



# CHRISTADELPHIAN ISOLATION LEAGUE

## EXHORTATION

Date: 25th October 2020

### SECTION LEADER:

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Readings: 2 Chronicles 21, 22, Daniel 3, Acts 1

### The God Who Is Able

God had allowed the unthinkable to happen: His people were in exile in Babylon. His promises seemed shattered. Was God really in control? Was He still faithful? Did He still care about His people? In our reading from **Daniel chapter 3** we meet three of those exiles: Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.

To Nebuchadnezzar, it would seem very foolish for anyone not to bow down to his golden image: the fiery furnace was a serious warning to such people. Certainly, it had never occurred to him that officials whom he had recently promoted would disobey his edict: but they did and Nebuchadnezzar was furious. He threatened them with the furnace and with these words: *“who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”* (**Daniel 3:15** ESV). Their response is brave and faithful indeed: *“our God whom we serve is able to deliver us”* (**v17**). He was now so angry that he had the furnace heated to its maximum temperature so that his injured pride might be satisfied by annihilating the three men; he wanted nothing left of them. As if that wasn't enough, he then ordered the strongest men present to tie them up, so that escape was impossible.

So, the three are pushed into the furnace, watched by Nebuchadnezzar from a safe distance. As the flames died down, he could not believe his eyes! He had seen three men thrown into the furnace and now there were four! What is more, all were unbound and unharmed. The fourth person, we discover in **v28**, is an angel. Once again, Nebuchadnezzar has been brought face to face with the God of Israel (we remember the incident with Daniel in **chapter 2**) and we note that he called the three men *“servants of the Most High God”* and later would say: *“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him”* (**Daniel 3:28**). At the end of the episode, the three are promoted again, reminding us of Christ's comment: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you”* (**Matthew 6:33**).

This was more than a miracle, however: it demonstrated the sovereignty of the one true God over the nation that had taken Israel captive; it showed a God who does, after all, care for Israel and works for His people, even in the Godless state of Babylon; it demonstrated God's redemptive purposes. **Isaiah 43:1, 2** says: *“Thus says the LORD, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine....when you walk through fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you’”*.

He is also the God of the individual. We are told that everyone present: *“...saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed...and no smell of fire had come upon them”* (**Daniel 3:27**). How insignificant is a hair! Yet God cared that much: everything about his saints is important and precious in God's sight; this is not escape, it is victory!

We are told that the fourth person in the furnace was an angel. He was from God; he carried God's authority; he came in the name of the LORD and he was in the fire. Their God was not One that was a far off; when they were taken off to Babylon, He had not deserted them, He was prepared to be with them in the fire of exile. He was there to see them through it. They made their stand for the LORD and He did not let them down: by faith, they: *“...quenched the power of fire”* (**Hebrews 11:34**). This is the language of victory, not escape! They would be further emboldened by the knowledge that He was there, in the angel, in the fire.

We may wonder why the angel did not come before they were thrown into the furnace. Everyone learnt from this experience, especially the ones who needed to learn from it, particularly Nebuchadnezzar and the three men. In spite of the events of chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar still had a lot to learn. The God of Israel was not merely a talking point but the living God who controlled history. The three men, once brought before the king, said very little. The time for action had come and Nebuchadnezzar was shown his lesson, not in word, but in deeds. The three men's trust in God was so deep that they could face the man who had total power over them, and still overcome.

Their God is our God, the one: *"who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think"* (**Ephesians 3:20**). The one in whom the Lord God has been revealed, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has promised always to be with his sheep, even when they deserted him in his critical hour, even when he was in the furnace as it were. Luke records: *"And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground"* (**Luke 22:44**). When Jesus arrived at Gethsemane, he fell to his knees in prayer, saying: *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will but yours be done"* (**Luke 22:42**). He states his utter trust in the will of his Father and his complete commitment into the hands of the God *"who is able"*. Please notice, it is then that the angel of the Lord came and was with Jesus in the garden.

Later, in the next chapter, Luke records our Lord's words at the end of his excruciating pain on Calvary (another furnace, of a kind): *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"* (**Luke 23:46**). He is quoting the first half of **Psalms 31:5**. The second half reads: *"you have redeemed me, O LORD faithful God"*. It isn't that he couldn't remember how the rest of verse went: he left that part of it unspoken on the cross, confident that his Father would raise him from the dead; that is because he had complete trust in the Lord and that was the mindset of the three men thrown into the furnace!

Our Lord Jesus knows everything about the furnace of life and he is uniquely placed to plead our cause in heaven and uniquely placed to truly share the same kind of moments in our lives; he is utterly sympathetic.

Perhaps there is a parable being played out here in Babylon. The angel represents Jesus, the unbound one, no slave to sin and, so, not worthy of death. His resurrection released him, once and for all, from the shackles of mortality and he is now, by his sacrifice, able to unbind all men and women from sin and, therefore, from death. We not only thank God for such a wonderful deliverance from eternal death, but also for the victory He gives us through our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar confessed that: *"...there is no other god who is able to rescue (deliver) in this way"* (**Daniel 3:29**). We are reminded of Peter's words regarding God's Son in **Acts 4:12**: *"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* In this man there is complete deliverance. As Paul puts it: *"...we are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (**Romans 8:37**).

The Nebuchadnezzar's of this world may have their day but it is only a day! Our king offers eternity. Paul wrote: *"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal"* (**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**).

Our Lord Jesus himself will be here soon to reveal that glory. So let us now remember him and the trial and affliction he went through so that we might have the opportunity of living forever.

**Brother Nigel Patterson: Newquay. UK 25.10.20**