

# LESSON 7

Verse 8 begins with a startling statement: “But Daniel purposed in his heart...”

Why was it startling? Because Daniel was a teenager. Because Daniel was far from home. Because Daniel had been dragged away from his family. Because many of his friends likely were telling him that God had forsaken them. Because of the tremendous pressure he was under from his new overseers. And we could go on and on.

With all of that working against him, Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself. Yes, it was a startling statement, but likely not that startling to people who knew Daniel!

But wasn't Daniel being a legalist? Wasn't he carrying this obedience thing just a bit too far?

First, we have to define what we mean by “legalist.” If we mean someone who focuses on part of the law while ignoring the remainder, then no, Daniel was not that. If we mean someone who obeys the law thinking that God will then owe him something, then no, Daniel was not that. If we mean someone who creates new laws not in God's word and then binds men to follow them, then no, Daniel was not that. But if we mean someone who loves and delights in the law of God and who tries faithfully to follow it all to please God and show his love for God, then yes, Daniel was a legalist — and we should be, too.

But wasn't Daniel in the minority? Weren't all of the public opinion polls against him on this food issue?

First, God's people have been in the majority only twice in human history: just after creation and just after the flood. At all other times they have been outnumbered by the ungodly. Our eternal destiny does not depend on the popular vote!

Second, although it may come as a surprise to some (particularly in the denominational world), the church is *not* a democracy. We don't determine the truth; we don't vote on the truth. The truth is the truth regardless of what we think about it.

**Romans 3:4** — *Let God be true though every man a liar!*

But isn't democracy God's favorite political system (as we often hear from Bible thumping politicians)? We can perhaps *infer* an answer to that question from Daniel. In fact, what we *don't* find in Daniel may help us answer that question! Everyone knows that Athens was the birthplace of democracy. That birth occurred around 500 BC, and it lasted for about 100 years. 100 years after that, Alexander was dead and his empire fragmented. Fast forward another 100 years, and Greece was at war with Rome, and we all know how that ended. In fact, Daniel told us in 600 BC how it ended, 100 years before democracy was born in Athens! It is interesting that although Daniel tells us in great detail what would happen with the kingdoms of the world in the 600 years between his day and the first century, he skips right over the birth of democracy in Athens just 100 years later.

I think a good argument can be made that if God has a favorite political system, it is a monarchy rather than a democracy. Israel was a monarchy under God until they rejected him as king and sought an earthly ruler instead to reign over them. The church (God's eternal kingdom) is a monarchy as well. We will learn much about that kingdom when we get to Chapter 2. Verse 44 will tell us about a *kingdom* set up by God. Jesus is our king, not our president. We don't get to vote when it comes to God's kingdom.

Daniel and his friends did not get together to vote on what to do; they knew what to do. And there is a word for that — integrity! We don't see Daniel agonizing over what to do. There was no need to agonize over this decision — Daniel knew what he

had to do — and he knew that before he was ever faced with the decision. If we like Daniel purpose in our heart to follow God’s word, then we won’t find ourselves with very many difficult decisions. Most of the decisions will have already been made!

Daniel used the word “defile” in verse 8. Even that word choice was courageous! He used a strong word but an appropriate word. The Bible names names and uses strong, direct, unmistakable language when needed. God is not the author of confusion, and the best way to avoid confusion is to speak plainly. Daniel did just that in verse 8.

The Babylonians could change many things about Daniel’s life: his homeland, his culture, his name. But they could not change his heart. He remained loyal and true to God, and he wanted to make sure the entire world knew that he was loyal and true to God. It reminds me of one of my favorite songs: “To Christ be loyal and be true; he needs brave volunteers to stand against the powers of sin, moved not by frowns or fears!”

Can you imagine the kind of courage required for this exiled teenager to stand up against all of the might and power of Babylon! Can you imagine the courage it took for him to stand up against the peer pressure from his own fellow exiles?

By choosing this course of action, Daniel and his three friends were setting themselves apart from all of the others. The others likely thought no one would ever know what they were doing in Babylon — but Daniel knew that God would know. The others may have even blamed God for their predicament — but Daniel knew that their nation’s own disobedience was to blame.

