

DANIEL'S COMPANIONS: PART 1 (3:1-15)

At the beginning of this series, I told you about an experiment that was designed to show how teenagers handle peer pressure. They brought groups of ten into a room for a test. Each group of ten was instructed to raise their hand when the teacher pointed to the longest line on three separate charts. But nine of the teens in each group were instructed ahead of time to only vote for the *second* longest line. The one teen that had no clue about the experiment would typically glance around in confusion, then eventually go along with the rest of the group simply because he/she lacked the courage to challenge the group. This occurred in about 75% of the cases.¹

Now let me give you the rest of the results that I didn't tell you about. The experiment also showed that if only *one* other teenager stood for the truth, the test subject was far more likely to resist peer pressure as well. It showed that *one* voice can make a difference among many.²

And we see this playing out in the lives of Daniel and his three friends – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Because of Daniel's influence, his friends also resolved to live for God no matter the cost. Like Daniel, they refused to conform to the external pressures of the Babylonian culture.

Now remember, at the end of chapter 2 (vs. 48-49) it says, *"The king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court."*

So, we won't see Daniel in chapter three because he's working back at the king's court while his friends are now working out in the province of Babylon. And these new positions of power will bring enormous pressure for Daniel's friends to conform to the culture.

So, tonight and next week, we're going to see if their internal convictions will enable them to stand under the external pressures of the culture.

Let's jump in and read verses 1-15 together...

¹ C. Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, p. 225.

² <https://explorable.com/asch-experiment>

Daniel 3:1-15 *"King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." ⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of... every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. ⁹ They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of... every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." ¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the... music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"*

The first thing we see is...

1. The command of the king.

As you can see, Nebuchadnezzar's heart hasn't changed one bit. In chapter two he admitted that Daniel's God was the "God of gods," (2:47) but this truth never really got to his heart. He praised God with his lips, but he did not repent in his heart.³

If you remember, in chapter two, God gave Nebuchadnezzar a vision of a statue and Daniel told the king that Babylon was the "head of gold" – the greatest of four world empires. And God told him, "Nebuchadnezzar, *you* are the head of gold on this image, but one day you'll be replaced by a chest and arms of silver."

And Nebuchadnezzar's response was, "*No I won't!* You won't replace me. I'm not just the head of gold. I'll build my own statue from head to toe – an image of myself. I'll reign forever. You don't tell me what to do. I may tip my hat to Daniel's God, but I will NOT bow my knee to Him!"⁴

By the way: this is the way the human heart operates – when God is not honored, man naturally glorifies himself.⁵ People who refuse to worship the true God will, by default, create a god in their own likeness – a god who agrees with their own opinions.

For example, we will "worship" (*worth-ship*)...

- **Some Person** (to date or marry, children, etc.) "If I could just have *them*, I would be happy and fulfilled." Or you worship the IDEA of being in a relationship, marriage, or having a family.
- **Some Thing** (possessions, career, popularity, etc.) "If I could just have *that*, I would be fulfilled."
- **Some Ideology** (belief system or "great cause") "If I can convince people to conform to *this*, I would be fulfilled."

These are all good gifts from God, but you were never meant to find your "worth" *in* them or place too much worth *on* them.



But why bring all these people and political leaders together and force them to worship the statue at the exact same time?

As Babylon grew into the greatest city in the world, many new religious views had made their way into Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. That's why verse 4 tells us that "peoples, nations and men of every language" were

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Da 3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ From Ben Stuart sermon: "Faith Under Fire" Sept. 23, 2024

⁵ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Da 3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

there. So, his statue was a way to unify his kingdom religiously around a central “god” or a central ideology.

And notice how Nebuchadnezzar did it. He appealed to the people’s senses...

- **Sight** (vs.1) – When the people stood before this enormous statue, they had a sense of awe because of its size (90ft tall – the height of a 9-story building), and its beauty (pure gold). It was beautiful and intimidating all at the same time.
- **Social Pressure** (vs.2-3) – Notice who is there. It says, “Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image.”

And, in verse 3, it repeats the fact that they all obeyed and came to the ceremony. Why is Daniel (the writer of this book) so careful to repeat who was there? Because he is trying to help you *feel* the enormous social pressure of the moment – EVERYONE was there and EVERYONE was doing it!

- **Sound** (vs.4-5) – It says, “The herald proclaimed, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.”

The king uses the greatest instruments and musicians of that day from a variety of nations and says, “I’ll create music that stirs your soul as I call you to obey me.”

So, thousands of people are standing before this great statue and everyone has a decision to make when the music begins to play, which leads us to our second point.

2. The choices among the crowd.

The crowd basically had three options...

- 1) **Bow willingly** – The first choice was simple – go all in. Think of the setting – the vibe: This beautiful and awe-inspiring statue on

the open plain of Dura, a sea of people ("who's who" of society), powerful and moving music that stirred the soul.

Think worship at *Passion Camp* – the sight, sound, and power of the moment.

But the average person in this crowd didn't know the true God – they weren't singing to Jesus. These people made their life decisions based on what was popular in the moment.

- 2) **Bow reluctantly** – As I said, many in the crowd came from conquered nations and some of them still had an underlying hatred for the king and all that the image represented. After all, he had destroyed their hometown, murdered their family, carried them off to a foreign land, and forced them to serve him.

They put a smile on their face, but inside, they were bowing *reluctantly* out of fear and intimidation. In fact, historians believe about 10,000 Jewish nobles/leaders were taken to Babylon with Daniel and his friends. Many of them were in this crowd, but we never see any of them taking a stand. They either *willingly* or *reluctantly* went along with the crowd.

- 3) **Stand firm** – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood for God no matter the cost! Scholars estimate around 300,000 people gathered before this statue of Nebuchadnezzar. As a sea of people bowed in unison, only three remained standing. That's 300,000 versus 3! Can you imagine the pressure they felt to conform?

We think it's impossible to stand for God in front of...

- 20 people in the locker room.
- 30 people in the classroom.
- 75 people in the cafeteria.
- Or just 3 people in our home.

But these young men took a stand in front of 300,000!! And this leads us to our final point.

3. The commitment of Daniel's friends.

When you stand UP, you stand OUT. And when you stand out for God, the devil will make sure you face opposition. Verse 8 says, "At that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused" them.

That term “**maliciously accused**” literally means “to tear in pieces.”⁶ These accusers wanted to tear/shred their credibility and, as we’ll see later, they wanted to see them literally *torn to pieces* by hungry lions. REMEMBER: these are very same officials that Daniel had saved from being “torn limb from limb” by the king when Daniel interpreted the king’s dream.⁷ Now they were turning on Daniel’s friends.



So, what happens now that the king is furious, and 300,000 people are staring at them?

You’ll have to come back next week to find out!

Small Groups

⁶ Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Da 3:8–12). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁷ *Agents of Babylon Study Guide* by David Jeremiah (pg.43)