

BIBLE CHARACTERS

by

D. L. Moody

Copyright © 1900

by

Moody Press

CHAPTER 3

NEBUCHADNEZZARS IMAGE.

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was three-score cubits: he set it up in the plains of Dur in the province of Babylon" (Daniel 3:1)

Time went on - possibly several years; and now we reach a crisis indeed. Whether or not that dream of a gigantic human figure continued to haunt Nebuchadnezzar we cannot say; but it is quite possible that the dream may have in some sort suggested Nebuchadnezzar's next proceeding. He ordered the construction of an immense image. It was to be of gold - not simply gilded, but actually of gold. Gold is a symbol of prosperity; and at this time Babylon was prosperous. In like manner in the prosperous days of Jerusalem, gold was abundant. And it may have been that some of the precious metal, carried as the spoils of war from the Jewish capital, was used in the construction of this image of gold. It was of colossal size - over ninety feet high, and between nine and ten feet wide. This gigantic image was set up in the plain of Dura, near to the city. I suppose Nebuchadnezzar wanted to gratify his imperial vanity by inaugurating a universal religion.

When the time came for the dedication, Daniel was not there. He may have been away in Egypt; or in some one of the many provinces, attending to the affairs of the empire. If he had been there we should have heard of him. Satraps, princes, governors, counselors, high secretaries, judges, were ordered to be present at the dedication of the image. What a gathering that morning! It was the fashionable thing to be seen that morning driving to the plain of Dura. Of course it was: all the great people, and all the rich people, were to be there. Now hark! the trumpet sounds; the herald shouts: **"To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."**

Perhaps a part of the ceremony consisted in the unveiling of the statue, as we say. One thing, however, is certain: that at the given signal all the people were required to fall to the earth, and worship. But in the law of GOD there was something against that: GOD's voice had spoken at Sinai; GOD's finger had written on the table of stone - **Thou Shalt Have None Other gods**

Before Me. GOD's law went right against the kings. I said Daniel was not on the plain of Dura. But his influence was there. He had influenced those three friends of his - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were there; and they were actuated by the same spirit as Daniel. Their position brought them here at the hour of the dedication.

Now mark you, no man can be true for GOD, and live for Him, without at some time or other being unpopular in this world. Those men who are trying to live for both worlds make a wreck of it; for at some time or other the collision is sure to come. Ah, would all of us have advised Daniel's three friends to do the right thing at any hazard? Are there not some of us with so little backbone that we would have counseled these three just to bow down a little, so that no one could take notice - to merely bow down, but not to worship? Daniel and his friends, when they first came to Babylon, perceived that the two worlds - the present world and the world to come - would be in collision: and they went for the world to come; they went for things unseen: they did not judge for the time being only; they took their stand right there. Even if it cost them their lives, what of that! It would only hasten them to the glory; and they would receive the greater reward. They took their stand for GOD and for the unseen world. The faithful three utterly refused to bend the knee to a GOD of gold.

A terrible penalty was associated with disobedience to the king's command: Whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

How many would cry out in this city - in every city - Give me gold, give me money; and I will do anything. Some people may think and say that the men of Nebuchadnezzar's day ought not to have bowed down to a golden idol; but they themselves are every day doing just that very thing. Money is their GOD; social position their golden image. There are plenty of men today who are bowing down to the golden image that the world has set up. Give me gold! give me gold; and you may have Heaven. Give me position; and you may have the world to come. Give me worldly honor; and I will sell out my hopes of Heaven. Give me the thirty pieces of silver; and I will give you CHRIST. That is the cry of the world today.

And now the order is given - very probably by the king himself - that the bands should strike up; just the same as on public occasions bands of music do now. The music could be heard afar off; and when the first notes burst forth all were to bow down to the golden image. Earth's great ones and mighty ones bowed down at the king's command. But there were three with stiff knees which did not bend. Those were Daniel's three friends, who knew well that to do the king's bidding would be to break the law of their GOD; and they at all events will not fall down and worship. At the king's command they had come to the dedication: there might be nothing wrong in that: but they will not bow down. They were too stiff in the backbone for that. They remembered the command, **Thou shalt have none other gods before Me.** These are the kind of servants GOD wants - men who will stand up bravely and fearlessly for Him.

