

CHAPTER 3

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION - IN TYPE

In that which now claims our attention we shall see how little Nebuchadnezzar had profited by the revelation God had made to him. We have already noticed that when Daniel explained the meaning of the dream, Nebuchadnezzar fell down before the prophet and did him homage. He had many nice things to say to him, and he gave him great rewards; but he was not brought to repentance or humbled in self-judgment before the God who had thus manifested His omniscient power. The king could appreciate the wisdom of Daniel; but he had no heart, for the God who had inspired His servant.

Nebuchadnezzar is not alone in that. Many there are who have a certain admiration for the ministry and the word of God, but yet who themselves go on practically all through their lives strangers to Him whose word His ministers declare. This was Nebuchadnezzar's condition exactly at this time. For in this third chapter, we see that, instead of his being humbled by the revelation made, it simply served to exalt himself as one especially favored of heaven, and to magnify his thoughts of the human mind and his own greatness.

This reminds me of smother man who was favored with a remarkable revelation, of whom we read in the New Testament. I refer to the apostle Paul, who was caught up to the third heaven. And this man Paul, though a child of God and a most devoted servant of Christ in every way, had just the same kind of a heart that Nebuchadnezzar had and so, in order that he might not be lifted up because of the abundance of the revelation, there was given him a thorn in the flesh, to remind him of his human weakness. Thus, we are reminded that even divine truth, if not held in fellowship with God, may actually be used to puff one up. Mere knowledge, apart from divine love, puffs up. This is not the case with, spiritual discernment, because the very first requisite for spirituality is humility. Spiritual discernment comes from God, and that will not exalt any one; but even scriptural knowledge, if divorced from godliness, will have a very deleterious effect upon the mind and heart. That was the way it was with Nebuchadnezzar. But in the next chapter we shall see how he too got his thorn in the flesh, and its blessed result.

What is emphasized here is that Nebuchadnezzar is lifted up with pride, and he determines to make a great image (probably a replica of the one he had seen in his dream), and call upon all men to bow to it. It was really to set forth the power and glory of *man*; for it pictured Gentile dominion in independence of God. It is stamped with the same number that distinguishes the Beast in Rev.13 - the number of a man, six hundred sixty and six. You will notice the passage tells us that it was sixty cubits high and six cubits broad. Seven is the number that speaks of spiritual completeness. Six seems to tell us of man's greatest efforts to attain to perfection.

The image was accordingly made, and set up in the plain of Dura. A command then went forth that upon the sounding of a great orchestra, all the peoples, and nations, and languages, gathered together from all the various provinces of the empire, should fall down and worship it. If any refused, they were to be cast into a furnace of fire.

The special place given to the great orchestra is very noticeable, as much so as in large worldly religious gatherings at the present time. It excites the emotions, and, thus working upon the

feelings, gives people a sense of devotion and religiousness, which after all may be very unreal. In the Old Testament dispensation musical instruments were used in the ornate temple services; but there is certainly no warrant for it in the New Testament. People may call it worship to sit and listen to a trained, and possibly unconverted, choir and orchestra rendering sweet and touching strains; but the music simply acts upon the sensuous part of our natures, and has nothing to do with true adoration of the Father and the Son, which must be in spirit and in truth to be acceptable to God. Those who plead for its use, because of the place it had in Old Testament times, should remember that that was a typical dispensation. The instruments then used typified the melody now made in the hearts of God's redeemed ones. We sometimes sing, and very truly

"O Lord, we know it matters not How sweet the song may be;
No heart but of the Spirit taught Makes melody to Thee."

A minister once remarked to me that many esthetic persons attended his church *to worship God in music*; so, he sought to have the best performers and the finest music it was possible to obtain, as otherwise the people would not attend. What a delusion it all is! And yet people actually look upon that as really worshiping God, whether they have ever been converted or not! In reality they are only gratifying their own taste for melody and harmony a taste God-given, I grant you, and proper enough in its place, but not to be confounded with true worship. A heart filled with Christ gives forth the sweetest music that ever reaches the ear of God the Father. He says, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me." Let us remember, then, that in the New Testament dispensation it is "singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord" to which the Christian is exhorted. That is where the music is to be a heart full of praises to the God of all grace. May we know more of it.

