

A Good Shepherd
Sacred Story

Three Men in a Furnace

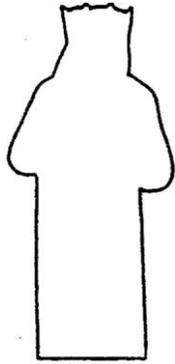
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THREE MEN IN A FURNACE MATERIALS

- large wicker basket to hold:
 - wooden furnace
 - wooden King Nebuchadnezzar figure
 - wooden Shadrach figure
 - wooden Meshach figure
 - wooden Abednego figure
 - 3 wooden soldier figures
 - 2 wooden wise men figures



King Nebuchadnezzar



Shadrach



Meshach



Abednego



Soldier



Wise Men

THREE MEN IN A FURNACE DANIEL 3:1-30

ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story from its shelf. Carry the basket carefully back to the circle and set it on the floor in front of you.

After speaking, allow 10-15 seconds of silence while you center yourself and the children by reverently touching one or more of the wooden figures.

Move your right hand slowly from left to right as though moving something.

Place King Nebuchadnezzar to left center.

Fashion a statue in the air with your hands.

Make a large sweeping motion, taking in "all" people.

Bow from the waist slightly.

Place Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to right center.

Shake your head slowly.

Clench one fist in anger.

Place the furnace in the center of the storytelling area. Put the soldiers next to King Nebuchadnezzar.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

All of the words to this story are inside me. Will you please make silence with me so I can find all the words to this story?

The people of God had been taken away into exile in Babylon. Their city, Jerusalem, and their temple had been burned.

In Babylon was King Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar built a statue of himself out of gold.

Then he told all the people that whenever they heard the sounds of horn, lyre, strings and other instruments, they were to bow down and worship the statue.

But three young Jewish men named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego remembered the words of the ten best ways to live that said, "You shall not make and worship any idol."

So they refused to bow down to the idol.

King Nebuchadnezzar became very angry.

He told his soldiers to take Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into a burning furnace.

Move Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego next to King Nebuchadnezzar.

Nod your head firmly and smile.

Touch the furnace and pull your hand away quickly, as though it is very hot.

"Tie" the three young men with an imaginary rope.

Move the soldiers and the three men near the furnace. Put the three men in the furnace, but have the soldiers fall down outside the furnace.

Point to the furnace.

Move King Nebuchadnezzar a littler closer to the furnace.

Place the two wise men next to King Nebuchadnezzar. Look puzzled as you speak.

Nod your head quickly a few times.

Hold up four fingers. Shake your head quickly in amazement.

Speak very softly in amazement.

Move King Nebuchadnezzar closer to the furnace and place your hands to your mouth to "call".

"Then," said King Nebuchadnezzar, "which god will deliver you from the burning fiery furnace?"

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego said, "Our God, Yahweh, will take care of *us*. No matter what you do we will not worship your idol."

King Nebuchadnezzar was so angry that he ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter.

Then he had some soldiers tie Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego with ropes.

When the soldiers threw the three men into the burning furnace it was so hot it killed the soldiers who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace.

The three men were now in the furnace and the flames were very hot.

King Nebuchadnezzar looked at the furnace.

Then he said to his wise men, "Didn't we throw three men into the furnace?"

"Yes," said the wise men.

"But," said Nebuchadnezzar, "I see four men in the furnace and they're walking around in the fire and they're not hurt."

"And the fourth one looks like a son of the gods. "

Then Nebuchadnezzar went closer to the furnace and called to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to come out of the furnace.

Move Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the furnace to stand by Nebuchadnezzar .

Spread your arms wide as you say "greatest" .

Place all wooden figures and the furnace carefully back into the story basket.

After speaking, carry the basket back to its shelf and return to the circle.

Dismiss the children to their work ONLY after they have all had a chance to choose their work.

When the three men came out everyone could see that they were not hurt and their clothes didn't even smell like smoke.

King Nebuchadnezzar was so amazed that he told everyone that the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was the greatest God ever, because no other god could have delivered the men from the furnace.

Then he made Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego very important people in the land of Babylon.

WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder how big the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar was?

I wonder if the three young men were scared of the fire?

I wonder who walked with them inside the furnace?

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

Watch carefully where I put this story away so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

It's time for us to choose our work today. What will you do? Let's go around the circle and choose our work.

THREE MEN IN A FURNACE •.. TEACHER HELPS

This story is one that most children love. Indeed, all of us find stories about courage and faithfulness exciting. When we add the inversion of the powerless becoming powerful we understand why children love this story so much. They often see themselves as powerless and are thrilled with the tales of becoming powerful.

It's ironic that these much loved stories of Daniel are so problematic for scholars. For while the setting of this story (and Daniel and the Lions) is supposedly during the exile in Babylon, (ca. 587 BeE) scholars believe the texts were not written until 166-165 BCE. There is difference of opinion concerning whether or not these stories existed first in an oral tradition or not. Some scholars believe they were oral tradition written down as memories much later, while others believe they were written as a prophecy first in the second century BCE.

It is not the point of this story to debate the historical time frame of the words, actions and understanding of God. Rather, the point of the story is to wrap ourselves in the faithfulness of the three young men who REMEMBERED and OBEYED, and in the faithfulness of God who, once again, delivered God's people. The three young men learned their lessons very well as they were growing up and could not bring themselves to break one of the Ten Commandments. They knew they could not be right with God if they worshiped an idol. The fact that they were willing to suffer a painful and horrible death rather than do so is amazing to us.

This is much like a miracle story from the New Testament where those who saw, believed and followed Jesus. Here the one who saw, King Nebuchadnezzar, believed and changed, at least temporarily.

There are many historical difficulties with the book of Daniel. It is primarily apocalyptic literature (concerning the end of this present age) and can be difficult to interpret. This may explain the obvious historical flaws, such as reference to Darius, the Mede, who does not exist in history at this time. (The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Vol.2, edited by Emory Bucke, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962, p. 766) This was never meant to be a historical text, but rather a text about persevering through times of persecution and remaining faithful to God and then rejoicing in God's faithfulness to God's people.

The wondering questions begin with allowing the children to wonder about the great gold statue made by King Nebuchadnezzar. How big was it? What was it like? They may liken it to statues they have seen of other people. We don't have an answer to this question so allow it to move on its own.

The second question is about the young men being or not being scared. It will be interesting to hear the responses. Most children will probably respond that yes they were afraid of fire. That will be because they themselves are afraid of fire. You may get a question about why the fire didn't burn them. It's OK to say, "I'm not sure, I just know God protected them."

The final question asks who walked with the three men. The children will probably be divided between God and an angel. This allows us to help children who still need to concretize God, do so. It also helps us keep alive the understanding that with God nothing is impossible.

Note: The Book of Daniel (Revised Standard Version) speaks of King Nebuchadnezzar (Ne-be-kad-ne-zer). He is the same person, although the spelling is different, as King Nebuchadrezzar (Ne-be-kad-re-zer) referred to in the Book of Jeremiah (Revised Standard Version).

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

Sometimes it's much easier to be brave when there is a group of you. The three friends in this story took courage from each other. Think of a situation where it would be easier to do the right thing if you had friends with you.

The three men in the furnace had God's presence with them in a very special and protective way. Think of a time when you felt like you were being cared for, even though there was no one around you.

It took a miracle for King Nebuchadnezzar to believe that the God of Israel was the true God. Why or how did you decide to believe that God is the God of our world?