

A Different Take on Nebuchadnezzar's Fiery Furnace

We all know the historical account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego being thrown into the furnace by king Nebuchadnezzar. However, what the Israeli men said to the king is not what we think it was.

The traditional rendering of the account is like this:

Daniel 3:16-18 (RSV) – *“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”*

This is the common interpretation, but it leads to the idea that the men were double-minded. The underlining in the passage above highlights where this occurs. Initially they say that Jehovah will deliver them, and then they say that he may not. That's double-mindedness and it doesn't make any sense in light of the men's faith.

So what did they really say?

The important thing to understand is that the passage was written in Aramaic,¹ not Hebrew or English. In all languages, words are important, so it's critical that we understand what the original writing was stating, not what our religious tradition tells us.

“The phrase “if it be so” is the Aramaic word 'hen'. If what be so? In verse 15 these men of God are threatened with being cast into the furnace. Their reply “if it be so” is referring to the threat. “If it be so that you throw us into the furnace...”

They then continue: “But if not”. But if not what? The Aramaic words here are 'hen la'. The 'la' is the negative added to the original 'hen'. 'Hen' = “if it be so”. 'Hen la' = “if it be not so”. The original declaration was in regards to the threat. The following 'hen la' refers to the same threat!

This is what is being said: “If it be so that you throw us into the furnace, our God will deliver us. If it be not so (if you change your mind and don't throw us in the furnace) be it known to you that we still won't serve your gods...”²

What the men said now makes perfect sense. They were not double-minded in their faith in Jehovah.

Our faith needs to be the same, not double-minded as it often is when we 'hedge our bets' about him 'coming through' for us.

NOTE: This interpretation matches what I've read elsewhere. When I find that confirmation, I'll update this article.

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(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)

1 – “Why are sections of Daniel and Ezra in Aramaic?” evidenceforchristianity.org/why-are-sections-of-daniel-and-ezra-in-aramaic

2 – Barry Bennett (20-5-2017) “What Did They Really Say?” secretplacesofelelyon.wordpress.com/tag/double-mindedness