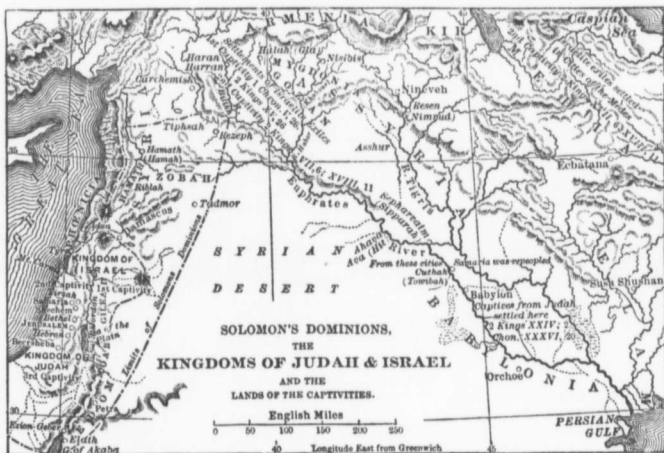


INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

FIRST QUARTER: THREE MONTHS' STUDIES IN JEWISH HISTORY.



B. C. 589.]

LESSON VI. THE FIERY FURNACE.

[Feb. 7.

Dan. 3. 16-28.

[Commit to memory verses 16-18.]



16 Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go, answered and said to the king, O Neb'u-chad-nez'zar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

17 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.

18 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.

19 Then was Neb'u-chad-nez'zar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go; therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

21 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.

22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go.

23 And these three men, Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

24 Then Neb'u-chad-nez'zar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

25 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.

26 Then Neb'u-chad-nez'zar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go, came forth of the midst of the fire.

27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

28 Then Neb'u-chad-nez'zar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Sha'drach, Me'shach, and A-bed'ne-go, 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.

General Statement.

At the close of his campaigns, when Nebuchadnezzar was at peace in his palace, he resolved to commemorate his conquest of the East by a great religious festival. He erected upon a plain near his capital a gigantic image of gold, perhaps in honor of the sun-god Bel, and summoned all the rulers and nobles of his empire, from the Tigris to the Nile, to bow before it. But while a thousand knees were bent in adoration, there were three young men who stood erect, and refused to sanction the worship of an image. They were the three Hebrew youths who had been companions with Daniel. Their leader was not with them, perhaps because the magi to which he now belonged were recognized as a separate order, and were not present among the secular officers of the realm.

The conduct of the three Jews made them conspicuous in the prostrate throng, and was duly reported to the king. They were summoned into the royal presence, and commanded to bow before the image, or to endure the agony of being thrown into a furnace of fire. But the courage which dared to stand alone against the current of custom, which could resist the idolatrous and licentious associations of a court, did not blanch under the anger of a king, and the threat of death. Promptly they chose the furnace rather than the crime of disloyalty to God. The fire was kindled, and piled higher than its wont, and they were thrown into its blazing depths. But a divine form walked beside them, and they stood unharmed amid the flames.