

## **MARCH OF EMPIRE - LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF DANIEL**

*by Floyd Hitchcock*

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### **CHAPTER 4**

#### **Better to Die in A Furnace than to Disobey GOD**

#### **LESSON TEXT – Daniel 3:17**

*A Study of This Book of Prophecy Is of Present Interest and Importance -- The Last Stage of World Empire During "The Times of the Gentiles" Will Be Destroyed by the Power of CHRIST Who Will Then Establish His Own Messianic Kingdom Over the Nations of the Whole Earth -- Because Daniel's Interpretation of the Dream Pleas'd the King He Promoted Daniel and His Three Companions to Positions of Power and Influence in Babylon -- The Times of the Gentiles Began with an Image for Idol Worship and Will End in the Same Way -- The King Carried Out His Plans But the Three Hebrew Children Refused to Obey -- They Would Rather Die Than to Disobey God's Word -- Their Faith in GOD Took Away Any Fear of Man, So That they Did Not Fear Even the Wrath of the King -- It Pays to Stand Alone If You Are on GOD's Side of Any Question*

This is a very interesting and timely Book, to study just now because Daniel was the great prophet to the Gentiles. Our present studies in Daniel should be all the more interesting because of what is now taking place in Palestine, and in Europe, and throughout the world. Before we have finished our study of this book, you will see that there is a reason for all that is coming to pass in these momentous days in which we live.

We have already studied the personal history of Daniel and his three companions who were carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon, where they were taught the learning of the Chaldeans, in order that they might serve in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar, who was King of Babylon.

We have also studied concerning the dream which Nebuchadnezzar had in which he saw the great metallic image which was a symbol of the march of empire during the times of the Gentiles.

According to the interpretation of the dream which Daniel gave, the metallic image was a symbol of the four successive world empires, beginning with Babylon and including Medo-Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire.

## **THE LAST WORLD EMPIRE OF THE GENTILE AGE**

The last stage of Gentile world dominion, we learned, was represented by the ten toes of the image which correspond to ten kings who will arise in the last days of the present dispensation.

Our last lesson was based upon verses 44 and 45 of chapter two, where it says, **"And in the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to the people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure."**

## **HOW DANIEL'S INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM AFFECTED THE KING**

As a result of the wise and correct interpretation of the dream, which Daniel had given, in Daniel 2:46-49 it says, **"Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him. The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth, it is, that you God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king."**

With these things well in mind, let us proceed to a study of the third chapter.

## **THE IMAGE WHICH THE KING SET UP**

In Daniel 3:1-7 it says, **"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent, to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasures, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, 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. Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up."**

## **THE KING HAD FAILED TO HEED GOD'S WORD**

To say the least, this is the beginning of a very interesting story. GOD had revealed some very great truths to King Nebuchadnezzar through the dream which he had given to him and through the interpretation of it as given by Daniel, but from our lesson text it appears as if Nebuchadnezzar profited very little by it, for we discover that soon after this he made an image of gold and set it up in the place of Dura, in the province of Babylon to be worshipped.

It seems utterly impossible to discover anything about the image except that it was made of gold and that it was three-score cubits high and six cubits wide. It is generally thought that this image of gold was made in the form of a man, after the form of the metallic image which Nebuchadnezzar had seen in his dream, or that it was an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. But there is no way of knowing this for sure.

The Bible narrative simply says, "**Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.**"

## **IDOLATRY**

Regardless of what the image was like or what caused the king to make it, we know that it was an image which was associated with the idea of heathen, idolatrous worship.

Because Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar that he was the head of gold, of the image which he had seen in his dream, it is thought by some that he was lifted up in pride and that he conceived this idea of deifying himself in an effort to unify the different religions of his kingdom. If this is what happened, it goes to show that instead of being humbled by the great revelation of divine truth which GOD had given unto him, he was lifted up in pride, and the truth which he had learned tempted him to do the wrong thing. Instead of using the truth which he had received, to honor GOD, Who gave it, he used it to glorify himself.

## **HOW GOD DEALT WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL**

We are reminded just here of the Apostle Paul to whom GOD, at a later time, gave special revelation concerning the great mystery of the church, which is the body of CHRIST. Before His conversion, the great apostle had been a very proud man and there was much danger that because of the great revelation of divine truth, which GOD had committed unto him, that he would become lifted up in pride, perhaps more so than he had ever been. Therefore, in order to keep him humble, GOD gave to the Apostle Paul a thorn in the flesh. We do not know what this thorn in the flesh was, but whatever it was, it served GOD's purpose in keeping the

great Apostle humble after he had received such glorious revelations of divine truth the like of which had been given to no other man on earth, except unto him.

## **MOSES**

Moses was another man whom GOD used mightily. He might well have been lifted up in pride, but on the contrary we are told that he was one of the meekest men of the earth.

