

THE STORY OF DANIEL

by

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“Aunt Hattie’s Bible Stories” for Boys and Girls

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE GOLDEN IMAGE

THE interpretation of his dream made a great impression upon the proud and boastful king of Babylon. “***Am I not that head of gold?***” was the question uppermost in his mind.

As the years went swiftly by, Nebuchadnezzar forgot his acknowledgment that Daniel’s God was the God of gods and Lord of kings. He seemed to think only of his exalted position of monarch of the world empire.

“The head of gold, indeed,” I think he mused. “Why am I not the whole image? Why does my kingdom need to be overthrown by another? Ha! Why did I not see this before? Why should any God be greater than I or any kingdom be able to destroy mine?”

“I defy any god of heaven or earth to be greater than am. I shall make my subjects worship me and understand my power. I’ll do it this way. I’ll build an image something like the one in my dream. I’ll cover it wholly with gold and it shall represent my kingdom and my power, and my subjects shall fall down and worship me through my image.”

I think Nebuchadnezzar called for his artists and designers and told them his plans. Together they wrought out a most colossal image, ninety feet high and nine feet in diameter and covered it with gold.

It was placed in the Plain of Dura, a short distance outside the walls of the city of Babylon, where it could be seen in shining splendor from great distances in every direction.

The dedication of the image was to be a notable occasion and preparations were begun months ahead.

Invitations were sent to every province of the whole realm. Princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counsellors, sheriffs, and all rulers were commanded to come to the celebration. Let us look in and see what our friends are talking about on the eve of this great day. I think it was something like this—

“Daniel, you are fortunate to be so high up that you can manage not to go to the dedication, but what about us?” asked Hananiah.

“Sure enough, what about us? We have to go for we are each one in charge of the affairs of a province. There is no getting out of it for us,” added Mishael.

“And not only that, but we have a feeling that some of the Chaldeans are getting jealous of us and feel none too kindly toward us,” remarked Azariah.

A sad and understanding look filled Daniel’s eyes.

“Yes, it will be a testing time but what are you going to do about it?”

“Do?” they all cried in one voice. “Do you think for one minute that we will bow down to that golden image? Do you think we will worship any but the true God, the God of Israel?”

“Of course you will stand true to our God, but, friends, it may cost you your lives. Let us have another prayer meeting as we had when the king forgot his dream and we were all doomed to die.”

I think these companions, now grown to stalwart manhood, knelt in simple trusting faith before Jehovah, the true and living God. Definitely laying the matter before Him they arose in calm confidence, and peace filled their hearts.

The day of dedication dawned, and multitudes of the nobility and officials of the kingdom poured into the city of Babylon.

I suppose they had a parade headed by the king himself, and all of his gorgeous court, lords, and ladies. Perhaps it formed near the palace and moved majestically forward with the first blast of the trumpets. In triumph the colorful procession swung along the cobblestone pavements to the city gate, then over the plain to the golden image, now scintillating under the rays of the high mounting sun.

As the throng approached its destination each company lined up under its leader. When all of the great multitude was standing before the image, the herald or announcer cried—

“To you it is commanded, O people, nations and languages, that when you hear the music of the orchestra everyone of you shall fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. And, whosoever falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace.”

The orchestra leader lifted his baton and the notes of the sweet melody floated out over the waiting throng.

Down upon their knees fell the people, all of them. No, not all of them, for three Jews, in magnificent defiance, stood with heads erect as though called to attention by the God of heaven. Handsome of face, perfect of figure, clean of heart, brave and courageous they stood, each one at the head of his bowing company.

“See those high-headed Jews,” cried a group of Chaldeans, evidently appointed as spies to report any disobedience to the king’s decree. “Ha! We have caught them at last. We’ll see if they hold all of the good positions.”

So saying they made their way to the king with these words—***“O king, live forever. You made a decree that when the orchestra began to play every man should fall down and worship the golden image, and whoso did not fall down and worship should be cast into a fiery furnace.***

“Now, O King, there are three Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, whom you appointed over affairs in the province, who have not regarded your word. They serve not your gods, nor do they worship your golden image which you have set up.”

