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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2345 ~ Nebuchadnezzar's Image.

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Sometime after King Nebuchadnezzar had heard Daniel's explanation of his dream given by God to Daniel, the king reverted back to worshipping Baal and his other Babylonian gods. His wise men and counsellors seemed to have a way of convincing Nebuchadnezzar to do things that weren't wise, even though the king himself thought that he'd become very wise indeed. His counsellors had hatched a plot to get rid of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. For then they'd be back in the favour of the king.

Nebuchadnezzar spent a very great deal of money having a statue of himself built that was 90 feet (or 30 metres) tall. The statue was positioned in a big flat area of land known as Dura, in the province of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar called together all his officials from many countries to assemble before the statue on a given date. The statue may have only been overlaid with gold but it was huge, magnificent and mounted on a platform so that everyone assembled could see it. It pleased the king to do this, because in worshipping the statue, he thought that the people were actually worshipping him. The king decreed that the penalty for not bowing down before the statue would be death in a blazing furnace.

This incident regarding King Nebuchadnezzar's statue is given in the Bible book of Daniel, Chapter 3. Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue. They were dragged before the king and given one last chance to bow down; if not, they'd be thrown into a fiery furnace. Normally this furnace would have been used for drying out bricks before going to building projects. But with the furnace seven times hotter than normal, Nebuchadnezzar claimed that no god could rescue them from his hands.

Up until this point in the history of God's chosen people, the Israelites were known as 'Hebrews' but from here on, they were known as 'Jews'. When the three young Jews stood before the king, they were full of faith in their own God. They told the king politely that they wouldn't bow down to his statue. They said that the God they served was able to save their lives. But even if He didn't, they still wouldn't serve the king's gods or worship his statue of gold. These Jewish men loved God more than they loved their own lives. And their faith and obedience have inspired generations of believers since then to accept death rather than to betray their Lord.

As you can imagine, the king was furious with them. How dare these slaves defy his commands! He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual. The three Jews were bound fully dressed and thrown into the middle of the furnace by some of the king's mighty soldiers, who themselves were overcome by the heat and died. But as King Nebuchadnezzar watched, he was amazed to see that, not three, but four men, were walking around in the fire unbound, with the extra man looking like a heavenly being. The king shouted out for them to come out of the fire. When they did so, everyone could see that the fire hadn't harmed them or their clothes.

God had a special plan in mind when He saved those three young men from harm: He demonstrated to the world that He was the one true God of all people, including the king of Babylon. Once again, King Nebuchadnezzar was forced to admit that the God of the Israelites was greater than any other god he knew, including himself. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree that anyone who spoke disrespectfully of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's God would die, for no other god could do what their God had just done for them. The king also promoted these three young men to higher positions in his province.

Some people are curious to know where Daniel was during this time, as it doesn't say in his book. He may not have been required to attend the statue's dedication ceremony, as his loyalty to the king was assured. Or more likely, as ruler over the entire province of Babylon, he may have been away on government business.

What can we learn from this section of Scripture? King Nebuchadnezzar wasn't content to just be the head of gold as shown in his dream; he wanted to be represented by a whole statue of gold. His officials and the important people of his court were happy to conform to his wishes by bowing down and worshipping him, so long as the king spared their lives and gave them what they needed.

The king's counsellors hadn't been happy since they'd been replaced by mere Jewish slaves. So, they made sure that the king was informed when Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego didn't bow down to the statue. The counsellors weren't grateful that Daniel and his three friends had saved their lives when they were thrown into prison. Rather, the Bible says that unsaved people don't always appreciate what believers may do for them. The king's counsellors only wanted to win back favour with the king again and regain their important positions.

The three young Jewish men didn't know for sure that God would deliver them from the furnace, but even if He didn't, they said that they'd still obey the Lord and not worship the king or his idol. Loyalty to God brought them two blessings: the Lord came and walked with them in the fire (something they couldn't have ever imagined) and also, they were set free from their bonds. Fellowship and freedom are often found in the middle of the furnace experiences of life when your heart's committed to the Lord God, no matter what.