Daniel faced the same sort of pressures that we face today — he was pressured to change his whole way of thinking. We can only imagine the pressure and influence these pagan Babylonian teachers tried to exert on the exiles. They no doubt looked down on them as uneducated hicks who needed to be taught the true way of viewing the world.

The Babylonians wanted the exiles to adopt their worldview, their view of man, their view of God, their view of morality — all of which ran directly counter to what these teenagers had been taught by their parents.

Young people today don't face such pressures from ancient Babylon, but don't they face the same pressures from modern Babylons? Don't they face these same pressures at universities? Don't we all face these same pressures daily from our society's constant attempts to change our thinking?

One pressure that was applied to Daniel and his friends was the pressure to participate in the occult practices of the Babylonians (such practices are called the New Age today, although they are hardly new!).

The Chaldeans were so associated with magic and divination, that the term *Chaldean* came to mean (and was already at this time sometimes being used to mean) one who was a magician or a diviner or an astrologer.

When the magicians tried to influence Daniel, he likely thought of Isaiah 8:19-20, which says:

*And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

Do we see anything like this today? Yes, I saw it this past week in an article on the Internet:

Mars, Earth, and the Sun all aligned last night, a rare “opposition of the planets” that only happens once every 778 days. But what made this event so remarkable is that it occurred precisely a week before everyone on earth will see the first of FOUR dark red “blood moons,” an extraordinary event some Christians believe represents the End

of Days and the second coming of Christ. The King James Bible predicts: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD comes, [Joel 2:31]. And, according to NASA, a highly unusual “Tetrad” — four successive total “blood-red” lunar eclipses each followed by six full moons — will, indeed, start next Tuesday and finish on September 28 2015. Pastor and author John Hagee, from San Antonio, Texas, has written a book on the phenomenon. He believes tonight marks the dawn of a “hugely significant event” for the world.

We know the precise day when Joel 2:31 was (past tense) fulfilled! Peter quoted Joel 2:31 in Acts 2:20, and he said in Acts 2:16 that “this is that” — that is, what was then happening in Acts 2 was a fulfillment of Joel 2:31.

Jeremiah 10:2 has a message for “Pastor” Hagee: “Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them.” Babylon was full of such people!

How were these teenagers able to be so strong in their stand against Babylon? Why were they able to be strong after being dragged 900 miles away from their home in Jerusalem?

There was the influence of God’s word. We recently talked about Josiah, and we briefly mentioned something that happened very early in his life — he restored the temple and discovered the word of God. If Daniel was 16 now, then he was born at about the same time that God’s word was found by King Josiah. Daniel must have heard the rediscovered law read many times while he was growing up.

There was the influence of his parents. We don’t know too much about Daniel’s parents, but we do know one thing — they named him “God is my judge”! They were in effect saying to him, “You will not always have us around to demand an account from you. But you will always be accountable to God, and he will always be there to demand it from you. God is your judge — so watch how you live and what you be-

lieve.” We also know that Daniel’s parents taught him the law of God. How else would he have known about the dietary laws? He had been taught what was right, and he had the courage to stand up and do what was right no matter what the consequences. But absent that initial teaching, all of the courage in the world will not do you any good!

There was the influence of God. God had not forsaken the exiles. He was at work among them, and we see that from the opening verses of Daniel. The Lord gave in verse 2. God had brought in verse 9. God gave in verse 17. Today, the days of miracles are over, but God is still at work in this world through his providence. He also exercises his influence through his word and through his church.

Finally, notice how Daniel handled this issue — he requested (not demanded) that he be allowed to eat other food.

When the chief of the eunuchs did not grant his request, he asked someone else. We don’t know what Daniel’s next step would have been had all of his requests been denied, but I think we know he would not have eaten that food. But Daniel began with a request, and he showed respect to those who had authority over him.

He did not create a public spectacle. He did not stage a food strike. His diet was private, not public. The king likely never knew anything about it. But Daniel knew. And God knew. We can learn much from how Daniel handled this situation.

### **Daniel 1:9-10**

**9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. 10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces**

**worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.**

Why did Daniel receive such favor and tender love in verse 9? Was it because of something he did? No — at least not entirely.

