

The Furnace of Egypt and Babylon

First, consider these seven parallels between the situations, characters, and actions in the books of Exodus and Daniel:

1. Both occur when Israel is in exile—first in Egypt, then in Babylon.
2. Both involve hostile foreign kings who persecute God's people—Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar.
3. Both revolve around idolatry, for Pharaoh was considered the incarnation of a god and Nebuchadnezzar had erected a golden image before which he commanded all to bow.
4. Both kings initially mock the God of Israel. Pharaoh asks, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?” (Exod. 5:2). And Nebuchadnezzar asks, “Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” (Dan. 3:16).
5. Both involve furnaces of fire. The three men are cast “into the burning fiery furnace” (Dan. 3:23) and Egypt is called the “iron furnace” (Deut. 4:20; 1 Kgs. 8:51; Jer. 11:4).
6. In both stories, God sends “his angel” (lit. “his messenger”) to rescue his people and lead them out of the furnace (Exod. 23:20-21; Dan. 3:28).
7. Both narratives conclude with the king, overcome by the display of divine power, forced to confess the superiority of the God of Israel (Exod. 12:31-32; Dan. 3:28-30).

These parallels are too many and too convincing to shrug off. The story of the three young men was composed with exodus melodies woven throughout it. To read Daniel without the Exodus in mind is like listening to lyrics shorn of music. It falls flat. Only by reading the Babylonian-furnace story alongside the Egyptian-furnace story are we able to fully hear what God is promising.

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