

Explanatory and Practical Notes.

Verse 16. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These were three young Hebrews, who were with Daniel, and like him promoted to important positions in the state. Their Jewish names, Hananlah, Mishael, and Azariah, had been changed by King Nebuchadnezzar. **Answered and said.** The king inquired of them whether the charge was true, that they had failed to bow down before the great golden image. **Nebuchadnezzar.** He was the son of Nabopolassar, the founder of the Babylonian Empire, and reigned from 604 to 586 B. C. He raised Babylon to the height of its power, built its gigantic walls, and reared its hanging gardens. He was a mighty conqueror, a wise and statesmanlike ruler, but in character a thoroughly Oriental despot. **We are not careful.** Rev. Ver., "We have no need." "That is," there is no use in discussing the question. Your mind is settled, and so is ours." Notice how openly and squarely these young men met temptation. They did not offer to compromise or try to avoid conclusions, but spoke out decidedly. (1) *All honor to the young man who dares to say "No."*

17. If it be so. If it be that those who will not worship must be thrown into the furnace. **Our God is able to deliver us.** The only question in their minds was not whether God was able, but whether they were worthy of his power. **The burning fiery furnace.** Such cruelties were not uncommon in the East. A picture at Nineveh shows two men being burned alive, their tongues being first been torn out. **He will deliver us.** This was the utterance of strong faith, for there is no hint of any divine revelation. (2) *Learn to trust God in the deepest trials.*

18. But if not. They believed that God would deliver them; but even though he should not, their purpose was the same. They were not of the class who serve God only while it seems to be for their interest. **We will not serve thy gods.** It was apparently a small matter to bow the knee; but that meant a profession of service which these conscientious young men would not make. **The golden image.** It stood on the plain of Dura, near Babylon, and, with its pedestal, was nearly a hundred feet high. Herodotus says that he saw in Babylon, about a century after this, a statue of solid gold eighteen feet high; and King Xerxes took from one temple in the same city gold to the amount of eighty-six million dollars; so that the statements concerning this image are not incredible. (3) *Let us not only avoid evil, but, like these youths, avoid the appearance of evil.* (4) *We should not be ashamed to let men see that we are on the Lord's side.*

19. Full of fury. An absolute monarch, he had never before been addressed in this manner, nor met such determined resistance to his will. **The form of his visage.** The face is often the index of the soul, and reveals the thought within. **Heat the furnace one seven times.** The number seven signifies completeness, and this means no more than that the furnace was to be made as hot as possible; but this only made the deliverance all the more signal. (5) *The schemes of wicked men only result in the greater glory to God's name.*

20. 21. The most mighty men. The task of throwing these victims into the fire was a dangerous one, as the result proved; hence the selection of the strongest soldiers. **Bound in their coats, their hose, and their hats.** Rev. ver., "their hose, their tunics, and their mantles." There is a difference among exporters as to the precise articles of dress referred to. The first may indicate the flowing trousers, the second the under garment reaching to the knee, and the third the outer robe. Just as they were standing in their garments of state they were seized and bound. **Cast into the midst.** It was probably in the form of a pit, into whose opening they were thrown. (6) *There is a fire which is hotter and burns longer; may we escape its burning!*

22. The king's commandment was urgent. Compelling the executioners to hasten, even to the risk of their own lives. **Slew those men.** They were perhaps smothered by the smoke as they approached too near the edge of the pit. If both these men and the

Hebrews had perished, this event would have seemed accidental; if both had escaped, some critics would have claimed that there was only a pretense of obeying the command; but when the young men escape unharmed in the fiery depths, on whose border the mighty men are slain, the hand of God is clearly revealed.

23. Fell down bound. We cannot, even in thought, place ourselves in the condition of these heroes. They were ready to give up their lives for conscience' sake. (7) *What self-denial are we willing to offer for right and duty?* **Into the midst.** The Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Old Testament, inserts at this place a hymn said to have been sung by these young men in the furnace; but it contains no evidences of inspiration. It may be read in the English Apocrypha.

24. Then Nebuchadnezzar. As soon as the fire had abated sufficiently for him to approach the furnace and look within it. **Was astonished.** An old word for astonished. **Said unto his counselors.** The nobles who were at all times in attendance upon the king. **Did not we...** They answered. Thus the testimony of the king receives confirmation from his council, who joined in the command and witnessed the event.

25. Lo, I see four men loose. It may be asked why the laws of nature were superseded for these men, and not for Ridley, Latimer, and many more martyrs who have died 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. **Walking in the midst.** They trod the burning coals at ease, content to remain there until summoned forth. **The form of the fourth.** Rev. Ver., "the aspect of the fourth." The miracle was not in the presence of the heavenly being, for that is always given to God's people when they need it, but in the manifestation of it to the king's senses. Spiritual things are seen only by men in a high spiritual state, but occasionally, as here, and to Elisha's servant (2 Kings 6, 17), a revelation is granted to people of lower nature. **The son of God.** Rev. Ver., "the Son of God," which is more correct, since Nebuchadnezzar could not know of "the Son of God" as we understand him. He meant a divine being or an angel. See ver. 28. Perhaps it was the Angel of the Covenant, the pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus Christ. (8) *Those who suffer for Christ's sake shall have his presence with them.*

26. Came near. When the heat had sufficiently subsided to allow a nearer approach. **Ye servants.** He now speaks respectfully to those whom a while before he had abused. (9) *God shall yet make all his faithful ones honorable before the world.* **Most high God.** Perhaps he had felt a contempt for Jehovah as the God of the Jews, unable to protect his city against the Chaldeans. See verse 15. Now he honors that God, as most high, above even his own Bel, the god of Babylon.

27. Princes, governors, and captains. These titles in the Rev. Ver. are given as "satraps, deputies, and governors." They were the officers of the realm, gathered from the various provinces. By them the news of this event was carried throughout the empire, and thus the very means employed to honor the idol only resulted in the greater glory to Jehovah. **Saw these men.** Their divine companion had now disappeared; indeed it is not stated that either the three Hebrews or the Chaldean nobles saw him. **Nor was a hair.** The fire had not even scorched their hair nor their garments; an emblem of the greater fact that their characters had remained unspotted from the wickedness which surrounded them in the palace.

28. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake. These words of the king are not to be understood as meaning that he became a worshiper of the God of Israel. He merely recognized him among the objects of worship in his dominions, and forbade the persecution of his servants. **Changed the king's word.** Have set aside his command and compelled its alteration, a very unusual event in an Oriental monarchy.

HOME READINGS.

M. The fiery furnace. Dan. 3, 16-28.

Tu. Consigned to the fiery furnace. Dan. 3, 1-27.

W. The Spirit, the speaker. Matt. 10, 16-37.

Th. The strong deliverer. Gal. 1, 1-20.

F. The Comforter and present Help. Isa. 43, 1-7.

S. Worship due to God. Deut. 10, 12-22.

S. Trust, and the joy it brings. Ps. 34, 1-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. Dan. 3, 17.