

SHADRACH REMEMBERS

Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up (Daniel 3:17-18)

‘Don’t go inside the kitchen if you cannot take the heat’
is what we used to say as kids when playing in the street.
We didn’t know that one day we would all be forced to choose
whether we would heed the king’s command or say, ‘We must refuse.’
The decision wasn’t easy. It was, ‘Bow or face the fire.’
Would we go the way of Babylon or do what God required?
The king had raised a statue of himself in burnished gold:
And thirty metres high it stood—amazing to behold.
‘Bow down,’ he said, ‘and worship it or face a dreadful fate—
The burning, blazing furnace.’

Well, we didn’t hesitate.

We heard the sound of trumpet, harp and zither, lyre and pipe,
and the counsellors and governors all acted true to type,
obedient, subservient, they quickly bowed the knee
and all the people followed them in meek complicity.
Because we were of Hebrew stock some locals planned a ruse
and told Nebuchadnezzar we would certainly refuse.
‘No god can save or rescue you,’ the king declared in ire.
‘Our God is able,’ Meshach said, ‘to save us from the fire.’
‘But even if he doesn’t,’ added bold Abednego,
‘We will not bow to idols—nor your image—even so.’

The king was full of fury. ‘Heat the furnace sevenfold!
Then throw them in together—since they dare to be so bold.’
Our faith was less than perfect: what would the outcome be?
Could we ever be forsaken? Surely God would set us free!
Should we cringe from persecution and excruciating pain
or embrace the opportunity for everlasting gain?
Would we compromise our conscience lest we suffer grievous loss
or stand for truth and honesty regardless of the cost?
There was only one conclusion for whatever the result,
we could not fail our fathers’ God—he could not be at fault.

Well, I still cannot explain it: it was all beyond belief!
While the soldiers were extinguished, we enjoyed a sweet relief—

like a cool refreshing shower or a burst of summer rain.
We began to dance like children, with no twinge or hint of pain
and beside us in the furnace, shaking hands and smiling wide
was a Messenger from heaven, there in person, by our side.
We will always recollect it. He was there, without a doubt.
And stunned Nebuchadnezzar—he just could not work it out.
So he gave a proclamation that the Lord should be revered;
And that he above all others should be held in holy fear.

The image that the king set up was splendid, great and tall
and everyone in Babylon acceded to his call,
while we were only three, both insignificant and small.
But our God who delivered us is greater than them all.

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