“Faith Under Fire”
Daniel 3:1-30 (NKJV)

Tonight we are going to be continuing with our “Hot Summer Nights” series. And what would this series be without that wonderful account of Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego in the fiery furnace in Daniel chapter three.

If you would, please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Daniel, and for now I would like to read verses 16-18.

Daniel 3:16-18 (NKJV)

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

17 If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king.

18 But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

P R A Y E R

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INTRODUCTION

On March 20, 2003, the United States armed forces and their allies from Great Britain launched a “shock and awe” attack on the city of Baghdad in central Iraq in the early stages of an eight year long war to topple the dictatorial government of Saddam Hussein.

Over the course of those eight years, over 1.5 million U.S. troops were deployed to Iraq; with 4,500 of our soldiers dying on that battlefield.

Little did our troops realize they were fighting on soil that is rich in Biblical history.

-Many believe THE GARDEN OF EDEN was located in this region because we are told in Genesis 2 that the river Euphrates flowed out of the Garden.

-It was also in this same area where Nimrod built the city of Babel, and the kingdom of Babylon had its birth. (Genesis 10:8-10)

-It was in this same region that NOAH built the Ark in the years leading up to the Great Flood.

-Abraham was originally from UR of the CHALDEES, which was located in the southeastern part of modern day Iraq.

-The scriptures tell us God sent Jonah to preach in the city of Ninevah. Ninevah was located along the Tigris river in the northern part of modern day Iraq near the city of Mosul.

And that brings us to tonight’s scripture. The Book of Daniel is set in the land of Babylon, the same land upon which our soldiers fought during the war in Iraq.
After Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom in **722 BC** all that was left of Israel was a small portion of land around Jerusalem called Judah. Despite the judgment that was experienced by the Northern Kingdom, the people of Judah plunged headlong into a life of idolatry, so GOD permitted the land of Judah to be conquered by the Babylonians.

Between **605 B.C. and 586 B.C.** the Babylonians launched three sieges upon the land of Judah, taking Jewish captives back to Babylon. Among all the captives, the names of four young men are highlighted for us in the scriptures: Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego.

**Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian King** saw something special in these four young men. They were handsome, they were very intelligent, and they were all “quick-learners.” So Nebuchadnezzar hand-picked these four young men to be trained and educated in the ways of the Babylonians to prepare them to serve in his government.

In **Daniel 2** we read about a bizarre dream King Nebuchadnezzar had one night. In this dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a giant image of a man. **Its head was made of GOLD.** **Its chest and arms were made of SILVER.** **Its belly and thighs were made of BRONZE.** **Its legs were made of IRON.** And its feet were made partly of IRON and CLAY.

Well this dream drove Nebuchadnezzar “nuts.” He called in all his wise men.....magicians.....and astrologers to see if they could tell him the meaning of his dream. When they failed to come up with an interpretation, Nebuchadnezzar became so furious he ordered the executions of these men.

Upon the advice of one of Nebuchadnezzar's chief advisers, Daniel went to King Nebuchadnezzar and offered to interpret his dream.
Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that the **Golden head on the Image** represented him and his Babylonian kingdom, and that the other four bodily features of the giant image represented **four more great kingdoms that would rise to power over the course of history**.

King Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed with Daniel's ability to interpret his dream that he promoted Daniel, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego to key administrative positions within his government.

Well as time passed, Nebuchadnezzar just couldn't stop thinking about that giant image he had dreamed about, so he had his craftsmen build a replica of this giant image in the plain of Dura.

Now some believe that in his vanity, King Nebuchadnezzar had his craftsman build an image that looked just like him, but this was not the case.

Normally when a statue is erected in the image of a man it is made on a 5 to 1 scale, which is common for human proportions. The giant image Nebuchadnezzar had his craftsmen build was on a 10 to 1 scale, which looked like a weird, elongated man. This bizarre looking image was **90 feet tall but only 9 feet wide**.

To give you an idea of just how bizarre this thing must have looked think about this. That pew you are sitting in is **10 feet wide or one foot wider than the golden image**. Imagine a building 9 stories high and not quite as wide as the pew you are sitting on.
If you and I saw this giant image on exhibit at a modern art show we would be scratching our heads and saying, “What in the world is that supposed to be?” I mean, other than the fact this image was made of GOLD, there was nothing attractive about it. It was absolutely HIDEOUS!

But Nebuchadnezzar loved the giant image he had made. In fact, he loved it so much, he wanted everyone in Babylon to love it too, including Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego.

First of all, let’s consider.......

I. The DILEMMA They Faced (Daniel 3:4-7)

Daniel 3:4-7 (NKJV)

4 Then a herald cried aloud: “To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,

5 that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up;

6 and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

7 So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

1. The dilemma Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego found themselves in was this: “Bow down and worship the golden image or die.”
2. This edict by King Nebuchadnezzar didn't pose a problem for the majority of the people under the rule of Babylon. These were heathen nations that didn't believe in JEHOVAH GOD.

