

The Iron Furnace
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Introduction: How can God take a rebellious man and turn him into a son of God?

- A. The heart of man left alone will follow the flesh! (**Rom 3:10-18,23**)
 - 1. Even when men praised Jesus He knew what was in man! (**Jn 2:23-24**)
 - 2. It takes a mighty power to change this stubborn heart. (**Jer 13:23-24**)
 - 3. What kind of power was used to change your heart?
- B. The conversion of Paul illustrates how God uses suffering to bring men to Him.
 - 1. When Paul was struck blind and then allowed to think about matters in a helpless state God described Paul's previous attitude as kicking "against the goads." (**Acts 9:3-5**)
 - 2. κέντρον - kentron ☐ AV - sting 3, prick 2; 5 ☐ 1) a sting, as that of bees, scorpions, locusts...2) an iron goad, for urging on oxen, horses and other beasts of burden 2a) hence the proverb, "to kick against the goad", i.e. to offer vain and perilous or ruinous resistance.
 - 3. One of the greatest blessings man might find is a "goad" from God.

I. What kind of furnace does God use?

- A. The nation of Israel was reminded of the fact that God used a furnace. (**Deut 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer 11:4**)
 - 1. כּוּר kuwr ☐ from an unused root meaning properly, to dig through; ☐ AV – furnace 9; 9 1) furnace, forge, smelting furnace or pot v 2) (Qal) to bore, pierce, dig, hew.
 - 2. Here it is a smelting furnace that denotes a purifying refining process. This is not a furnace used to cook or heat a home. (**Prov 17:3; 27:21**)
- B. God often had to get His furnace out when dealing with the nation of Israel. (**Isa 48:10**)
 - 1. The destruction of Jerusalem and the ensuing captivity would bring a different people in time! (**Ezek 22:18, 20, 22**)
 - 2. This furnace was one of testing where the true character can be shown and true faith can be built!
 - 3. Was the captivity a bad event for Daniel and his friends? NO!
 - 4. Jesus was put through the furnace and His true character clearly shown to us. (**Rev 1:15**)

III. How did God build a nation?

- A. Consider the beginnings of God's people in Egypt. (**Gen 46:31-34**)
 - 1. God wanted a separation and a purity of his people.
 - 2. For many years the people did have favor with Pharaoh and they lived in ease.
 - 3. When a king arose that did not know Joseph then the comfort ended. (**Ex 1:8,12-14**)
- B. The furnace helped the people to see that their only hope was in God! (**Ex 2:23-24**)
 - 1. During this time a generation of male babies were slaughtered. (**Ex 1:13-16**)
 - 2. Finally the desire for Egypt had been boiled out of them in "the iron furnace!"
 - 3. Now and only now are they ready for deliverance.

II. How does God bring a man to Him?

- A. Like Paul, a man must be first brought down to his knees. (**Acts 16:25-29**)
 - 1. Everyone must be brought to the point where they are not only sick of the world but also of themselves.
 - 2. There comes a time of honesty where you see the vain empty life you live and want the peace that can only come from God. (**Jn 14:27; 16:31-33**)
- B. Sadly most men will not learn from their adversity but will close and harden their hearts. (**Rev 9:5-6, 20-21**)
 - 1. Whatever event that causes you to see the truth about who you are and what you need is worth it.
 - 2. Satan will try to quickly redirect an opening heart to bitterness so the blindness he has imposed will remain. (**2 Cor 4:4**)
 - 3. Does God need to wake you up?

III. How does God continue to mold the heart of His servant?

- A. How many of you need the gift of patience? (**Jas 1:2-3**)
 - 1. One of the best teachers we have is adversity.
 - 2. I have had occasions to talk with my sons about bitter losses in sports. How can these events be the very thing needed to move forward?
 - B. Look at the great men of faith and look how God allowed them to be tested by fire.
 - 1. Consider Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. What kind of men were they at first and what did they become? (**1 Pt 1:6-9**)
 - 2. Can bad things happen to good people? Ask Job. (**Job 1:8-12**)
 - 3. What did Job learn in the end? (**Job 42:5-6**)
 - 4. This is a process where we come to “abhor” ourselves and marvel in better knowing our awesome God.
 - C. The furnace is used to prepare us for a greater usefulness. (**2 Cor 1:3-5**)
 - 1. The most difficult experiences I had to go through as a Christian have proven to provide me with tools that I often use to help others today. (**Heb 5:7-9**)
 - 2. One of the essentials in reaching others with the gospel is a heart that understands the pain of being captured by Satan and who genuinely wants to rescue others from his reach. (**2 Tim 2:24-26**)
 - 3. One of the best things that could happen to those on the roles of churches is an adversity that will expose and tenderize our hearts. (Ex. Recent study)
 - 4. Why did Jesus speak to Peter of a later “conversion” to Him. (**Lk 22:31-32**)
- “Every wise workman takes his tools away from the work from time to time that they may be ground and sharpened; so does the only-wise Jehovah take his ministers oftentimes away into darkness and loneliness and trouble, that he may sharpen and prepare them for harder work in his service.” - Robert Murray McCheyne

Conclusion: God’s work with us in the furnace is for our good.

- A. For the hard changes in our lives we need God’s help! (**Mal 3:3**)
- B. Remember in the days of hardship our God has a plan for good. (**Deut 8:14-17**)