

THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

In the Light of
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE EVENTS

by

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CHAPTER THREE

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S "GOLDEN IMAGE" AND "THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE"

Foreshadowing "**The Image of the Beast**" and the Faithful Jewish Remnant during "**The Great Tribulation**"

CHAPTERS three, four, five and six of the Book of Daniel not only set forth the moral and religious conditions that existed at the beginning of "**the times of the Gentiles**"; but they also foreshadow the moral and religious conditions that will exist in the end of this age, during the reign of the Antichrist.

A glance at our chart will remind us of this fact. Each of these chapters contains the record of how God miraculously overruled the idolatry and pride and self-will of the early Gentile monarchs. And chapters three and six tell the story of God's mighty power on behalf of Daniel and his three friends. These four young men, therefore, are a striking picture, or type, of the faithful Jewish remnant "**in the latter time.**"

In chapter three we have the story of Nebuchadnezzar's folly and pride and idolatry in setting up the "**golden image**" for all his subjects to worship; and here we have also the beautiful story of the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow down to the image, and of their deliverance from "**the burning fiery furnace**" by the God they loved and served. Let us turn to the chapter and read the familiar record beginning with verse 1.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S "IMAGE OF GOLD"

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.

1. The Dimension of the Image.

There is something very interesting about the proportions of the image.

We read that it was sixty cubits in height and six cubits in breadth. Six is the number of man, and the sixes in the dimensions of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image point onward to that one whose number is 666, even the Antichrist. In Revelation 13:18 we read of this coming "**man of sin**":

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred three score and six.

One of the sixes is missing in Nebuchadnezzar's image, possibly because the rebellious system was yet to be fully developed. Six is the number of human incompleteness; seven, of God's completeness. Six days are given to man for work, but the seventh day belongs to God. Even Satan's masterpiece, the Antichrist, cannot measure up to more than "**six hundred three score and six.**"

As the cubit varied in olden times, we cannot know the exact size of the golden image which "**Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.**" If the cubit was eighteen inches, then the image was 90 feet in height and 9 feet in breadth. If the cubit was twenty-two inches, the image was 110 feet high and 11 feet wide. In either case, it was a huge idol; and a vast concourse of people could see it at the same time, as they bowed before it.

2. *"The Dedication of the Image."*

Four significant facts are stated in verses 2-7 concerning the dedication of Nebuchadnezzar's "**image of gold**":

- (1) He called together a great assembly of government officials to bow before the image;
- (2) He demanded that everyone in the realm worship the image, or be cast into "**a burning fiery furnace**";
- (3) He provided beautiful music to accompany the pagan ceremony;
- (4) Multitudes obeyed his command.

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 the king had 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, 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 worshipping 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 music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

I wonder if we can visualize the scene which took place on the plain of Dura on that day which was set for worship of the image. In the distance stood the image of gold, possibly dazzling in the sunlight. A long procession of priests from the temple of Bel, their solemn ritual adding to the impressiveness of the scene, marched slowly across the plain. There fell on the ear the clear notes of the cornet, then the more gentle tones of the harp, the flute, and the psaltery, until the air was filled with music; and as the notes rang out, vast throngs of people fell down and bowed before the image which the king had set up. What a spectacle that must have been! What a scene well calculated to appeal to the eye and the emotions, stirring the souls of men until they gave to a graven image the worship which belonged to God!

Satan knows the power of music to stir the emotions of man; let us not forget that this was a religious ceremony—religious, but bloodless. Nor will this age of Gentile dominion end irreligiously. Some of the most God-dishonoring ritualisms performed today in the name of religion are accompanied by beautiful music. And possibly the worship of the image of “**the beast**,” after the true church has been translated to be with the Lord, will be accompanied by skillfully-executed music.

But all such ceremonies are not beautiful to God or to those who love Him. They are a mockery. About nineteen years had elapsed since God had told Nebuchadnezzar that “**the head of gold**” was to pass away, to be succeeded by three other Gentile world-empires. Could it be that in setting up his own image—all of gold—that he thought to change the decrees of God? Was he presumptuously believing that “**great Babylon**” which he had built (Daniel 4:30) would continue its autocratic rule, even until the time of the end? It seems that he must have attempted, in this blasphemous self-deification, to change the decrees of Daniel's Lord.