3. And so on the day of the dedication ceremony for the golden image, when the music played, the people complied to the new law and got down on their knees and worshiped the golden image.

4. But not every knee was bowing. You notice Daniel's name is not mentioned. Some Bible scholars believe Nebuchadnezzar had sent Daniel on a government assignment out of the country so he would not be present at the time this order was given and the dedication was held.

5. But Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego were there. And the Chaldeans, who were jealous over their promotions by Nebuchadnezzar, watched them like “a hawk” on the day of the dedication.

6. When they observed that Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego had not bowed down and worshiped the golden image, they made a “bee line” straight to Nebuchadnezzar.
7. In verse 12 we see the report they gave Nebuchadnezzar.

v. 12 “There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

8. When Nebuchadnezzar heard this he went into a tyrannical rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego be brought to him immediately.

This brings us to ……

II. The DECISION They Made (Daniel 3:16-18)

1. As soon as they are brought before Nebuchadnezzar, he asks them, “Is it true? Is it true that you do not worship my gods and that you didn’t bow down worship the golden image I have set up?”

2. Before giving them a chance to respond, Nebuchadnezzar says, “I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I am going to give you guys another crack at this. We’re going to go back out to the Plain of Dura. I’m going to have the musicians sound the music, and you guys are going to fall down and worship the golden image, then we are all going to go home and pretend none of this ever happened.”
3. Then Nebuchadnezzar says, “If you don't bow down and worship the image you will leave me with no other choice but to have you thrown into “the fiery furnace.”

4. Without any hesitation, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego make one of the boldest, most courageous proclamations of faith in the entire Bible......

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16b-18 NKJV)

5. They had decided they would rather DIE than to bow before a false god!

That brings us to........

III. The DELIVERANCE They Received (Daniel 3:19-28)

1. Can you think of any worse way to die than in a fire? Shadrach, Meshech and Abednego were to be executed in a furnace or kiln that was normally used for baking bricks. The normal temperature inside this brick kiln would have been somewhere between 1000 - 1500 degrees. That temperature was sufficient to kill the three men.
2. But in verse 19 we see a classic case of “over kill.” Nebuchadnezzar is so angry with Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, he gives his soldiers a command to increase the heat inside the furnace seven times hotter than the normal temperature. Now if the normal temperature was 1,000 - 1,500 degrees, this means the temperature was increased to somewhere between 7,000 and 10,500 degrees.

3. After layering the three men up with their coats, trousers, turbans and other garments, and tying their hands and feet, the soldiers brought the men to the fiery furnace.

When the soldiers removed the opening on top of the furnace, verse 22 tells us the heat was so intense it killed the soldiers. Some commentators say the soldiers literally disintegrated from the intense heat.

4. Verse 23 tells us, “Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.”

5. Now if the flames and heat above the furnace had been so intense that it disintegrated the soldiers, one would certainly think the same would happen to the three young men INSIDE THE FURNACE!
6. But that is not what happened. Evidently there was some kind of a ventilation opening or window on the side of the furnace that allowed King Nebuchadnezzar and his counselors to see inside the furnace. And just what did they see?

7. Look at verses 24-25.......

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counsellors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

25 “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

8. I want you to listen very carefully to what I am about to say, because it is the key point of this whole message.

The LORD did not deliver Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego FROM the fire, He delivered them IN the fire.

9. And the same is true for you and me. When you and I take a stand for our FAITH and refuse to bow down to the world's demands, it doesn't mean the LORD will spare us from the “flames” of suffering and persecution.
10. But what it does mean is that when we find ourselves in the furnace of suffering for our FAITH, the LORD will be in the FIRE with us.

11. When Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego were brought out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar and his counselors couldn't believe their eyes. Not only had they not perished in the flames, not a hair on their heads were singed......not a thread on their garments was burned.......and they didn't even smell like smoke.

12. The LORD had saved them completely!

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C O N C L U S I O N

There is much to learn from this account about our own FAITH. If you and I trust in GOD completely we can expect our FAITH to be challenged. If you and I trust in GOD completely we can expect to be TEMPTED to compromise our FAITH. If you and I trust in GOD completely, we can be assured that we will never be alone, even in the fiery furnace of persecution.

The account of “The Fiery Furnace” is a foreshadow of a day yet in the future. There is coming a time when the whole world is going to have to make a choice: “Bow to the image of the BEAST or die.” John tells us in the Book of Revelation that in those days of the Great Tribulation, many will refuse to bow to the image and will lose their lives. And yet their deaths will NOT have been in VAIN. They will NOT have been defeated, because they shall emerge from the fires of persecution victorious, and will reign with JESUS for a thousand years! AND THAT IS OUR MESSAGE FROM THE LORD ON THIS “HOT SUMMER NIGHT.”