This was not so of King Nebuchadnezzar. When GOD had revealed these things unto him, through His prophet, because he was unregenerate in heart, he yielded to the temptation and became lifted up with spiritual pride. Spiritual pride is one of the most obnoxious things in the world. It is a sad thing when some humble young man studies for the ministry and then, because he obtains some knowledge of the Word of GOD which others do not possess, he becomes lifted up with pride and conducts himself with an air of superiority.

## **WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL**

Indeed, my friends, even divine truth and a good understanding of the Bible, if a person does not hold it in divine fellowship with GOD, is likely to puff one up to where he will be of little or no use whatever in the cause of CHRIST. In other words, the more we know, the more humble we ought to be. One of the saddest things in the world, therefore, is when a preacher becomes proud of what he knows and is lifted up with pride.

## **THE KING CARRIED OUT HIS PLANS**

That is exactly what happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore when he had made the image of gold and had caused it to be set up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon **"Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up."**

After the people had assembled from the various provinces to attend the dedication service of the great image, then the king commanded music to be played, and that all, who would not fall down and worship the image, when the music was sounded, should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSIC**

It is interesting to note what an important place music had in this event of idolatrous worship. Music, my friends, is a powerful thing, and King Nebuchadnezzar was wise enough to know the influences which it has over the emotional nature of men. He depended, therefore, upon the influence of music to prepare the minds and hearts of the people, and cause them to worship the image which he had made. It is doubtful whether his scheme would have been a success at all without such wonderful music. As we know, music excites the emotions and some people, when they go to church and hear the music of a great orchestra, go away

feeling as if they had worshipped GOD. The fact however that we enjoy good music in the church service is little proof that we have really worshipped GOD in spirit and in truth. I am satisfied that some people go to church because they love the music which they hear, more than they love GOD. If it were not for the music in our churches very few people would attend, just in order to hear the Word of GOD. I am reminded, therefore, of the verse which says,

"O Lord, we know it matters not  
How sweet the song may be  
No heart, but of the SPIRIT taught  
Makes melody to thee."

We affirm, therefore, that many of the people obeyed King Nebuchadnezzar, not only because of the command which the King sent forth, but because of the spell which came over them when they heard the strains of music which the king had prepared, for this very purpose.

### **THE HEBREW CHILDREN REFUSED TO OBEY**

When the worship of the image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up had gotten under way and the people were bowing before it and doing homage to it as Nebuchadnezzar required, the three Jewish companions of Daniel refused to join in such idolatrous worship. This is confirmed in verses 8 to 18 of our lesson text, where it says, **"Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee; they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 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 musick, 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? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered 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."**

### **THEY SOUGHT TO OBEY GOD'S WORD**

This is certainly another very interesting portion of this unusual narrative. The important thing in this passage just read is the fact that these three Hebrew children refused to disobey GOD in order to please, even the King of Babylon. Being Jews, they knew what was written in the law of the ten commandments concerning the matter of idolatrous worship. They were familiar with what was stated in Exodus 20:3-6 where it says, "**Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images, or any likeness of any thing that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.**"

### **NO SECOND CHOICE**

Understanding these things, they knew that the only way to protect themselves with the true GOD was to oppose the king of Babylon and refuse to worship the golden image which he had set up. This they were not afraid to do.

### **THEY MANIFESTED A REMARKABLE FAITH**

The faith and courage which they manifested is beautifully and forcefully expressed in the 17th and 18th verses of our lesson text, where they said, "**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.**"

Thus, my friends, with these words, which were born of faith and which were spoken with courage, they exposed themselves to the wrath of the king and the judgment of the fiery furnace and threw themselves unreservedly upon the power and mercy of GOD. Certainly this was a wonderful thing for them to do.

I am wondering how many people living today would have faith and courage enough to go through a similar experience as this. It means a lot to stand alone when everyone else, including the king, is against you.

The story is told of a believer, to whom the Emperor of Rome said, "All the world is against you." To this taunt, by his superior, the man is reported to have answered, "Then I am against all the world."

### **PAUL A GOOD EXAMPLE OF FAITH**

That was the sort of faith and courage which the Apostle Paul had when he went forth to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. The Jews were against him and many of the Gentiles also opposed his teaching. Nevertheless, as an intellectual and spiritual giant he stood alone and when all men forsook him, he labored on just the same to fulfill the great commission which

GOD had committed unto him of preaching the Gospel to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

### **IT PAYS TO BELIEVE AND OBEY GOD**

In my work over the air and through my magazine, The Gospel Messenger, I know from experience what it is to stand alone. This is the price which I have had to pay for the privilege of preaching the whole Bible without fear or favor to the Jews and Gentiles alike, but I am convinced that GOD is blessing His Word to those who hear it. Therefore, even if many people have forsaken us and have left us to fight the battle alone without either their moral or financial support, we know that GOD is able to bless His own Word to the hearts of those who hear it. And He is doing so, therefore, we are more determined than ever to press on in our work and service for the Lord.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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