

“Nebuchadnezzar, in rage & fury, changed his visage.”

“Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ...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.” (Dan. 3:13,21)

This phenomenal and historic event recorded here was the work of God – done to drop-kick these three men clean into the only Hall of Fame that counts; to wit: “The Hebrews 11 Gallery of the Faithful.” These three men are there identified forever as they who *“quenched the violence of fire.”* Heb. 11:34.

This amazing story begins with these words, *“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits (90 ft.), and the breadth thereof six cubits (9 ft.): he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.”* Dan. 3:1. He issued a decree that anybody who did not fall down and publicly worship that monstrous idol would be summarily executed. Now the burning question is, Why? This was a huge and costly and historic undertaking. If the thing was solid gold, we’re talking \$billions. And it probably signaled the consolidation of one superior system of unified super-idol worship for the entire Babylonian empire – an empire already famous as a nation of idols and idol-worship. But, Why? The question remains. Here is a man – Nebuchadnezzar by name – who – just a short time before – had made a wonderful Confession of faith to the one, living, and true God, to the exclusion of all other “gods” – with a small “g”; to wit: *“The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldst reveal this secret.”* Dan. 2:47.

The “secrets” there referred to was a horrifying dream of another “*great image*,” – only this “*great image*” was not all of gold – only the head was of gold; which quickly degenerated into inferior metals – (breast and arms of silver; belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet part of iron and part of clay) – which was interpreted by Daniel as meaning that Nebuchadnezzar’s vast kingdom of absolute tyranny and monarchical power would soon give way to *“another kingdom inferior to thee,”* and so to another, and yet another, until the end of time when the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that should last forever. I say, all this was terrifying to Nebuchadnezzar. In the first place, he could not even recall what the dream was – let alone interpret it. Only that it terrified him. But Daniel told him what the dream was AND did thereupon give him the terrifying interpretation thereof; beginning as follows; to wit: *“Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.”* Dan. 2:31.

Now we come again to the “Why?” question. Why did Nebuchadnezzar make that humongous image of gold out in the plain of Dura? Well, the Jews say that Nebuchadnezzar – under tremendous political pressure from without, as well as terrible fears within, arising from Daniel’s words interpreting the dream as losing his kingdom – determined to reverse Daniel’s god-awful, many-medaled image, by replacing him (so to speak) with a SOLID GOLD image of his own making. The overwhelming majority of Babylon’s officials – (civic, military, priests, all others) – were seething with rage at king Nebuchadnezzar’s RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

under Daniel to the worship of the one, true and living God. They were all idolaters and image-worshippers, born and bred, and they were determined to keep it that way.

Gills says, that Nebuchadnezzar was determined “*to contradict the interpretation of his dream, and avert the fate of his empire signified by it; or to purge himself from the jealousies his subjects entertained of him, of relinquishing the religion of his country, and embracing the Jewish religion, by his praise of the God of Israel, and the promotion of Jews to places of trust and honor; and, – (get this) – they say it may be to LAY A SNARE for Daniel and his companions; of which we have an instance of the like kind in chapter 6.*” Remember chapter 6? How they cooked up an elaborate scheme to get the elderly man Daniel killed – eaten by ferocious lions. To wit:

“Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”

(Dan. 6:4,5)

And so they cooked up an elaborate scheme, to wit: They conned Darius the king into signing a goofy law that made it a criminal offense punishable by death in the lion’s den; to wit: ***“that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.”*** Dan. 6:7. Cute. They knew Daniel prayed three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem; and they knew that no goofy law was going to stop him from praying – in public. So, Daniel was caught in the Devil’s snare – and that landed him in Heaven’s Hall of Fame forever; identified there as the one who – through the faith of God’s Elect – ***“stopped the mouths of lions.”*** Hebrews 11:33.

Even so, in like manner, the old Jews say the entire project to build and erect a 90-foot-tall, solid gold image – an idol – worth \$billions – was nothing but an elaborate scheme – ***“to ensnare Daniel and his companions.”*** Dan. 3:2. They knew doggone good and well that those holy Jews would never in this world bow down and worship that golden image. All the time that thing was being built and erected; all the time the music was being prepared and the orchestra was rehearsing; all the time the invitations and orders were going throughout the empire that all officials were to attend the grand dedication of the golden image – I say, all those months or years of preparation, the holy Jews were getting ready to defy the king’s command to bow down – and the murderous Chaldeans were likewise getting ready to investigate and prosecute the case against the three Hebrew children, for NOT bowing down. Yes. For months and months preparations were being made for the grand dedication of the image; to wit:

“Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, – (thousands of them) – 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.” (Dan. 3:3)

And when the beautiful music played, by the most talented musicians in the empire – kind of like when the Star Spangled Banner plays at the opening of all sporting and other events in America – they all bowed down. They had better bow down. And they had better worship the image. And it had better be convincing – that the worship was sincere and genuine – on pain of death. And the instrument of death – a burning, fiery furnace – was immediately at hand; to wit:

“That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, 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.” (Dan. 3:5,6)

Rabbi Jarchi says, “*the music was to draw, the furnace was to drive, men to this idolatrous worship; the one was to please and sooth the minds of men; and so allure them to such stupid service; the other to frighten them into obedience.*” (Incidentally, this was the first time mention was ever made of “hours,” it was very probably the invention of the Babylonians; for Herodotus says the Greeks received the twelve parts of the day from the Babylonians.) Nor are we to look upon this Great Golden Image Dedication event as a one-day or a one-location affair. It was, rather, a long-lived, permanent religious and patriotic institution; involving every single citizen and every square inch of the far-reaching Babylonian empire.