The God-given dream portrayed “**the head of gold**”; Nebuchadnezzar's image was all of gold. The one was a divine prophecy; the other a man-made attempt at self-glorification. I say “self-glorification” advisedly, because, while this golden image was that of Bel, Nebuchadnezzar's chief god, it also deified the king himself as “the personification and representative of the Babylonian Empire” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown). What an insult to the Lord, who had given this heathen king a chance to love and honor Him!

“THE IMAGE OF THE BEAST”

All these circumstances and details concerning Nebuchadnezzar's “**image of gold**” typify, in a marked way, “**the image of the beast**,” or Antichrist, which he will set up “**in the latter time**.” As we have already pointed out, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in suffering “**fiery trial**” rather than worshipping the golden image, are just a picture of the faithful Jewish remnant, who will go through “**the great tribulation**” rather than worship “**the image of the beast**.”

In the previous chapter we quoted from II Thessalonians 2:1-12, showing that the true church must be translated to be with Christ before “**the man of sin**,” “*the Lawless one*,” is revealed. When he is manifested to the world, the Jews will be deceived by him, and will make a covenant with him for seven years—“**the seventieth week** (or, 'seven')” of Daniel's prophecy in chapter nine. Many of the nation of Israel will be back in their own land then.

The Antichrist “**shall confirm the covenant with many** (Israelites—Daniel's 'people') for one week (or period of seven years).” (See Daniel 9:27.)

And in promising Israel her land, he will also restore the temple worship of the Jews in Palestine. But in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.

What is an “**abomination**” to a godly Jew?

It is an idol. And we believe that “**the abomination of desolation**” to which our Lord referred in His Olivet Discourse will be “**the image of the beast,**” which he will set up in the holy place of the Jewish temple “**in the midst of the week,**” that is, at the end of three and one-half years of that seven-year rule of the Antichrist.

Then what will happen?

Devout Jews, born again by the gospel of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus, as it will be preached during that time by the 144,000 Israelites, will realize that they have put their faith in a false Messiah, the Antichrist; they will know he is false when he sets up his image “**in the holy place.**”

They will cease to give allegiance to him; and he will persecute them with “**great tribulation.**”

1. What Christ Said about That “Abomination of Desolation.”

So terrible will that “**time of Jacob’s trouble**” be that our Lord warned Israel in Matthew 24:15-22, saying:

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains. . . For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

2. What Paul Said about the Antichrist's Demand for Worship.

Now let us read again a part of what Paul told us about “**the image of the beast**” in II Thessalonians 2:1-12. Writing of “**the man of sin,**” Paul said:

He opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God . . . whom the Lord shall consume with die spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

3. What John Said about “the Image of the Beast.”

And now let us turn to Revelation 13:11-18 to see what John wrote of “**the image of the beast,**” as he, like Paul, was guided by the Holy Spirit of God. Many Bible teachers believe that the two beasts referred to in this chapter are the political ruler, or the last Caesar, in Rome and the “**false prophet,**” who will be the religious leader and representative of the Antichrist, possibly in Palestine. This teaching seems to correspond with the reference to “**the beast and the false prophet**” in Revelation 20:10. However that may be, both will be antichrist, that is, against Christ; often the term “**Antichrist**” is applied to both personages.

Now will you read carefully all this passage in Revelation 13:1-18, noting especially verses 14-17:

And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast. . . And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

People often ask, “What is the mark of the beast?”

I do not know. This I do know: it will be some outward token of homage to and worship of “**the beast.**” And those who refuse to receive it will be persecuted to death. There will be some godly Jews who will escape, but many, both Jew and Gentile, will be martyrs of that cruel monster. (See Revelation 6:9-11; 7:9-14).

We who live in this church age should be ashamed to refuse to give a testimony for Christ in any social circle, in any business office or home or school! How little we are called upon to suffer for Him!

My friends, this will be that short period, during which Satan will receive worship, for the Antichrist will be Satan's masterpiece. I have gone into detail to quote these scriptures, for I want you to see how graphically Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego foreshadow the faithful remnant in Israel who will refuse to worship “**the image of the beast.**”

The furnace of their affliction will be heated with all the fury of Satan. Talk about anti-Semitism! That will be Israel's “**great tribulation**”! But “**those days shall be shortened**” by the return of Christ in glory. Then Israel will enter into the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth.

