

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

SECOND QUARTER: STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

B. C. 603. LESSON VIII. THE FIERY FURNACE; or, Deliverance for God's Servants, Dan. 3, 21-27. May 26.

EXPLANATORY.

21. THESE MEN. The three young Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their conduct showed, 1. Courage, both moral and physical, of the very highest order. They dared to displease the king, to stand alone, to breast the current of popular opinion, to face torture and death. 2. Principle. They acted not on impulse, nor from stubbornness, but upon calm and clear conviction of their duty. They could die, but not commit a sin. 3. Reverence for God. They bowed the knee to him alone, and would not even by a gesture appear to worship a statue. 4. Faith. They trusted that he would deliver them, certainly would save them hereafter; and were willing, if need be, to die for his glory. Notice under what circumstances they were faithful: 1. They were in youth, when life seems most enjoyable and precious. 2. They were afar from their home and the worship of their own land. 3. They were without the encouragement of friends, and stood utterly alone in their hour of trial. 4. Bound. While still dressed in their robes of state, and without even the change of a garment. 5. Hosen. Read instead, "tunics or shirts," which were made of linen or woolen. 6. Hats. These were loose turbans of linen cloth. 7. Garments. The word means the loose, flowing, outer robes. All these were of highly inflammable material. Cast into the midst. The furnace was probably built of brick with an opening at the top and a door at the mouth below. They were thrown down upon the bed of burning coals from above. Fiery furnace. Chardin, who travelled in Persia two centuries ago, relates that some persons who took advantage of a famine to sell provisions at exorbitant prices, were, by royal command, roasted over a slow fire, and others were cast into a heated oven.

22. COMMANDMENT WAS URGED. If these officers were so eager to execute the inhuman orders of a tyrant; what energy should we display in fulfilling the behests of our gracious Lord to save men from fires that will destroy both soul and body? Exceeding hot. The context says "seven times more than it was wont," an expression to indicate the utmost possible intensity. Slew those men that took up. No sooner did the officers remove the covering from the roof of the furnace than the pent-up flames burst forth in their fury, and caught the executioners as well as their victims before they could escape. Had both these men and the Hebrews perished, this event would have seemed accidental; had both escaped, some might have claimed that there was no fire, but only a pretense of obeying the command; but when the young men live in the fiery depths, at whose edge the mighty men are slain, the hand of God is clearly revealed.

23, 24. FELL DOWN BOUND. We cannot place ourselves, even in thought, in the position of these heroes. They expected to die, and were ready to give up their lives for conscience sake. Then Nebuchadnezzar. He was probably sitting enthroned near by, gazing upon the scene; the door at the front of the furnace being open to afford draught, and commanding a view of the fire. Astonied. An old word for astonished. Did not see. Thus the testimony of the king receives confirmation from his council, who joined in the command, and witnessed the event.

25. Lo, I see. It may be asked, why the laws of nature were arrested for these men, and not to save Ridley, Latimer, and many more martyrs who have since died bravely at the stake? In some ages God's cause needs evidences, in other ages exemplars. In one case God gives supernatural proofs, in the other, sublime characters. Loose, walking in the fire. They trod the burning coals in comfort, willing to remain in such goodly company until summoned forth. They have no hurt. "No hurt is in them." The flames failed to scorch or the smoke to stifle them; their bonds were burned away, but their garments were unscathed. So God keeps his own in peace. Bainham, an English martyr, cried out in the flames, after his arms and legs were half consumed: "In this fire I feel no more pain than if I were in a bed of down; but it is to me as a bed of roses."—Trapp. The fourth. Those who suffer for Christ shall have his presence with them. In prosperity he walks unseen, but in adversity he stands revealed at his disciples' side. The Son of God. Nebuchadnezzar unconsciously uttered a truth greater than he supposed. He could not know of the son of God in the sense that we understand him. His words were "a son of the gods," meaning a divine person.

He afterward refers to the appearance as an angel (verse 28). Such it may have been—perhaps the angel of the covenant, the pure-incarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ.

26. CAME NEAR. The heat having now sufficiently subsided to allow a nearer approach. Ye servants. In his rage and fury he had abused them; now he speaks respectfully to them. God makes his people honourable in the eyes of the world, and he will yet make them glorious before the assembled universe. Most high God. Perhaps he had felt a contempt for Jehovah as the God of the Jews, unable to defend his city against the Chaldeans. Now he realizes that he is above even Bel, the god of Babylon, in power and majesty.

27. Princes, governors, captains. The officers of the Government, assembled from every part of the realm, were witnesses of the wonderful event. By them the news was carried through all the provinces, and the very means employed to honor the idol, only resulted in the greater glory of Jehovah. Saw these men. Their divine companion had now disappeared from sight, as he was no longer needed. "The grandees, wondering, pressed close around the living martyrs, saw, handled, and even smelt. As to their sight, it fell on countenances serene with innocence, and radiant with joy. As to their touch, they found the texture of the men's raiment firm, their flesh healthy, their persons not scorched with flame, nor feverish with fear. The hair of the men's heads was carefully dressed in the Babylonian fashion, long and neatly braided, as it lay between their shoulders; and the beard, cut square, fell, as accustomed, on their bosoms. As for the sense of smell, it served to witness that the costly perfumes spent in the morning, as if to sanctify them for burial, had lost nothing of their fragrance—fragrance yet exquisitely pure, breathing gladness, as become persons adorned for a feast. The smell of fire had not passed upon them. The pitch, the naphtha, the stench, had not hung about them, and the men who had contracted no taint from the licentiousness of palaces, passed untaunted through the suffocating vapor of the furnace."—W. H. Rule.

GOLDEN TEXT: Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. Dan. 3, 17. DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: God's presence with men. The next lesson is Dan. 5, 23-31.

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A Christianity without mystery is as unphilosophical as it is unscriptural.—Angus.

A Sunbeam passes through pollution unpolluted.

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