**Thrown to the flames**

Only a few people close to the royal enclosure could see and hear what happened next, but everybody tried to. While the great golden image still towered above them the crowds surged forward to catch a glimpse of the three young men who had dared to defy the king. Many a little boy, I am sure, climbed on his daddy’s shoulders to get a better view of what was going on. “Is it true?” asked Nebuchadnezzar of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. “Do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?(Dan 3:14). He offered them one more chance, for he had liked these young men from the first time he had seem them. The band would play again. If they would now fall down before the image all would be well.

If not they would be cast at once into “a burning fiery furnace.” “And what God,” asked the king, “shall deliver you out of my hands?” It was an awful moment for the three young men. Nobody likes to be burned alive. They could see smoke rising from the furnace which the king had brought along to deal with people like them, and they knew very well that he would do exactly as he had said if they disobeyed him again. Yet they did not flinch. They could have said to themselves, “Well, just bowing down once won’t matter very much We couldn’t really be worshipping the image . We would just do it to please the king who has been so good to us.” But they did no such thing. They remembered the commandment of God, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven

image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow thyself to them: for I the LORD thy GOD am a jealous GOD, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”(Exodus 20:4,5,6). And they decided that they must obey God rather than man. So respectively, “ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, 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 thine hand,

Oh 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.”(Dan:16,17,18). Hearing the young men’s reply, the king became very furious and could hardly contain his rage. “Heat the furnace!” he roared. “Make it seven times hotter than it ever was heated before!” Servants ran to do his bidding. Some started to throw more fuel on the fire. Others worked the bellows to fan the flames to white heat. Meanwhile the strongest men in the king’s army were called to bind the three young men with ropes. Hotter and hotter grew the fire, until the king and the whole royal party could feel the heat of it. Now the problem arose as to how to get the young men into it. It was too hot. Nobody could get near it.

Even the mighty men who had bound Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego drew back, wondering what to do next. “Throw them in!” yelled the king in his wild anger. The soldiers obeyed. Picking up the three young men, they moved forward, threw them into the furnace, then fell to the ground and died from the terrible heat. Nebuchadnezzar did not care. His foolish jealousy was now satisfied. Nobody would dare disobey him again. As for the three young Hebrews and their God he was glad to be rid of them. Suddenly a cry was raised. “Look! There’s somebody in the fire!” What!” cried the king. “Impossible!” Wide-eyed with amazement he gazed through the open doors of the blazing furnace. Yes, there was somebody inside of it.

Two people in fact. No, three, four! Others were looking now; everybody who could get close enough to get in. “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” cried the king. “True O king,” said those about him. “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.” Forgetting his royal dignity, forgetting the tens of thousands of eyes that were upon him, Nebuchadnezzar left his throne and hurried as near as he dared to the door of the furnace. ”Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!” he cried. “Ye servants of the most high God, come fourth, and come hither.” They came. They were not burned in any way, nor were their clothes even scorched. All that the fire had consumed,

Were the ropes that had bound them. Everybody crowded around to see the astounding sight. “And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon who’s bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. As for Nebuchadnezzar, he was quite overcome by the experience. He never said another word about his great golden idol. Instead he declared to all about him, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the kings word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve or

worship any god, except their own God. “Therefore I make a decree, That every people , nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made of dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.” It was indeed a wonderful deliverance, and God used it to cheer the hearts of His people in the days of their captivity. It must have been a comfort to them to know that He was willing to walk in the fire with those three dear faithful lads! Perhaps He will do the same for you someday.