

This is a portion of a larger book. In this version, the Bible texts have been modified into modern English, the punctuation improved, headings and emphasis may have been added, and some sentences realigned.

Chapter 4

The Fiery Furnace

In the same year that Daniel and his companions entered the service of the king of Babylon events occurred that severely tested the integrity of these youthful Hebrews and proved before an idolatrous nation the power and faithfulness of the God of Israel.

While King Nebuchadnezzar was looking forward with anxious forebodings to the future, he had a remarkable dream, by which he was greatly troubled, “and his sleep broke from him” (Daniel 2:1). But although this vision of the night made a deep impression on his mind, he found it impossible to recall the particulars. He applied to his astrologers and magicians, and with promises of great wealth and honour commanded them to tell him his dream and its interpretation. But they said, “Tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation” (verse 4).

The king knew that if they could really tell the interpretation, they could tell the dream as well. The LORD had in His providence given Nebuchadnezzar this dream, and had caused the particulars to be forgotten, while the fearful impression was left upon his mind, in order to expose the pretensions of the wise men of Babylon. The monarch was very angry, and threatened that they should all be slain if, in a given time, the dream was not made known. Daniel and his companions were to perish with the false prophets; but, taking his life in his hand, Daniel ventures to enter the presence of the king, begging that time may be granted that he may show the dream and the interpretation.

To this request the monarch accedes; and now Daniel gathers his three companions, and together they take the matter before God, seeking for wisdom from the Source of light and knowledge. Although they were in the king's court, surrounded with temptation, they did not forget their responsibility to God. They were strong in the consciousness that His providence had placed them where they were; that they were doing His work, meeting the demands of truth and duty. They had confidence toward God. They had turned to Him for strength when in perplexity and danger, and He had been to them an ever-present help.

The Secret Revealed

The servants of God did not plead with Him in vain. They had honoured Him, and in the hour of trial He honoured them. The secret was revealed to Daniel, and he hastened to request an interview with the king.

The Jewish captive stands before the monarch of the most powerful empire the sun has ever shone upon. The king is in great distress amid all his riches and glory, but the youthful exile is peaceful and happy in his God. Now, if ever, is the time for Daniel to exalt himself, to make prominent his own goodness and superior wisdom.

But his first effort is to disclaim all honour for himself and to exalt God as the source of wisdom:

“The secret which the king has demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, show to the king; but there is a God in heaven that reveals secrets, and makes known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days” (Daniel 2:27, 28). The king listens with solemn attention as every particular of the dream is reproduced; and when the interpretation is faithfully given, he feels that he can rely upon it as a divine revelation.

The solemn truths conveyed in this vision of the night made a deep impression on the sovereign's mind, and in humility and awe he fell down and worshiped, saying, “Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a LORD of kings, and a revealer of secrets” (verse 47).

The Golden Image

Light direct from Heaven had been permitted to shine upon King Nebuchadnezzar, and for a little time he was influenced by the fear of God. But a few years of prosperity filled his heart with pride, and he forgot his acknowledgment of the living God. He resumed his idol worship with increased zeal and bigotry.

From the treasures obtained in war he made a golden image to represent the one that he had seen in his dream, setting it up in the plain of Dura, and commanding all the rulers and the people to worship it, on pain of death. This statue was about ninety feet in height and nine in breadth, and in the eyes of that idolatrous people it presented a most imposing and majestic appearance. A proclamation was issued calling upon all the officers of the kingdom to assemble at the dedication of the image, and at the sound of the musical

instruments, to bow down and worship it. Should any fail to do this, they were immediately to be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

The appointed day has come, and the vast company is assembled, when word is brought to the king that the three Hebrews whom he has set over the province of Babylon have refused to worship the image. These are Daniel's three companions, who had been called by the king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Full of rage, the monarch calls them before him, and pointing to the angry furnace, tells them the punishment that will be theirs if they refuse obedience to his will.

In vain were the king's threats. He could not turn these noble men from their allegiance to the great Ruler of nations. They had learned from the history of their fathers that disobedience to God is dishonour, disaster, and ruin; that the fear of the LORD is not only the beginning of wisdom but the foundation of all true prosperity. They look with calmness upon the fiery furnace and the idolatrous throng. They have trusted in God, and He will not fail them now. Their answer is respectful, but decided: "Be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:18).