Gill says regarding that huge religious/ patriotic festivity, that it was regularly celebrated “*not only by those in Babylon and by those that lived near the plain of Dura where the image stood, but in all places where the (beautiful patriotic and religious) music was played, what through love of music, the fear of the furnace, regard to superstition and idolatry, and to the king’s command, men of all nations and languages gave it homage and worship.*” (Think, the Islamic “Call to Prayer,” 5 times daily, from a high tower erected in every city and town. Every Muslim must stop doing whatever he’s doing, and bow down and pray with his face to the ground.) “*This Great Golden Image – and the religious system of idolatry for which it stood – saturated the minds and hearts of the masses of every nation, kindred, tongue and tribe that made up the vast Babylonian monarchy: Armenians, Parthians, Medes and Persians, as well as the Chaldeans and all the Babylonians. When they heard the music sound, they were immediately to repair to the plain, where the image stood, and pay their adoration to it; or to fall down prostrate in their own houses in honor of it; and perhaps persons were appointed in all cities and towns throughout the empire to play this music; at hearing which, all people, nations and tongues, were to bow down, in token of their religious regard unto it.*”

And, Remember, Beloved, that all this time, while this elaborate scheme was being planned, developed and implemented, Daniel and his three best friends were running the empire. To wit: “*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 (royal court) of the king.*” Dan. 2:48,49. BANG!!

“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold...(and)...he set it up in the plain of Dura.” (Dan. 3:1)

Is it likely that the king could have kept such an elaborate scheme hidden from the knowledge of the four highest ranking, most powerful, members of his government? Month after month? Such a Gigantic project? Not likely. And is it likely that these four righteous men – God’s Elect, in all probability, especially since they are solidly in the Hall of Fame of Hebrews 11, by supernatural faith they **“quenched the violence of fire,” Heb. 11:34** – I say, is it likely that these four righteous men did not know that they were headed for a historic, world-famous, life-and/or-death showdown with the king – (whether the king realized it or not ala Darius and Daniel and the lions’ den) – once the image was built and set up, and the command to bow down actually was issued? Not likely. They had many months to get ready for the showdown. It did not come as a surprise to them. And that gives a new, better, and more dynamic meaning to their reply to the king, once the day came for the showdown; to wit:

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said, 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.” (Dan. 3:16-18)

They knew that Satan and his children are forever cooking up elaborate schemes to ensnare God’s Elect. They knew this one was coming, but they were powerless to stop it – even though they were politically well-connected. Circumstances and pressures abounded on every hand on that fateful day in 585 B.C. – and all of them were outside the control of the Three Hebrew Children. A stupid king thought if he built himself a great, multi-billion-dollar solid gold image, he could reverse Daniel’s prophetic interpretation of that other image which foretold an irreversible downward trend from a head of gold, breast of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with brittle clay.

Babylon, the head of gold, is doomed – as are all succeeding empires. How silly to think he could reverse the inevitable downward trend and offset the image of Daniel’s prophesy with his own pure gold image. But, Beloved, do not all such silly maneuvers abound in our own day, calculated to frustrate and confound our simple Word of God? It certainly looked bad for Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego as the most mighty men in Nebuchadnezzar’s army roughly bound them in their clothes and forthwith cast them into the burning fiery furnace – on urgent orders of a great king who was filled with rage and fury, ***“and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.” Dan. 3:19.***

Everything was going wrong. Wasn’t it? But, as a matter of fact, it was the most glorious day of their lives. Listen to these blessed words; the story never grows old with the telling; throughout all eternity it will be repeated – to the glory of God, His wisdom, power and faithfulness to His own; to wit: ***“And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.” Dan. 3:23.*** And then? And then? Something remarkable has happened. The very next words are remarkable. Pandemonium has walked upon the scene; to wit:

“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.” (Dan. 3:24,25)

All commentators agree that this famous fiery furnace is emblematic of the fiery trials and afflictive dispensations the children of God pass through in this world. Indeed, it is a golden-rich passage of Scripture. To which must be added 1 Pet. 4:12; to wit: *“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto 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.”* 1 Pet. 4:12,13.

“I see four men loose,” exclaimed the tyrant. They were bound before; but the furnace has a marvelous liberating effect, and an educational effect, where the truths of God are taught and learned: *“Ye shall know the truth; and the truth shall make you free.”* Jn. 8:32. *“I see four men loose.”* Loose, from the power and prevalence of sin over them; from the world, and the things of it; from a spirit of bondage, and from doubts and fears. *“Walking in the midst of the fire.”* Strolling as in a garden, in the cool of the day; nor were they concerned to come out of it.

Rabbi Saadiah says, the angel Gabriel, who is over the hail, came and cooled the fire of the furnace, that their walks might be more comfortable. So afflictions are a path to walk in, through which all must all must go to reach Heaven. *“And they have no hurt.”* Afflictions do no hurt to the people of God, not to their persons, or to their graces, which are tried, refined and brightened hereby; faith is strengthened, hope is encouraged, and love is made to abound. *“And they have no hurt.”* *“The fourth is like the Son of God.”* Following a lengthy exposition wherein he tracks down all the theories as to who this Son of God is, Gill finally concludes that it is, of course, what else – the Son of God, *“highly probably”* the Lord Jesus Christ. I asked Mom who it was, and she immediately said, “the Son of God.” When I asked why she thought that, she immediately said, because it says, “the Son of God.” He is in the furnace of affliction with His people, to sympathize with them; to revive and comfort them; to bear them up and support them; to teach and instruct them, and at last to deliver them out of their afflictions.

“When thou walkest through the fire, I will be with thee; thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.” (Isa. 43:2)

“Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.” (Isa. 48:10)

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; 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 honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” 1 Pet. 1:6,7. We may reasonably conclude that the Lord Jesus is more likely to be closer and more self-revealing to His people in the fiery furnace of affliction than at any other time or place. Amen.