I remember on one occasion taking a friend of mine unquestionably an earnest Christian into a little hall where perhaps a half hundred believers were gathered together one Lord's Day morning for worship. He had been accustomed to a service very much like that which I have referred to above. On that particular morning it seemed to me the Lord's presence in our midst was especially manifest. One after another took part in praise and thanksgivings as the Holy Spirit seemed to lead. Together we broke the bread and partook of the cup that speaks so loudly to the Christian heart of Him who gave Himself for us. At times there was hardly a dry eye in the room as we remembered Him who in infinite grace had redeemed us to God. Returning home, I inquired of my friend if he had enjoyed the meeting. He replied, "Oh, very well. There were many things about it that appealed to me very much; but I did miss the music." "Why," I replied, "did you not hear the music?" "Music?" "Was the answer," "why, there was none there." "Indeed, there was," I answered; "each heart that was occupied with Christ was like a stringed instrument touched by His own blessed hand; and He, the chief singer on the stringed instruments, was there in our midst, leading out our hearts in worship and praise to the Father." But, alas, my friend did not seem able to enter into this! How is it with you, my hearer? Have you yet learned what it is to "worship in spirit and in truth"?

But, turning back to our subject, we notice that the instruments were to play: the people were to be stirred up by the music, and then they were all to prostrate themselves before the great image that set forth the glory of man.

But there were three in that great company who paid no heed to the king's commandment. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow; and malignant spies soon carried the news to the haughty monarch. They said, "There are certain Jews, . . . O king, have not regarded thee; they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." In a rage the king sent for the three devoted men. He offered to give them another opportunity to carry out his bidding; otherwise, they must suffer the fate reserved for any *who* would not worship the image. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not like the timeservers of these degenerate days; they were not like the trucklers to the present age. They knew God had said, "Thou shalt *not* make unto thee any graven image. . . . Thou shalt *not* bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." So, these three Hebrews boldly faced the great king 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 thy 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." Thus, they witnessed a good confession, and in their God-given strength boldly stood before the king and all the people as the witnesses of Jehovah's power and glory.

In his rage and fury Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the furnace be heated seven times more than ordinarily, and that his instructions be carried out to the letter. So great was the furnace's heat, that it consumed the men who cast them into the flames. Then we read that Nebuchadnezzar arose and came to the furnace, and cried out in amazement: "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? . . . 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 a son of God " (or son of the gods). We know well who that fourth One was; so that the rendering that we have in the Authorized Version is correct as to the person, whether it is actually what Nebuchadnezzar meant or not. The blessed Son of God was there with His dear servants in their hour of trial. He had said long before, through the prophet Isaiah, "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." And every word of God shall be fulfilled, for "He is faithful that promised."

We are not told that anyone but Nebuchadnezzar saw the form of this fourth One. He cried out at once, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most-high God, come forth, and come hither." And they came forth, not having the smell of fire upon them; the flame had simply burned away their bonds and left them free men. The result was that Nebuchadnezzar was filled with admiration for the power of the great God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He made a royal decree, declaring that anyone who should speak anything amiss against their God should be put to death. Yet, as before, when his dream was interpreted, he does not bow in repentance at the feet of the Lord and own Him as *his* God. He simply speaks of Him as *their* God; and while he admires His greatness and power, he does not worship and serve the Lord Jehovah.

How many people there are in the world just like that! They would not say anything against God our Father nor His Son the Lord Jesus Christ; they have a certain reverence in their hearts for God; they think of Him as their mother's God perhaps, or the God of their fathers; but they cannot cry, "*My* Lord and *my* God," as Thomas did after he saw the print of the nails. And so again, we are reminded that it is one thing to give assent to the truth of Scripture, and the revelation there given, as to the glory of the triune God; but it is quite another to have bowed the heart in His presence, owned oneself a sinner lost and guilty, and trusted God's blessed Son, the

crucified and risen Saviour, as our own deliverer. Nebuchadnezzar owns His *power*; but he does not yet own His *claims* upon him. He had to pass through a humiliating experience ere he would come to that.

But someone may be inquiring, what has all this to do with prophecy? Why did God cause this particular bit of history to be recorded in the book of the prophet Daniel? This would have been something very suitable in a historical book or a devotional book, but why do we have it here in a prophetic book? For a very good reason indeed. This event, though actual history, is a typical scene picturing the trial and deliverance of a faithful remnant of Daniel's people that is to take place in the Time of the End. There will come a day when (like the great image set up by Nebuchadnezzar) what the Lord Jesus calls "the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet," is going to be set up in Jerusalem by the Antichrist of the future. Matt. 24:15.

