them during their seventy year captivity in Babylon.

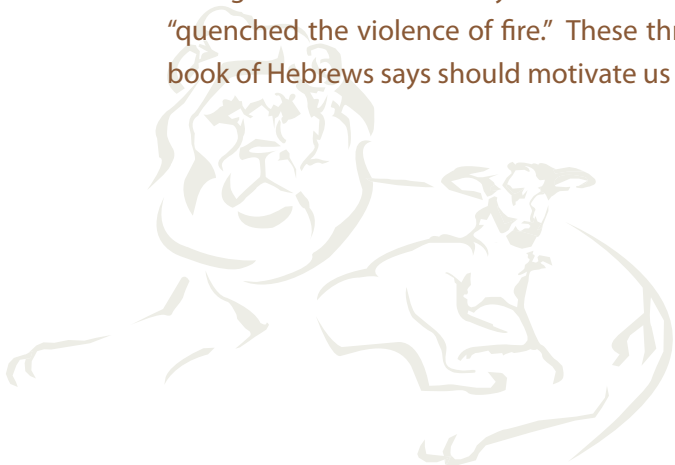
WHERE IS JESUS?

Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.

In the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, there is an obvious answer to “Where is Jesus?” The Son of God was with them in the fire as the fourth person. Showing us a glimpse of a greater deliverance, that would save us all believers from the fires of hell, God delivers these men from the flames so that not even their clothing is singed!

Hebrews 11:34 says by faith people “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.”

Though not mentioned by name in Hebrews 11:34, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego certainly “quenched the violence of fire.” These three men are a part of the “great cloud of witnesses” that the book of Hebrews says should motivate us to “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1-2).



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

Bible Passage: Psalm 118:14-21

Connecting the passage to Christ:

Israel would have understood salvation as victory over their enemies and peace in the land. Here, however, God himself becomes the psalmist's salvation: "...you have become my salvation" (Psalm 118:21b). This is a direct foreshadowing to when Christ becomes our salvation.

Questions for reflection:

- How does God become our salvation? (God becomes our salvation in Christ when He dies on the cross for our sins.)
- Did the psalmist understand that the ultimate expression of salvation from God would come through Jesus? (No, the psalmist didn't understand the specifics of God's plan but understood that salvation was by the hand and mercy of God. This faith filled looking forward demonstrated faith in God's plan to send the Messiah.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

BE A DOER OF THE WORD

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?

ONLY HIGHER

Supplies

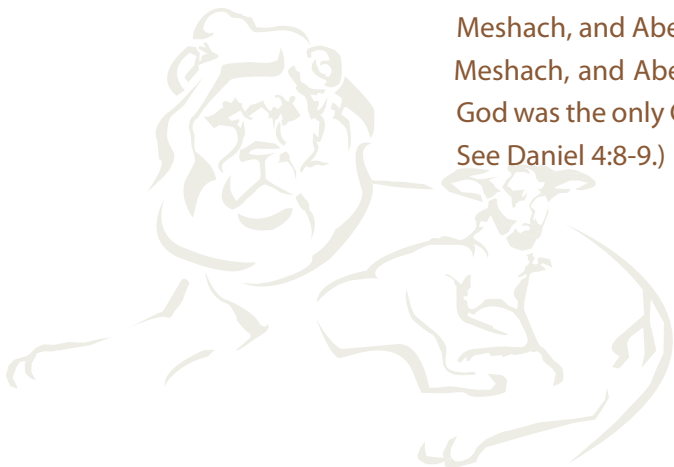
four rocks painted gold,
18" high stand for one of
the rocks (this could be
a length of board that
will stand up or a small
cardboard box)

This exercise is designed to help the children see that Nebuchadnezzar's response to God after He preserved the three men in the flames was a good response but not the best response. You see, Nebuchadnezzar called their God the Most High God but did not remove his own idols. In other words, God was the most high among other gods, but not the only God.

Set the golden rocks up on a table in front of the class. Explain to the class that Nebuchadnezzar was a polytheist; he believed in many gods. He demanded that the people worship a god he created among their other gods. Read to them the story of how he made a ninety foot tall god. Place one of the gods (rocks) on the stand higher than the rest. Ask the class how many gods they see. The proper response is four. Ask them which god looks the most powerful. (They should answer the one on the stand.)

Then ask the class the following questions:

- What did Nebuchadnezzar learn about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? (Nebuchadnezzar learned that their God was more powerful than any god he knew.)
- What mistake did Nebuchadnezzar make even though he worshipped Shadrach Meshach, and Abednego's God? (Nebuchadnezzar declared the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was the Most High God but he did not recognize that their God was the only God. Nebuchadnezzar and his people continued in their idolatry. See Daniel 4:8-9.)



