

IN A FIERY FURNACE



WHEN the king of Babylon captured the king of Israel and made the Israelites captives in Babylon, there were four young men who were specially favored by the king. One of these was Daniel. They were brought into the king's palace that they might be trained to serve among his advisers. These advisers were called "wise men."

The training of the wise men was begun when they were young and lasted for three years. It was something like three years in college. In order that they might be very healthy they were fed with the same choice food that was prepared for the king, and they also drank of the king's wine. When these young Hebrews were brought into this special school Daniel explained to the man who had charge over

them that they would rather not eat the king's meat or drink the king's wine.

The man was afraid that the king would be very angry with him if he let these young Hebrew boys eat or drink anything else. But Daniel asked him if they might try eating other food for a short period of ten days and see how good their health was at the end of that time. The man who had charge over them agreed to this. Well, at the close of the ten days the boys looked and felt better than any of the others who were in training with them, so the man who took care of them was well satisfied. Later the king was also pleased.

As we learned in our last story, it was Daniel, one of these four Hebrews, who explained the king's dream for him—that dream in which he saw a statue like a man, which was made of gold, silver, brass, iron, and clay. The king was very, very much pleased with what Daniel did for him, and he exalted him to be chief ruler over the province of Babylon.

One of the very good things about Daniel was his loyalty to his friends. When the king gave him such a wonderful position in the nation as a reward for telling him the dream and what it meant, Daniel thought of the other three Hebrews who had also been trained to be wise men. So he told the king about them, and the king said that the three Hebrew boys could represent Daniel, and be rulers over the province of Babylon. Wasn't that a wonderful arrangement!

But they did not know how much trouble they were to have later on. When Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he was such a mighty ruler in the world, the king became proud and thought he was very wise. He also forgot the God of the Hebrews who had helped Daniel to interpret his dream. The king commanded that a very large golden idol, or image, should be made, and then ordered all those whom he had appointed to be rulers over the various provinces to worship this idol.

When these rulers learned about the king's command, all of them except the three Hebrews gathered together where the idol was built, and when they heard the sound of music being played on the

many kinds of instruments which the people used at that time, they bowed down before this huge golden idol and worshipped it. The province of Babylon was only a small part of the country. In this province the city of Babylon was built. You can understand that, can't you? It is like the state of New York, the county of New York, and the city of New York. In Babylon the states were called provinces, and the three Hebrew children who were made rulers over the province, or state of Babylon, refused to bow down and worship that great idol of gold which Nebuchadnezzar had set, up in the place of God.

My, but it took a lot of courage for those young men to defy the king of Babylon! When he heard about it he was very angry. In those days kings were very cruel to those who did not obey them.

Nebuchadnezzar gave orders that any of the rulers who refused to bow down and worship the image should be cast into a furnace of fire and burned to death.

Wasn't that awful!

Of course the three Hebrew children knew that this is what the king had ordered, but they decided that no matter how much they suffered they would not worship the image. They trusted in God, and knew that it would be very wrong for them to worship an idol. Yes, when Nebuchadnezzar learned that these young Hebrews had refused to obey him he was indeed very angry, but he was willing to give them another chance, and again the three Hebrews refused. Well, you can just imagine how the king felt by this time! He told his servants to heat the furnace seven times hotter than usual, and then to bind these three rebellious Hebrews and throw them into that dreadfully hot fire.

But these godly young men were not afraid!

They had told Nebuchadnezzar that they believed God would help them, but even if he did not, they would not worship the king's image. Yes, the fire was hot—it was so hot and fierce that the men who carried the Hebrews to the furnace were burned to death by the flames which leaped out from it.

I suppose the king thought he was very clever and powerful. I can imagine him saying to himself, “I’ll teach those young Hebrews a lesson. Who is their God, anyway, that I should pay any attention to him?” After he had a little while to think it over, and to feel glad that he was so very wise and powerful, he decided he would go to the edge of the fiery furnace and make sure that the Hebrews were dead. But what a surprise! Instead of being burned to death, they were alive and walking around in the fire. And not only that, instead of three, Nebuchadnezzar saw four people in the fire! He said that the fourth one looked like the Son of God.



I’ll tell you, if Nebuchadnezzar was ever frightened he was now! He was wise enough to know that a power much greater than he could understand was protecting those three Hebrews. He knew, too, that it was the power of their God. He called to the three Hebrews to step out of the fire, and they did. When they were examined it was found that not even their clothing was singed with the fire. Wasn’t that wonderful?

Oh yes, I forgot to tell you the names of these three Hebrew boys that were given to them by one of the king’s servants. They were Sha-drach, Me-shach, and A-bed-ne-go.

King Nebuchadnezzar gave orders throughout the country over which he ruled that no one should say anything against the God of

these three Hebrews. Not only that, but he gave the young men better positions than they had before.

Isn't it wonderful to know that God is so powerful, and that he takes such good care of those who love and serve him? We don't understand how he kept the three Hebrews from being burned in that intensely hot fire, but we know that he did. We don't know all there is to know about fire, anyway. We know it is hot, and we know that it burns wood, and paper, and coal. We know that it won't burn rocks; and we know, too, that water won't burn. And we know also that God knows everything about fire and that he knew how to keep the fire from burning the three Hebrew children.

We know this because the Bible says so, and we know that the Bible is true.

QUESTIONS

- Who were Daniel's three friends who were brought to Babylon as prisoners with him?
- How did these three Hebrews become important rulers in Babylon?
- Explain how the enemies of the three Hebrews tried to have them killed by the order of the king.
- What did the king of Babylon do when he found that the Hebrews were not burned to death in the fiery furnace?