Like all the servants of the Lord, and all who walk in the atmosphere of Heaven, these three Hebrews had enemies. There were some who bore them a bitter grudge. Very possibly they were thought to have had undue preference in being promoted to office. So there were some others, besides the three young Hebrews, who did not worship as commanded. Do you know what they were doing? They were watching to see Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. If they themselves had bowed their faces to the ground, according to Nebuchadnezzar's command, they would not

have seen that Daniel's three friends refused to bow: they would not have seen the three young Hebrews standing up, erect, straight. There were those Chaldeans looking out of the corners of their eyes, and watching the three young men. These young Jews had so carried themselves, and had so lived in Babylon, that their watchers felt sure they would not bow down. They knew well that the three would not sacrifice principle. They would go as far as it was lawful in obeying the king's commands; but a time would come when they would draw the line. When the commands of the earthly sovereign come in conflict with the commands of the GOD of Heaven they will not yield. The watchers watched; but the young men did not bow.

Thank GOD, they had backbone, if you will allow me the expression. Something held their knees firm; they would not give in: there they stood as firm as rock. They did not get half-way down, and just make believe that they were going to worship the image: there was nothing of that kind: they stood up erect and firm.

Some of those Chaldeans wished to get rid of these young Hebrews: they perhaps wanted their places: they were after their offices. Men have been the same in all ages. There were, no doubt, a good many men in Babylon who wanted to get their posts. These three men had high positions; there was a good deal of honor attached to their offices: and their enemies wanted to oust them, and to succeed to their offices. It is a very bad state of things when men try to pull down others in order to obtain their places; and there is a good deal of that, you know, in this world. Many a man has had his character blasted and ruined by some person or other who wanted to step into his place and position.

So away went those men to the king to lay an information. They duly rendered the salutation, O king, live forever! and then they went on to tell him of those rebellious Hebrews who would not obey the king's order. Do you know, O king, that there are three men in your kingdom who will not obey your command?

Three men in my kingdom who will not obey me! roars Nebuchadnezzar; no! who are they? what are their names?

Why, those three Hebrew slaves whom you set over us - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When the music struck up they did not bow down; and it is noised all around: the people know it. And if you allow them to go unpunished, it will not be long before your law will be perfectly worthless.

I can imagine the king almost speechless with rage, and just gesturing his commands that the men should be brought before him.

Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you would not bow down and worship the golden image which I set up in the plain of Dura?

It is true, quite true, says one of them - perhaps Shadrach. Quite true, O king.

One last chance Nebuchadnezzar resolved to give them. **Now, if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made - well: but if ye worship**

not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is that GOD that shall deliver you out of my hands?

That is pretty plain speaking, is it not? There is no mincing or smoothing over matters. Do this, and live; do not do it, and you die. But the threat that the king held out had few terrors for them. **They turned and said to the king: O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee 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 thine hand, O king. 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.**

And that is plain speaking, too. The king of Babylon had not been accustomed to be talked to like that. And he did not like it. We are told he was full of fury.

These Hebrews spoke respectfully, but firmly. And mark, they did not absolutely say that GOD would deliver them from the burning fiery furnace; but they declared that He was able to deliver them. They had no doubt about His ability to do it. They believed that He would do it; but they did not hide from themselves the possibility of Nebuchadnezzar being allowed to carry out his threats. Still, that did not greatly move them. But if not - if in His inscrutable purposes He allows us to suffer - still our resolve is the same: we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. They were not afraid to pass from the presence of the king of Babylon to the presence of the King of kings. They had courage, those men. I wonder if there could be found three such brave men in New York, or in Boston, or in Baltimore, or in Chicago, now. How settled they were in their minds! Thank GOD for such courage! thank GOD for such boldness! A few such men, brave and fearless for GOD, would soon turn the world upside down. Nowadays they would be thought fanatics: they would be advised to bow down outwardly, and never to mind the worship of the image. But even the semblance of worshipping an image was too much for them; and they were determined to avoid even the appearance of evil.

Look at the king! I can imagine him in his fury, trembling like an aspen leaf, and turning pale as death with rage. What! disobey me, the great and mighty king? Call in the mighty men; and let them bind these rebels hand and foot. Heat the furnace seven times hotter than its wont; and then in with these rebellious fellows! They shall not live.

Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

The command was instantly executed; and they were hurled into the terrible blaze. The fire was so furious that the flames consumed the officers who thrust them in. The three young Hebrews fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace; and it seemed as if they were in a bad case then. From his royal seat the king peered forth, looking out to see the rebels burnt to ashes. But when Nebuchadnezzar gazed, expecting the gratification of his vengeance, to his great amazement he saw the men walking about in the midst of the flames; walking, mind you - they were not running - walking as if in the midst of green pastures or on the margin of still waters. There was no difference in them, except that their bonds were burnt off. Ah, it does my heart good to think that the worst the devil is allowed to do is to burn off the bonds of GOD's children. If CHRIST be with us, the direst afflictions can only loosen our earthly bonds, and set us free to

soar the higher.

Nebuchadnezzar beheld strange things that day. There, through the flames, he saw FOUR men walking in the midst of the fire, although only three had been cast therein. How was this? The Great Shepherd in yonder Heaven saw that three of His lambs were in trouble; and He leaped down from there right into the fiery furnace. And when Nebuchadnezzar looked in, a fourth form was to be seen.

Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

It was doubtless the Son of GOD. That Great Shepherd of the sheep saw that three of His true servants were in peril; and He came from His Father's presence and His Father's bosom to be with them in it. There had been One watching that terrible scene of attempting to burn the faithful; and His tender pitying eye saw that men were condemned to death because of their loyalty to Him. With one great leap He sprang from the Father's presence, from His palace in glory, right down into the fiery furnace, and was by their side before the heat of the fire could come near unto them. JESUS was with His servants as the flames wreathed around them. **And not a hair of their heads was singed; they were not scorched; not even the smell of fire was upon them.** I can almost fancy I hear them chanting: **When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.**

- GOD can take care of us when we pass through the waters;
- GOD can take care of us when we pass through the fires.

GOD is able to take care of us, if we will but stand up for Him: GOD will take care of us, if we will but stand up for Him. Young man, honor GOD; and GOD will honor you. What you have to do is to take your stand upon GOD's side. And if you have to go against the whole world, take that stand.

- dare to do right;
- dare to be true;
- dare to be honest:

Let the consequences be what they may. You may have to forfeit your situation; because you cannot, and will not, do something which your employer requires you to do, but which your conscience tells you is wrong. Give up your situation then, rather than give up your principles. If your employer requires you to sell goods by means of misrepresentation, fraud, or falsehood, give up your situation, and say, I will rather die a pauper; I will rather die in a poorhouse; than be unfaithful to my principles. That is the kind of stuff those men were made of. These glorious heroes braved even death because GOD was with them. O friends, we want to be Christians with the same backbone: men and women who are prepared to stand up for the right, heeding not what the world may say or what the world may think.

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spoke,

and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the Most High GOD, come forth, and come hither. And they walked out, untouched by the fire. They came out, like giants in their conscious strength. I can fancy how the princes, the governors, the counselors, and the great men, crowded around them to see such an unheard-of sight. Their garments showed no trace of fire; their hair even was not singed - as if GOD would teach that He guards even the very hairs of our head. Nebuchadnezzar had defied GOD; and had been conquered. GOD had proved Himself able to deliver His servants out of the king's hand. Nebuchadnezzar accepted his defeat. And he makes a decree: That every people, nation, and language, which speak anything against the GOD of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other GOD that can deliver after this sort. And he promoted these three witnesses to higher place and position, and put greater honor upon them. GOD stood by them because they had stood by Him. He will have us learn to do a thing just because it is right, and not because it is popular. The outlook may appear like death: but do the right; and, if we stand firm, GOD will bring everything for the best. That is the last we hear of these three men. GOD sent them to Babylon to shine - and they shone.

LIVING! WORKING! WAITING!

Who would not live for JESUS,
Rejoicing, glad and free?
The music of a ransomed life
Is all He asks from thee.

Who would not work for JESUS,
When service is but song?
The rippling of a stream of love
That bears thy soul along?

Who would not die for JESUS,
When death is victory?
The grand, overshadowing portal-gate
Guarding eternity?

Who would not wait for JESUS,
And waiting, sweetly sing?
Hushing their heart with promises
While tarrying for their King?

Eva Travers Poole

~ end of chapter 3 ~