4. Some “Signs” That Point to the Coming “Man of Sin.”

And how rapidly that day seems to be drawing near!

It was never so before, in all the 1900 years that are passed. Israel has returned to Palestine in unbelief, even as God said she would. It is marvelous that Israel should have been restored to national status in our day.

Again, the rise of dictators in the world today foreshadows the manifestation of “**the beast.**” Surely it is easier for our own generation to imagine what the Antichrist will be like than it has been to those living in former years.

Again, the trend of the thought of diplomats today is toward a federation of states. That is what is being considered in Europe.

Add to these things the “**signs**” of apostasy in Christendom and increased lawlessness in the earth, and you will realize how significant is this present day! We dare not set dates for the return of Christ, but it is the part of wisdom to “**discern the signs of the times.**”

“THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE” AND THE GOD WHO IS “ABLE TO DELIVER”

1. “Certain Chaldeans . . . Accused the Jews.”

Let us read verses 8-28 of our chapter to see something of the courage and faith of the three Hebrew youths, and to see something of the love and power of their God. Possibly the jealousy of some or all of Nebuchadnezzar's princes and governors and other officials prompted them to encourage the king to demand worship, in order that they might have occasion to accuse “**the Jews**” (v. 8).

Perhaps they were watching to see what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would do. Certainly this is what happened when Daniel was cast into the lions' den. And as the king was both the civil and the religious head of the empire, these jealous officials “**accused the Jews**” of treason.

Possibly they sought also, by their flatteries, to win favor with the king. And where was Daniel at this time? We well know that he did not worship the image. He was the second ruler in the kingdom, and must have been in another, distant part of the empire, possibly on official business for Nebuchadnezzar.

In spite of the fact that princes, governors, captains, judges, and dignitaries of every kind bowed the knee to the image; in spite of the dire threat concerning “**the burning fiery furnace,**” these three refused to yield their right to worship God.

We may well imagine that they had never before stood so erect, as they did on that memorable day! They had purposed in their hearts at the very beginning that they would not defile themselves with the king's meat; now they refused to defile themselves by bowing the knee to an idol, for they had not forgotten the first commandment, “**Thou shalt have no other gods before me,**” or the second, “**Thou shalt not . . . bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.**”

When it came to a choice between the word of the king and the Word of God, it did not take these men long to decide whose voice they would follow. The envious might gloat; Nebuchadnezzar might rage; obey they must!

The soul that knows God, my friend, cannot be diverted by gold or silver or favors or threats. Neither can the sophistries of this world seduce him. If our souls are linked with God, no matter what the test, He will help us to be faithful to Him. And you and I may be called upon to suffer for His name's sake.

The church will not go through the tribulation period, but “**coming events cast their shadows before**”; and the sufferings of Christians in Russia and other lands today may be re-enacted in many parts of the world before the Lord takes us home to Himself. If we do have to suffer for Christ's sake, may we be as true to our God as were the Hebrew youths in the days of ancient Babylon. I like to call them “Protestants,” for they “protested” against idolatry, even as Martin Luther and others of the Protestant Reformation “protested” against certain evils in the church of their day. There comes a time when a godly man or woman or boy or girl needs to protest against evil in some of its seductive forms.

2. *“The Jews” Were “Brought before the King.”*

In his “**rage and fury**” Nebuchadnezzar had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego brought into his presence. Evidently he had loved these three Hebrews; possibly they had been valuable to him in his official business, for he gave them a second opportunity to bow before his image. But they did not follow the policy of many in our own day, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Like the early Christians of a later date, they were willing to die for their faith.

The story is told of a Roman emperor who had a coliseum built by a skilful Greek architect, in whose honor he gave a great performance, dedicating the finished edifice. There were all kinds of sports. Then at the last a door was opened on the arena, and the spectators saw a little band of Christians enter. At the same time another door was opened, from which came roaring lions, ready to devour their prey. The emperor arose, praised the young architect for his achievement, then referred to the “sport” they had witnessed, warning any others of their certain fate if they embraced Christianity.

The young architect, his face white, his lips trembling, stood to his feet and exclaimed, “I also am a Christian!”