Only loyal believers in God are certain that nothing happens by chance; rather, they see that God engineers circumstances and for them to be faithful in every way means that we have only one loyalty: that is to our Lord. If we learn to worship God in the trying circumstances of life, God can quickly alter them when He chooses to do so. Complete loyalty to Jesus Christ is the one thing we need to live by every day.

The idea is not that Christians 'do' work for God, but rather, that they are so loyal to Him that God does His work through them, without them complaining or receiving any explanation from Him. No matter who you are, you'll find that living a life that's loyal to godly principles will cost you something. When we ask people to consider trusting Christ as Saviour and Lord of their life, we're asking them to re-evaluate their loyalties and give priority to being loyal to Christ and the Scriptures. Sometimes people don't realise that God and truth have taken a back seat in their loyalties, often for the sake of appealing to others in a 'good' light.

We have to ask ourselves: are we willing to place our loyalty in the Messiah Jesus and to His Word above all else? Yes, we need God's grace to keep our hearts loyal and fixed on Him. God promises to never let His people down. He plans to reward His faithful people greatly in heaven for their loyal obedience on earth. God promises in Proverbs, Chapter 28, that: "A faithful (or loyal) man will abound with blessings."

Why, then, did Nebuchadnezzar want to be worshipped as though a god here on earth? Some people are so concerned about themselves that they worship themselves as a god. There's coming a day in the not-so-distant future when a man will sit in God's place in the holiest room of a soon-to-be-built third temple in Jerusalem. This man will expect people to worship him as God. Christians call this man the 'Antichrist' and during his short 7-year reign over the world, many terrible things will happen and millions of people will be killed. Such events will happen after the Lord Jesus has called up from the earth all those who love and obey Him.

During these Tribulation years, those who have known the way of salvation but have never personally accepted Jesus as their Lord will be greatly deceived by the Antichrist's lies. But before that time comes, loyal Christians on earth know that they can expect to suffer as they follow their Lord Jesus. He suffered for all people when He died on the cross to pay the penalty for the world's sins. Christians are called to glorify and honour God in their sufferings, whether they live or die while doing so. Such suffering for Christ will bring great rewards in the next life. God doesn't promise to keep us 'out of the furnace', but He does promise to be with us 'in the furnace'.

He promises to bring us through the suffering that we face, and He will glorify Himself through us. Jesus allows Christians to suffer in various ways to bring them into full dependence, faith and surrender to Him, so that they may also share in His glory in heaven. The Apostle Paul says: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." In Mark, Chapter 8, it says: "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." But even if we fail to be completely loyal and steadfast to Christ, we have His assurance that He will be loyal to us. For in Matthew, Chapter 28, Jesus says: "And surely I am with you always, even until the very end of the age."

We need to understand that spiritual growth isn't automatic. It takes a deliberate commitment on our part. We must want to grow, decide to grow, make an effort to grow, and persist in growing through the enabling of His Holy Spirit. In Philippians, Chapter 2, it says: "Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him."

Two parts of spiritual growth are ‘work out’ and ‘work in’. The ‘work out’ part is our responsibility to desire God’s truth and leadership in our lives, while the ‘work in’ part is God’s role to bring our heart, mind and soul into line with His commands and promises, as is done through the Holy Spirit living within us. Spiritual growth is a joint effort between a believer and the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit works with us; not just ‘in’ us. This verse is written to believers and doesn’t refer to how to be saved but rather, how to grow in one’s salvation day by day. It also doesn’t say that believers must ever work for their salvation, because no one can add anything to what the Lord Jesus has already finished on the cross, paying of the world’s penalty for all its sin.

The Apostle Paul urges all believers in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 9, to run the race of life so that each believer might not be disqualified on Judgment Day but rather, receive a prize of great eternal value.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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