I need not tell you that the king flew into a rage.

“Bring them to me at once,” he shouted.

And the three men were brought before the king. How hushed the throng must have been and how each word must have burned itself into the hearts of our friends!

Addressing them, Nebuchadnezzar said, ***“Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that you do not serve my gods nor worship the golden image which I have set up? I’ll give you another chance. Now be ready. When you hear the first notes of the orchestra, fall down and worship the image which I have made. If you do, then well and good, but if you worship not the image, then this very hour you shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace.”***

I think I can hear the hiss of Satan as he added, ***“Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”***

How tensely the king and his subjects must have listened as the answer came clear and sure from the lips of the accused—

“O King Nebuchadnezzar, we are not afraid to answer you in this matter. If you bring this test upon us, then our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand. But if God does not think best to deliver us, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship your golden image which you have set up.”

In the face of such perfect faith and confidence in Almighty God, the ruler of the world empire became a raging tyrant.

The great celebration came to an abrupt and unhappy end. Preparations were now ordered for the destruction of the three defiant subjects. I think the throngs rushed back to the city in great disorder to gather around the mouth of the furnace which was made to burn seven times hotter than usual.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (foreign names for Hananiah, beloved of the Lord, Mishael, who is as God, Azariah, the Lord my helper) stood calmly as the executioners bound them hand and foot.

All was ready! The mighty men ran with their victims to cast them into the fire that raged so fiercely that they themselves were consumed with the burning.

“And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace.”

But look! What happened? See—the king had risen from his seat where he had been waiting to witness the cruel scene. With great concern and astonishment he peered into the flames. I think he put his hands to his head as he turned to question his counsellors, saying—

“Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?”

“True, O king,” they answered, **“there were but three.”**

Looking into the flames again he cried, **“lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”**

I wonder if this heathen king knew the meaning of his words, **“the Son of God.”** And yet, it truly was the Lord from heaven who came down that day to walk in the midst of the fire with His faithful ones.

Nebuchadnezzar trembled with fear in the presence of such a manifestation of power, for immediately his whole attitude toward his three Jewish subjects was changed.

Going closer to the furnace he called, **“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the most high God, come out of that furnace.”**

And out they came from the midst of the fire in the very clothing they wore when they were thrown in. Upon their bodies were no marks of fire, not even a hair had been singed, neither was the smell of fire or smoke upon them. Only the bands that bound them had been burned.

The notables, gathered around, must have looked upon them in utter amazement. All of wrath and anger gone, the king in reverent tones said,

“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants that trusted in Him, and has changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

“Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses disgraced because there is no other god that can deliver in this wonderful way.”

Besides saying all of these gracious words, the king promoted these Jews to higher places in the province of Babylon.

I think that night the three men were talking over the events of the day when they were joined by Daniel.

Greeting them with much feeling, perhaps he said, “I knew you would stand true to our God and I knew that He would stand true to you. I heard all about your experience up in the palace. Everyone is talking about it. No, not about the golden image, but of God’s deliverance of you, my friends. What a victory!”

“Oh, but Daniel, you missed a great blessing by not being with us for God’s Son from heaven came down and walked with us in the fire. Why, Daniel, that fire never touched us. We were as comfortable in those seething flames as we are this minute. What a God is Jehovah, the only true and living God.”

Daniel answered confidently, “I knew last night when we put the matter in His hands that He would carry you through. Praise be to the name of the Lord.”

I think they had a real thanksgiving prayer service before they parted for the night. All of this story happened hundreds of years ago and was a great miracle of God’s grace. Will He deliver His children today? Why not?

Let us remember that the God of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah is our God and that He is just as able to deliver today as He was then.

God’s children have many fiery trials today, many sorrows and burdens too heavy for us to bear, but if we will trust Him, putting all of our faith in Him, then we, too, may have Him to walk with us through all of our difficulties.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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