God gave Daniel favor in the Babylonian's sight, but Daniel also had a role to play. Daniel's role was to be obedient to God in how Daniel dealt with the Babylonians. But it was God who deserved all of the credit for Daniel's success as verse 9 tells us. Again we are reminded of a major theme in this book — the absolute sovereignty of God. But Daniel is not just a passive observer!

Daniel feared God, but whom did the chief eunuch fear? Nebuchadnezzar. The chief eunuch feared for his life. Daniel feared for his soul. If these young boys were not well taken care of, the chief eunuch would lose his head! He had a great deal riding on the outcome of this experiment! His fears were well founded. We will soon see Nebuchadnezzar's harshness and rashness on display.

The reference to the other children in verse 10 confirms that Daniel and his three friends were not alone. The others almost certainly included other children from Judah as well as children from the other lands that had been conquered by Babylon.

### **Daniel 1:11-13**

**11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to**

**eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.**

Daniel next goes to the steward that the chief eunuch had appointed and offers him a deal — let them eat their alternative diet for ten days, and then he can judge for himself which group looks better.

The King James Version treats “Melzar” in verse 11 as a proper name, but the presence of an article in the original Hebrew makes that unlikely. A better translation is “overseer” or “guardian,” although “guard” is also a possibility (but his role seems to have been more to watch over them and care for them than to guard them).

The ten days in verse 11 is just that — ten days. Unlike Revelation, much of the book of Daniel is historical and not apocalyptic. Later, we will study sections of this book in which numbers should be interpreted figuratively, but not here. (Although we will see another ten in verse 20 (“ten times better”) that is likely just an idiom for “much.”)

The proposed diet is found in verse 12 — pulse to eat and water to drink. The word “pulse” in the King James Version (here and in verse 16) is better translated “vegetables.” “Pulse” is a poor translation because it refers only to beans, peas, and lentils. The actual Hebrew word just means “that which grows from sown seed.”

A search on Amazon.com returns over 50 books on the Daniel Diet! Yes, it may be healthy, but that is not the point here. Daniel was not opposed to eating meat because it was unhealthy *per se*; he was opposed because some of it was unclean (which, in at least some cases, also meant it was unhealthy) and because of its asso-

ciation with idols. (A meat diet is *commanded* at some points in the law; the Passover lamb and other sacrifices, for example.) In 10:2-3 we will see Daniel briefly abstaining from meat for three weeks, which suggests he was not always a vegetarian. In fact, you will also find books on the “Daniel Fast.” They are based on that three week fast in 10:2-3.

If all we get out of this wonderful book is a new diet plan, then we have seriously missed out! Such people are like “a duck paddling across the surface of a large lake, taking in only an inch of water, completely unaware of the fathomless depths that lie beneath.”

### **Daniel 1:14-16**

**14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat. 16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.**

Why did the overseer agree to Daniel’s plan in verse 14? We aren’t told, but it may have been God working on him just as he was working on the prince of eunuchs in verse 9. But we might also ask this question: Who do we think got to eat all of the rich food that Daniel and his friends refused to eat? When you answer that question you may have your answer to the other question!

At the end of the ten days, they were found to be fairer and fatter than all of the other children who ate the kings’ food. Their improved appearance was likely

miraculous as it is difficult to see how a ten day diet of vegetables could have made such a visible difference. So the guard makes the change permanent — he takes away the meat and the wine, and gives them vegetables and water instead.

Was Daniel *testing* God here? How is this situation different from Matthew 4 when Satan tempted Jesus to cast himself down from the pinnacle? First, verse 12 did not say that God was being tested, but rather that Daniel and his friends were being proved or tested. Second, what we are seeing here is Daniel's *faith* in God — and that faith would have been unshaken had the four boys lost weight and strength on their new diet. Third, this diet was part of God's plan for Daniel, as we will soon see.

### **Daniel 1:17**

**17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.**

The key phrase in verse 17 is “God gave.” This is the third time in this first chapter that we read that God gave something to someone. In 1:2, God gave Jehoiakim and Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. In 1:9, God gave the chief official sympathy toward Daniel and his friends. Now in verse 17 we read that God gave the four Judeans “knowledge and understanding.” God is in charge here. Their learning and their wisdom were gifts from God. (Not due to their diet as vegetarians claim!)

