

Daniel 3:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Analysis

The devastating phrase "But if not" (vehen la, אֲלֵךְ) introduces one of Scripture's most powerful declarations of unconditional faith. After affirming God's ability to deliver (v. 17), the three Hebrews now address the possibility that God may choose not to rescue them from the furnace. The conjunction "but" marks a crucial pivot—their faith doesn't depend on receiving the outcome they desire. This isn't doubt but mature faith that trusts God's character regardless of circumstances.

"Be it known unto thee, O king" is a formal, defiant declaration. They're not begging for mercy or negotiating terms but making an authoritative pronouncement to the most powerful ruler on earth. The phrase "we will not serve thy gods" uses strong negative language—absolute refusal without qualification, hesitation, or compromise. The parallel statement "nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" reinforces their total rejection of idolatry in any form.

This verse establishes the highest standard of faith—trusting God even when He doesn't deliver from suffering, serving Him even when obedience leads to death. Their commitment isn't contingent on favorable outcomes but rooted in God's worthiness regardless of what He permits. This anticipates Job's declaration "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15) and finds ultimate fulfillment in Christ's Gethsemane prayer, "not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

Historical Context

This declaration came at the moment of ultimate crisis—standing before an enraged Nebuchadnezzar who had absolute power to execute them immediately. Ancient Near Eastern kings tolerated no defiance; execution for refusing royal commands was standard. The Babylonian context made their stand even more remarkable—Babylon's pantheon included hundreds of deities, and Babylonian religion was characteristically syncretistic, easily accommodating additional gods.

Yet the three Hebrews recognized that outward conformity to idolatry, regardless of inner mental reservations, violated the first and second commandments (Exodus 20:3-5). Their refusal demonstrated that true worship involves external actions, not merely internal beliefs.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What "furnaces" might God allow in your life to test whether your faith is contingent on favorable outcomes or rooted in His worthiness?
2. How can you cultivate faith that releases control of outcomes to God while maintaining unwavering commitment to His commands?

Interlinear Text

וְאִם	לֹא	יָדוּעַ	לֵּיהִיא	לְךָ	מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהִים	יְיָ	לֵאלֹהֶיךָ	לֹא
But if	nor	known	be it	H0	unto thee O king	H1768	thy gods	nor
H2006	H3809	H3046	H1934		H4430		H426	H3809
אֵת יְיָ	נִשְׁתָּעַבְדָּם	וְלֹא	לְעִלְזָהּ	אֵת	יְיָ	הָאֱלֹהִים	הָאֲשֶׁר	לֹא
that we will	serve	image	the golden	H1768	which thou hast set up		nor	
H383	H6399	H6755	H1722		H6966		H3809	

נִשְׁתָּעַבְדָּם
worship
H5457

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 10:39 (Parallel theme): He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Revelation 12:11 (Parallel theme): And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Joshua 24:15 (References God): And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

Job 13:15 (Parallel theme): Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

Proverbs 28:1 (Parallel theme): The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Daniel 3:28 (Kingdom): Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Acts 4:19 (References God): But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

Leviticus 19:4 (References God): Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I am the LORD your God.

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