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

SET UP AN IDOL

Supplies

- roll of gold foil wrapping paper
- tape
- string
- prizes for the volunteer

Use the wrapping paper to make a tall idol-like figure. Hang it in front of the class prior to the start of class.

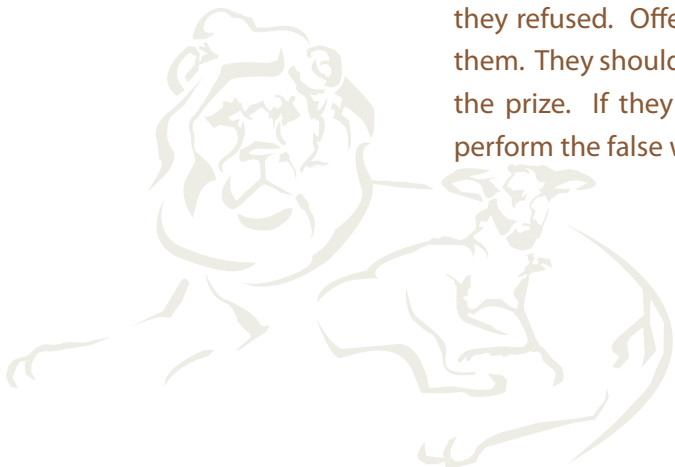
When the class comes in make no mention of the prop. Once the class is settled ask for four volunteers. (Be sure to avoid choosing uncooperative children or those who might use participation in an exercise like this to draw attention to themselves by performing foolishly.)

To the first volunteer tell them to look at the image as a sculpture. Ask them to critique it telling you what they think it most resembles. This could be humorous. You could give them a few suggestions such as a golden knight or a ray of sunshine. Thank the volunteer and award them with a prize.

To the second volunteer tell them that the image is a memorial to all the great generals who fought to keep our country free. Tell them that on this day, it is appropriate to salute the memorial to honor all those who died to keep our country free. After they salute the statue award them with the prize. (If they won't salute the statue, turn to the class and ask for a volunteer who feels more comfortable and willing to salute the statue. Award the prize to them.)

To the third volunteer tell them the statue is a symbol of good luck. They should rub the statue and if they do, they will be blessed for the day. Award them with the prize explaining that the prize is their blessing. (If they won't rub the statue then find a classmate who is willing to do so and give them the prize.)

To the fourth volunteer tell them that the figure is a golden image and when you clap your hands they should fall down on their knees before it and worship the golden image. They should refuse, and when they do, draw them out as to why they refused. Offer a prize as payment for worshipping the image to try to bribe them. They should still refuse and when they do, congratulate them and give them the prize. If they consent, stop the exercise without allowing them to actually perform the false worship.



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

Then ask the class the following questions:

- How did you feel when I got to the fourth volunteer and said they needed to worship the paper as a golden image? (I suddenly felt uneasy because it is wrong to bow down and worship anything other than God.)
- How was the fourth volunteer's job different from the others? (The first three requests presented to the volunteers were a bit odd but not sinful. It would have been a sin for us to worship the paper as a god.)
- At what price should we give in? Would you worship the paper if I offered you ten dollars, a hundred dollars, or a thousand dollars? What if someone told you they would kill you if you did not bow down to it, would it be ok to bow down then? (No, under no circumstances should a person ever bow to another false god.)

Read the story of Daniel 3 and talk about the faith and courage of the three men to say no even though they did not know if God would deliver them.



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

TRUST THE TEACHER

Supplies

- large clear glass bowl filled with water
- wash cloth
- one dozen eggs with 6 hard boiled and 6 raw
- tarp. (Place the six raw eggs in the front row).

This exercise is meant to demonstrate trust. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted God even though they did not know if God would deliver them from the flames.

Ask the class for an egg tester. Tell them that you want them to allow you to break an egg on their head. (Pick out a raw egg from the carton to show them as you speak but let it slip out of your hands to break on the floor. Apologize and commence cleaning the egg up. This will fool them into thinking all the eggs are raw.) Tell them that they should not get too messy but if there is an accident you have some water and a cloth for them to wash.

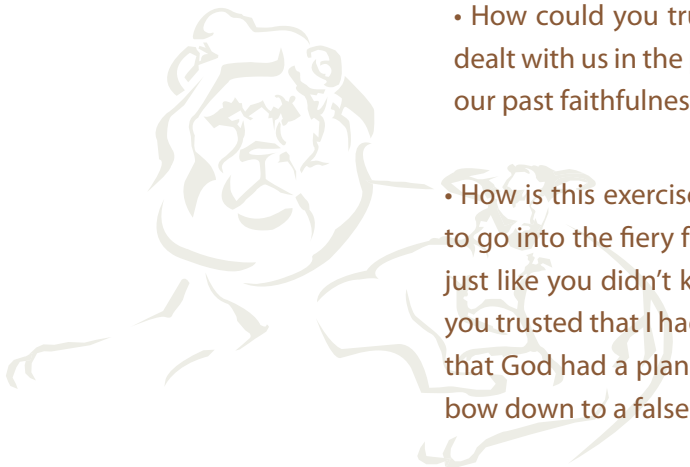
Ask for volunteers to raise their hands. Before choosing a volunteer interview why some of the people do not want to be a volunteer (afraid to get egg in their hair) and why some are willing (they believe you can do it without getting egg in their hair). Ask those who trust your ability: What if I get egg in your hair though? The object here is to outline their trust of you.