His fate was that of his fellow-believers in Christ, but he went to his death with God-given courage which did not falter. It is to such men that we owe the preservation of the Word of God, as well as the privilege of reading and studying it openly and unafraid. May we be as bold and as fearless as they were in our testimony, whatever the cost.

3. *“Our God . . . Is Able.”*

Nebuchadnezzar, in his rage, asked a blasphemous question, “**Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?**” The answer comes in verse 16-18—

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.

My friends, something like this will be the decision of the faithful Jewish remnant who will refuse to worship the image of **“the beast”** in the closing days of this age. They will refuse the claims of that Satan-inspired usurper, and because of their refusal, they will be cast into the **“furnace”** of **“the great tribulation.”** But their God **“is able . . . and he will deliver”** them out of Satan's hand. Some will be martyrs, but they will go into the presence of Christ; others will be saved to enter into His millennial kingdom upon earth.

For behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadows,
Keeping watch above His own.

4. *“Through Faith” They “Quenched the Violence of Fire.”*

The Holy Spirit must have had in mind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when He wrote, in Hebrews 11:34, that some of the heroes of faith had **“quenched the violence of fire.”** He was writing to Hebrew Christians who knew and loved the story.

In verses 19 and 20, we read—

Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

The greatness of the miracle of God in preserving these three is seen in the fact that **“the fire had no power”** upon their bodies, **“nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed upon them”**— this, in spite of the fact that the furnace was so **“exceeding hot”** that **“the flames slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,”** to cast them into the fire.

Most wonderful of all, **“the angel of the Lord,”** even God in angelic form, came down to walk with His own through the fiery trial! The witnesses had seen the three Hebrews fall **“down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.”**

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, 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.

We know that the fourth was the Son of God in angelic form, but Nebuchadnezzar was a heathen king; he had many gods, of whom Bel was supposed to be the father of sons and daughters.

What blindness, even after the only true God, the God of Daniel, had spoken to that heathen king some years previously! But at least the testimony of the Hebrews had made its impression upon this pagan king; he acknowledged the power of their God—not his own god.

So in verse 28—

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Are you going through sorrow and trouble, my Christian friend? The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is **“the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”** (Hebrews 13:8). And His promise never fails.

In Isaiah 43:2, 5 He says,

When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. . . Fear not: I am with thee.

He who spoke these reassuring words many centuries ago is **“able to deliver,” “able to keep,” “able to save to the uttermost”** (Daniel 3:17; II Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25).

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (I Corinthians 10:13).

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you . . . but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy (I Peter 4:12, 13)

. . . that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:7).

We might go on endlessly, quoting the precious promises of our God, for they fill the pages of His inspired Word, but these will suffice to remind us that the God of Daniel and of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will go with us through every trial.

This ever reminds us that **“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** when He takes us to be forever with Himself. (See Romans 8:18).

5. *“There Is No Other God That Can Deliver after This Sort.”*

In these words Nebuchadnezzar recognized the power of the God of the Hebrews, but he did not recognize His claims. He made a decree that no one in his realm should **“speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”** He even promoted these three young men **“in the province of Babylon.”** (See verses 29, 30.) But still he refused to worship the only true God.

Does that seem very strange, my friend? It does; yet how many there are today who respect their mothers' God; they would not blaspheme His name; they even show Him a certain deference in public assembly. Still they have never bowed the knee before Him, in confession of sin and in repentance unto eternal life. They give assent to certain Scripture truth, yet do not accept it for themselves. They cannot fall at Jesus' feet and exclaim, with Thomas, **“My Lord and my God!”** (See John 20:28). Do you belong to this class, my brother? Then look away to Calvary's Cross today, and be born again. The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will not only save your soul; He will also go with you through **“the burning fiery furnace”** of affliction. When trouble comes, you will be able to say, with Job: **“He knoweth the way that I take: and when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold . . . Though he slay me, yet will I trust him”** (Job. 23:10; 13:15).

That is what the Hebrew children said to a heathen king. That is what the faithful Jewish remnant will be able to say in that future **“time of Jacob's trouble,”** when the Antichrist will try to compel them to worship his image which he will set up in the temple of restored Israel. And to all His children in every age our faithful, loving, omnipotent God is saying to us in a thousand ways:

Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed;
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid.
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.
When thro' fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

This God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death (Psalm 48:14).

And for all eternity in His presence there will be “pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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