After the Church has been caught away to heaven, at the close of this dispensation, the Jews (who are even now returning to Palestine in large numbers) will be deceived into owning the claims of a blasphemous impostor claiming to be the Messiah. He it is who is going to place the Abomination that maketh desolate. He will demand that all men worship the image that he sets up; and thus, the scene of the plain of Dura will be reenacted. In that day, as in the past, a remnant among the Jews will refuse to own his claims or to obey his voice. This will be the signal for the breaking out of the great tribulation, "the time of Jacob's trouble;" but many of the faithful shall be saved out of it, just as these three Hebrew young men were preserved by God in the midst of, and eventually delivered from, the furnace of fire.

Some may ask, what is the Abomination of Desolation? I cannot tell you positively; Scripture has not clearly revealed it. It seems to be identified with the image of the Beast set up by the false prophet, as predicted in Rev. 13, and which he will cause all men to worship, all who have not the seal of God. This image of the Beast may not be a literal idol. It may be that it refers to some great popular movement; but it seems to be intimately connected with that of which our Lord warned His disciples. At any rate it speaks of a time when men will be called upon to acknowledge the power and the authority of that which is Satanic instead of Divine, and when practically all the world will be brought to own the Antichrist as the Messiah.

It is a mistake to suppose that the Antichrist is the papacy (*Authority of the Pope*). We shall see very clearly. I trust, when we come to consider the latter part of the eleventh chapter, that he will be a distinct personality a Jew by birth, who will bear rule in the land of Palestine, and be accepted by the Jews as their Messiah. he will deny the Father and the Son, and be energized and controlled by the devil. In that day apostate Christendom will join with apostate Judaism in owning allegiance to this monster of iniquity. But, according to His promise, God will, even in that day when iniquity shall come in like a flood, lift up a standard against it. He will have His faithful little flock who will dare stand, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, for the truth which lie will have made known to them; and though because of this they become the victims of Satan's rage and man's hatred, yet they shall be delivered out of it all, to the glory of the God whom they shall serve. No weapon that is formed against them shall prosper; for the Most-High shall be their shield and buckler.

Already we see preparations being made for these momentous events. While they are not to take place as long as the Church remains on earth, yet even now the land of Palestine is being prepared by God to become once more the home of His earthly people, and the people are being prepared for their land. Think of the changes that have been taking place in the East in the last fifty years! A half century ago a Jew was not allowed to dwell inside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, and there were less than fifty thousand Jews in all Palestine. Now there are more than that number living in Jerusalem itself; and it is estimated that there are nearly three times that number dwelling in the land. And now, the latter rains which God had withdrawn in judgment for many centuries, are returning to the land once more; and while they have not come every year, yet there has been sufficient rain to encourage agriculturists to such an extent that thousands of acres have been planted as olive-yards, vineyards, and fruit farms; and most of these are owned and worked by Jews. Of course, all these things are very different from the fulfilment of the prophecies in regard to their regathering by omnipotent power. But they show us that things are shaping themselves for the carrying out of the predictions as to the great tribulation, and the events that are to follow in rapid succession.

In the hour of Antichrist's dreadful reign, it will mean much to be faithful to God; it will mean much *not* to own the Abomination of Desolation; but grace will be given to the feeble remnant, and they shall glorify God in the fires. If such is to be the triumph of saints in a future day, what devotion and faithfulness should characterize us who are so much more highly favored in this present dispensation of the grace of God! And yet how many there are who fail to stand the test when it comes to maintaining that which God has committed to them! How little the most of us know of that spirit of devotion to Christ which led Athanasius of old to reply to the emperor's taunt, "All the world is against you," by the never-to-be-forgotten words, "Then I am against all the world!"

It was this spirit that enabled Paul to triumph when he stood before Nero; even though he had to say, "At my first answer no man stood by me." Left alone, he nevertheless bore a faithful witness, and "was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."

What a rebuke are these devoted servants of God to many of us to-day! How little do we know of standing for Christ and His truth, even if we have to stand alone! But how contemptible will our weakness and pusillanimity (*lack of courage or determination; timidity*) appear in that coming day of glory! Rest assured, there will not be a saint then who will regret having suffered for Christ, or borne reproach for His name's sake; but there will be thousands who would give worlds, were they theirs to give, if they had been but more faithful and devoted while in this scene of testing.

The time is short. Our day of testimony for an absent Lord will soon be over. Oh, let us not forget that we have "Only one life, 'twill soon be past; Only what's done for Jesus will last."