Pick a volunteer and have them sit before the class. Take a hard boiled egg and crack it several times on the crown of their head. Peel the shells and take a bite out of the egg thanking them for their assistance.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- What gave you the confidence to volunteer? (We didn't believe we would get any egg on us, etc.)
- Did you trust me? (Yes, we trusted you that you would not get us all messed up with egg.)
- How could you trust me? (We could trust you because we know how you have dealt with us in the past and you have never hurt us before. Explain to the class that our past faithfulness frames the way people think of us.)

• How is this exercise like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusting God enough to go into the fiery furnace? (They didn't know what would happen in that furnace just like you didn't know what would happen if I cracked an egg on your head but you trusted that I had a plan that was for your good just like those three men trusted that God had a plan that was for their good. In any case, they knew they could not bow down to a false god.)



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

IN CLASS PROJECT

The first and second grade children can use the preschool coloring sheet and questions. Have the older children draw a picture of four men in the furnace.



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

FOR OLDER GRADES

Supplies:

- \$20 dollar bill
- mirror
- personal gaming device like a Gameboy™
- set of headphones
- four boxes to cover these items.

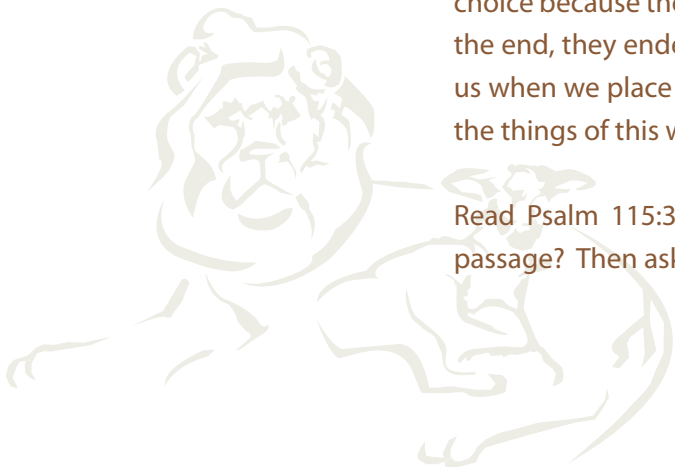
The object of this activity is to help the children realize the idols in their lives. It is easy to dismiss an idol of gold. They might think they would be just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when in reality we all serve idols in our hearts. An idol is anything we worship or give our lives to in place of God. The items selected in this object lesson should help the children see the alternate loves they have in their hearts.

Set the items up on a table in front of the class and cover them. Have the children take turns reading the paragraphs of Daniel 3 aloud. Tell the children that though we don't have the same temptations as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we are tempted by the idols in our hearts. We can allow these idols to rule our lives and by so doing we are bowing down to them.

Ask the children to guess what modern idols might be. Mark the boxes so you remember which is which. The money represents the love of wealth and its corresponding power. The mirror represents love of reputation and self. The Gameboy™ represents the love of power and control. The headphones represent love of peace and privacy. Explain to the children that though these items are not evil, to allow them to distract us from our worship of the one true God is idolatry. You can identify an idol at work in your heart by gauging your reaction when you do not get what you want. Watch what you do if your mom tells you not to play your video game, or take your headphones off, or regulates what music you listen to, etc.

Make the connection to Christ. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego made the right choice because they trusted in God who was more to them than there very lives. In the end, they ended up dancing with a fourth person in the fire. God will be with us when we place our trust in His plan. His plan for us is found in Jesus Christ, not the things of this world.

Read Psalm 115:3-8 and ask the class what do we learn about idols from this passage? Then ask them how does this apply to modern day idols of our hearts?



FOUR MEN IN THE FURNACE

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: DANIEL 3

A LITTLE BIT MORE

Polytheism – The pagan cultures depicted in the Bible had polytheistic beliefs. Polytheism is a belief in a plurality of gods. There was no problem adding in worship of the God of Israel. The problem came from excluding other gods and making the God of Israel the only God. The idea of polytheism is that everyone's gods are welcome. But, God sets Himself apart from all other gods by demanding exclusive worship, see Exodus 20:2-3, and by exposing the impotence (inability to do anything) of other gods, see Psalm 115:3-8.

