**The Face-Off**

**Daniel 1:1-4**

**Introduction**

In sports such as hockey, a face-off refers to the start or restart of play in which the referee drops the puck between two opposing players. It is direct confrontation between two opposing parties. Since we are talking about hockey, it is safe to say it can be rather fierce! When Daniel and others were transported to Babylon, there was a face-off between two cultures. One culture was God-centered and the other godless. Perhaps this face-off is best represented visually by Daniel in the lion’s den. Daniel was really no match for the lions. The only hope for Daniel was in God’s deliverance.

We are in a similar clash of cultures today. Obviously, things are changing in America because we have departed from the Bible. Those who remain true to God’s Word are at odds with the godless, secular culture. We can find great encouragement from the book of Daniel regarding what it means to stand by faith. In this series, we will endeavor to understand not only what Daniel reveals about the end times, but how it applies to today. “The Book of Daniel is not only one of the most intriguing works in the Bible, but it is also filled with timeless truths that are just as relevant to modern believers as they were to those who first heard them” (Stephen Miller). Because there is an enemy that continues to oppose all that is right and good, there must be people of God who stand by faith. In this lesson, we will consider how Nebuchadnezzar set himself in opposition to God’s people. How did he plan to bring about a cultural revolution?

1. **Background to the study of Daniel.**
   1. In the preface to his commentary on Daniel, John Goldingay said that the book had to be rescued from three primary schools of thought:
      1. Those who were skeptical of its accuracy. Some say it is too precise to be prophesy!
      2. Those who view it only as children’s stories.
      3. Those who view it as prophesy to be decoded.
   2. Daniel was writing for the benefit of the generation that was to settle back in the land of Israel.
      1. Daniel wrote to give them a biblical view of their past, present, and future.
      2. They were captive in Babylon because of their sinful choices. Warren Wiersbe said, “God would rather have His people living in shameful captivity in a pagan land than living like pagans in the Holy Land and disgracing His name.” They had to learn the hard way.
      3. God said they would be in the land for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11). Now that 70 years had passed, they were to return to Israel.
   3. As they returned to the land, they would face opposition. The wrong choices of their parents have made the next generation an easy target for their enemy.
      1. They needed to be encouraged by the examples of those who stood firm in the face of opposition while in Babylon.
      2. Under inspiration, Daniel reflected on their past as he sought to give them courage for the future.
      3. He also wanted them to understand the basic tactics of a culture that is antagonistic to the people of God.
2. **When Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, he targeted two key areas.** 
   1. Nebuchadnezzar understood that a military siege of a country was not sufficient to change a country. He purposed to bring about a cultural revolution.
   2. First, he targeted their faith.
      1. The vessels that were used in the service of God were transported to Babylon to be used in the temples of their false gods. (v. 2b)
      2. He transported them from the holy city of Jerusalem to Shinar. Shinar represents all that opposes godliness. (v. 2c) The Theological Workbook of the Old Testament comments on Shinar:
         1. Shinar is the Old Testament designation for southern Mesopotamia, the plain between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. It is modern day Iraq.
         2. In Gen 10:10, we are told that the great tyrant and empire builder, Nimrod, founded his kingdom in Babel.
         3. It was also here that rebellious man built the well-known tower of Babel in direct defiance of God.
         4. In Zechariah 5:11, it is the place where wickedness makes her home.
         5. All of this points to a sinister significance for Shinar as the major center for the development of a culture and civilization built on counterfeit religion, rebellion against the true God and His revealed Word, the cradle of imperial tyranny, and the enemy of God's people—in short, the epitome of wickedness.
      3. If he was successful in changing the way they served God, he would be successful in changing how they lived.
   3. Second, he targeted their youth. (v. 3-4)
      1. Nebuchadnezzar wanted to enlist some of the Israelite youth in his administration. Most estimate that Daniel would have been about 15 years old. He understood that the minds of young people are impressionable. He planned to shape their minds.
      2. He understood that they had great potential. The enemy understands the potential found in today’s young people.
      3. They were physically, intellectually, and socially fit.
      4. In essence, they were perfection candidates for his process of indoctrination. We will take a closer look next week at the particulars of how he planned to indoctrinate them.
   4. Central Idea: Nebuchadnezzar endeavored to bring about a cultural revolution by targeting their faith and their youth.
3. **Relevance: God’s enemy continues to bring about a cultural revolution by targeting our faith and today’s youth.**
   1. The enemy is targeting the faith. We must be among those who would “earnestly contend for the faith.” (Jude 3). Satan wants to take that which is devoted to God and use it for his sinister purposes. He wants to close the doors of Bible-preaching churches. If the enemy can make advances in the church (the pillar and ground of the truth), he has greater opportunity to spread lies.
      1. Can you identify ways churches are changing in America?
      2. In what ways is your personal service to God targeted?
   2. It is also evident that the enemy is targeting the minds of young people in America. Consider the percentage of advertising that is geared toward today’s youth. Consider also the indoctrination that is taking place through various forms of entertainment. Add to this what is taught from the earliest years of elementary classes to today’s university. You have a recipe for what it takes to change a whole culture.
      1. How has youth culture changed over the last few decades?
      2. In what ways are the youth of Southwest Baptist Church being bombarded with godlessness? What can we do about it?
   3. Daniel sought to inspire God’s people to live for God in a culture that was antagonistic to their faith. What examples of faith inspire you today? Are you spiritually prepared for the face-off?