

fear of the Lord was not only the beginning of wisdom, but the basis of all true prosperity. They therefore calmly and respectfully told the king that they would not worship his golden image, and that they had faith that their God was able to protect them. (SDP 43.1).

The king was angry. His proud spirit could not tolerate this refusal to obey his decree. He ordered that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual, and that the most mighty men of his army bind these three Hebrews and throw them into the fire. This was done, but God in this act began to vindicate his worthies. The furnace was so exceedingly hot that the mighty men who cast the Hebrews into the fire were themselves destroyed by the intense heat. God suffered not envy and hatred to prevail against his children. How often have the enemies of God united their strength and wisdom to destroy the character and influence of a few humble, trusting persons! But nothing can prevail against those who are strong in the Lord. The promise is, "The wrath of man shall praise thee." (Psalms 76:10).

God preserved his servants in the midst of the flames, and the attempt to force them into idolatry resulted in bringing the knowledge of the true God before the assemblage of princes and rulers of the vast kingdom of Babylon. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." All things are possible to those who believe. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." God may not always work deliverance in the way that we think best, but he who sees everything from the beginning, knows what will bring honor and praise to his name. (SDP 44.1).

Suddenly the king became pale with terror. He looked intently into the midst of the fiery furnace, and turned to those near him with the words, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered, "True, O king." The king then 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." (SDP 44.2).

How did the king recognize the form of the Son of God? Evidently by the teachings of the Jews in the

court of Babylon and in remembrance of his vision. Daniel and his companions had ever sought to bring before the king, the princes, and the wise men of Babylon, a knowledge of the true God. These Hebrews, holding high positions in the government, had been associated with the king; and as they were not ashamed of their God, they had honored and given glory to the Lord whenever opportunity afforded.

The king had heard from their lips descriptions of the glorious Being whom they served; and it was from this instruction that he was able to recognize the fourth person in the fire as the Son of God. The king also understood the ministry of angels, and now believed that they had interfered in behalf of these faithful men who would yield their bodies to punishment rather than consent with their minds to serve or worship any God but their own. These men were true missionaries. They held honored positions in the government, and at the same time let the light of the gospel shine through their lives. This miracle was one of the results of their godly lives. (SDP 44.3).

With bitter remorse and feelings of humility, the king approached the furnace, and exclaimed, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither." They did so, and all the hosts of the plain of Dura were witnesses to the fact that not even the smell of fire was upon their garments, and not a hair of their heads had been singed. (SDP 45.1).

#### *References*

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Freedom  
of  
Worship  
Daniel 3:1-30

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold." According to Usher's chronology it had been twenty-three years since the dream of this same Nebuchadnezzar as recorded in the second chapter of Daniel. As a result of the experience at that time, Daniel was made counselor, sitting in the gate of the king, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were appointed rulers in the province of Babylon.

Many opportunities had presented themselves to these men of God, and they had kept the knowledge of their God before the people of Babylon. Jerusalem had in the meantime been destroyed. The Jews as a nation, were scattered throughout the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar; their king, Jehoiachin, languished in one of the prisons of Babylon. It was a time of sorrow and mourning for the chosen people of God. Could it be that they were forgotten by Him who smote Egypt, and led the hosts across the Red Sea? As far as human eye could see, it was right to think so. (SDP 39.1).

Nebuchadnezzar had been humiliated when Daniel interpreted his dream, and he had then worshiped God. But as the years passed, he lost the spirit which characterized true worship, and while in the mind acknowledging the God of the Jews, in heart he was pagan still. So he made an image of gold, patterning it as closely as possible after the image revealed to him in his dream, at the same time gratifying his own pride, for the entire figure was gold. There was no trace of the other kingdoms which were represented by the silver, the brass, the iron, and the clay in the dream. On the plain of Dura it stood, rising at least one hundred feet above the surrounding country, and visible for miles in every direction. (SDP 39.2).

Then a decree was issued by Nebuchadnezzar calling to the capital the governors and rulers of provinces from all over the world. He, the ruler of kingdoms, thus showed his authority. It was a great occasion, and subject kings and governors dared not disobey the mandates of this universal king. Heaven was watching with intense interest, for this was the occasion when the highest worldly authority was to meet the government of heaven. Babylon was not only the greatest and most powerful government in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, but it is a symbol of earthly governments of all time, and for that reason we have the record as

given in Daniel 3. (SDP 40.3).

As a king, he had a perfect right to call his subjects together. As subjects, it was the duty of those who were called to obey. As that great company gathered around the image on the broad plain, the voice of the herald was heard: "At what time ye hear the sound . . . of all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image. . . . Whoso falleth not down and worshipeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit." But of spiritual worship, paganism is entirely ignorant. Except there be some form, some image before which they can bow, there can be, to them, no worship. It was wholly in accordance with the religion, the education, and the government of Babylon, for the king to erect an image such as he did. It was wholly in harmony with the customs-educational, religious, and civil-for the people in general to respect a command to worship such an image. (SDP 40.6).

While it was in harmony with worldly government, it was not, however, according to the principle of the heavenly government. Hence it is, that again, in the person of the Babylonian king, Satan is challenging the government of God. When Lucifer and his angels refused to bow before the throne of God, the Father would not then destroy them. They should live until death should come as a result of the course they pursued. The Babylonian king, however, threatened utter destruction to all who refused to worship his golden image. The motive power in the heavenly government is love; human power when exercised becomes tyranny. All tyranny is a repetition of the Babylonian principles. We sometimes call it papal; it is likewise Babylonian. When the civil power enforces worship of any sort, be that worship true or false in itself, to obey is idolatry. The command must be backed by some form of punishment,-a fiery furnace,-and the conscience of man is no longer free. From a civil standpoint, such legislation is tyranny, and looked at from a religious point of view, it is persecution. (SDP 41.1).

The vast throng fell prostrate before the image, but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego remained erect. Then it was, certain Chaldeans,-teachers in the realm, jealous of the position and power of these Hebrews,-

having waited for a chance to accuse them, said to the king, "There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, . . . these men have not regarded thee." Can it be, thought the king, that when the image is made after the pattern of the one shown me by the God of the Jews, that those men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, have failed to worship at my command? Can it be possible that when I have elevated those men, who were only slaves, to high positions in the government, that they disregard my laws? The thought rankled in the heart of the king. Self exaltation brooks no opposition, and the men were called forthwith into the presence of Nebuchadnezzar. (SDP 42.1).

Can it be possible, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, after all that has been done for you, that ye do not serve my gods nor worship the image which I have set up. The reason for making the image was doubtless explained, and another opportunity offered them in which they might redeem the past offense. But if it was willful disregard of authority, the law of the land should be enforced. The furnace was pointed to by the king as awaiting traitors and rebels. What a test of the fidelity of these three companions of Daniel! They realized that they were in the presence of not only the richest monarch of earth, and that disobedience meant death, but before the assembled multitudes of the plain of Dura, and that they were a spectacle to God, to angels, and to the inhabitants of other worlds.

The whole universe was watching with inexpressible interest to see what these men would do. The controversy was not between man and Satan, but between Satan and Christ, and eternal principles were at stake. Men were actors in the contest. They could stand as witnesses either for Christ or for Satan in this time of decision. Would they allow an unsanctified emotion to have possession of their lives, and compromise their faith? What could a religion be worth which admitted of compromise? What can any religion be worth if it does not teach loyalty to the God of heaven? What is there of any real value in the world,-especially when on the very borders of eternity,-unless it be God's acknowledgment of us as his children? These Hebrew youth had learned from the history of God's dealings with the Israelites in times past, that disobedience brought only dishonor, disaster, and ruin; and that the