The proud monarch is surrounded by his great men, the officers of the government, and the army that has conquered nations; and all unite in applauding him as having the wisdom and power of the gods. In the midst of this imposing display stand the three youthful Hebrews, steadily persisting in their refusal to obey the king's decree. They had been obedient to the laws of Babylon so far as these did not conflict with the claims of God, but they would not be swayed a hair's breadth from the duty they owed to their Creator.

The king's wrath knew no limits. In the very height of his power and glory, to be thus defied by the representatives of a despised and captive race was an insult which his proud spirit could not endure. The fiery furnace had been heated seven times more than it was wont, and into it were cast the Hebrew exiles. So furious were the flames, that the men who cast them in were burned to death.

In the Presence of the Infinite

Suddenly the countenance of the king paled with terror. His eyes were fixed upon the glowing flames, and turning to his lords, he said, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" (verse 24). The answer was, "True, O king". And now the monarch exclaimed, "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” (verse 25).

When Christ manifests Himself to the children of men, an unseen power speaks to their souls. They feel themselves to be in the presence of the Infinite One. Before His majesty, kings and nobles tremble, and acknowledge that the living God is above every earthly power.

With feelings of remorse and shame, the king exclaimed, “You servants of the most high God, come forth” (verse 26). And they obeyed, showing themselves unhurt before that vast multitude, not even the smell of fire being upon their garments. This miracle produced a striking change in the minds of the people. The great golden image, set up with such display, was forgotten. The king published a decree that any one speaking against the God of these men should be put to death, “because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort” (verse 29).

Steadfast Integrity and the Sanctified Life

These three Hebrews possessed genuine sanctification.

True Christian principle will not stop to weigh consequences. It does not ask, What will people think of me if I do this? or, How will it affect my worldly prospects if I do that? With the most intense longing the children of God desire to know what He would have them do, that their works may glorify Him. The LORD has made ample provision that the hearts and lives of all His followers may be controlled by divine grace, that they may be as burning and shining lights in the world.

These faithful Hebrews possessed great natural ability, they had enjoyed the highest intellectual culture, and now occupied a position of honour; but all this did not lead them to forget God. Their powers were yielded to the sanctifying influence of divine grace. By their steadfast integrity they showed forth the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. In their wonderful deliverance were displayed, before that vast assembly, the power and majesty of God. Jesus placed Himself by their side in the fiery furnace, and by the glory of His presence convinced the proud king of Babylon that it could be no other than the Son of God. The light of Heaven had been shining forth from Daniel and his companions, until all their associates understood the faith which ennobled their lives and beautified their characters. By the deliverance of His faithful servants, the LORD declares that He will take His stand with the oppressed and overthrow

all earthly powers that would trample upon the authority of the God of heaven.

A Lesson to the Fainthearted

What a lesson is here given to the fainthearted, the vacillating, the cowardly in the cause of God! What encouragement to those who will not be turned aside from duty by threats or peril!

These faithful, steadfast characters exemplify sanctification, while they have no thought of claiming the high honour.

The amount of good which may be accomplished by comparatively obscure but devoted Christians cannot be estimated until the life records shall be made known, when the judgment shall sit and the books be opened.

Christ identifies His interest with this class; He is not ashamed to call them brothers [and sisters]. There should be hundreds where there is now one among us, so closely allied to God, their lives in such close conformity to His will, that they would be bright and shining lights, sanctified wholly, in soul, body, and spirit.

The conflict still goes on between the children of light and the children of darkness. Those who name the name of Christ should shake off the lethargy that enfeebles their efforts, and should meet the momentous responsibilities that devolve upon them. All who do this may expect the power of God to be revealed in them. The Son of God, the world's Redeemer, will be represented in their words and in their works, and God's name will be glorified.

.

As in the days of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so in the closing period of earth's history the LORD will work mightily in behalf of those who stand steadfastly for the right. He who walked with the Hebrew worthies in the fiery furnace will be with His followers wherever they are. His abiding presence will comfort and sustain. In the midst of the time of trouble – trouble such as has not been since there was a nation – His chosen ones will stand unmoved. Satan with all the hosts of evil cannot destroy the weakest of God's saints. Angels that excel in strength will protect them, and in their behalf Jehovah will reveal Himself as a “God of gods,” able to save to the uttermost those who have put their trust in Him. – Prophets and Kings, p. 513.

oooOooo