We also get some important foreshadowing in verse 17 — God gave Daniel wisdom and the ability to understand visions and dreams. (All four children received the first gift, but only Daniel received this second gift.)

This second gift would allow Daniel to become an advisor to Nebuchadnezzar, which is exactly what God had in mind for him. It would also allow Daniel to be considered a “wise man” in the king’s court, and would allow Daniel to be the channel of revelation that God wanted him to be. The Babylonians believed that their gods spoke to them in their dreams, and this skill of interpreting dreams was very highly prized.

Does God talk to us today in dreams? When God talked to people with dreams in the Old Testament, they knew it. They received a definite message, and God was very persistent about it. Nebuchadnezzar in Chapter 2 will know that his dream is no ordinary dream.

If God did talk to us today with dreams then what would he say? What more do we need to hear from God? The word he has already given us is able to instruct us about salvation (2 Timothy 3:15) and equips us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16). God’s word is complete, and it makes us complete.

**Hebrews 1:1-2** — *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*

Are you looking for a message from God? You have one! The Bible is God’s message to us. Those who claim that God speaks to them today apart from his word generally have found something in his word that they don’t like. The truth may be scarce, but the supply has always exceeded the demand!

*Orwell:* The further a society drifts from truth, the more it will hate those who speak it.

Those waiting for a sign already have the only sign they will get.

**Matthew 12:39-40**— *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but*

*the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

If they don't believe when faced with the sign of the resurrection, what sort of sign could make them believe?

Although we don't have miraculous gifts such as the ones Daniel received, we all have gifts from God. We need to identify them and then use them for God's kingdom. How do we feel when we pick out a gift for someone, and they toss it in a drawer never to see the light of day? Do we think God feels any different when his gifts to us are not used and enjoyed? How would these events have been different if Daniel had neglected his gift from God?

Ezekiel 28:3 speaks of a man named Daniel who was wise and could interpret secrets. After reading this far in Daniel 1, who do you think Ezekiel had in mind? The liberal critics argue that Ezekiel was speaking of a mythic pagan character named Dan'el who was famous for his drunkenness. Does that make any sense at all?

### **Daniel 1:18-20**

**18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. 20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of**

**them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.**

These four young men made quite an impression on the king. Although they had only been in the country for a few years, they already knew much more than the wise men who advised the king.

We have already asked the question of why Daniel and his friends wouldn't eat the king's food, and we have mentioned two reasons: (1) the food was unclean (not kosher), and (2) the food had been offered to idols. The word "defile" in verse 8 could include both of those reasons.

But there is also a third likely reason for why Daniel refused the king's food, and it fits the context very well. If their strength and their wisdom had come from their Babylonian food and their Babylonian education, who would have gotten the glory when they stood before the king ten times better than all of the others? Babylon would have. But we are told that their wisdom was given them by God (and we would know that anyway after learning they were ten times smarter than their teachers!), and their physical strength must also have been from God (which we know because they refused to eat the Babylonian food). In a book in which earthly kings believe they are in total control and deserve all of the glory, it is important to show right from the first chapter that God is in total control and God deserves all the glory.

Most likely all three of these reasons were at play here — the food was unclean, the food had been offered to idols, and it was important to show that Daniel's strength and wisdom came from God.

One reason I think the third reason is an important factor here is that the diet resulted in an apparently miraculous increase in physical strength. If the concern

had been only to avoid defilement, then Daniel would have avoided the unclean food without regard to how he looked ten days later.

Notice how Daniel is being presented here — he is the incarnation of a wise man. He knows how to navigate through life; how to live in a pagan culture while staying true to God and displaying the wisdom that is from above. He knows what is right, and he does what is right. He knows the right thing to say, and says it. He, like Joseph, is faithful in exile, and he, like Joseph, is greatly blessed by God and allowed to succeed against seemingly impossible odds.

But with all that we see here about Daniel, we should note that this book is *not* a book about Daniel — it is a book about God. God is the central figure in this book. It is God who moves through history (often behind the scenes) fulfilling his will and showing love and compassion for his people. It is God who shows us his detailed plan for bringing forth his beautiful eternal kingdom. It is God who shows us the Son of Man — our perfect Messiah and King. Daniel is a book about God, and Daniel would have been the first to tell us that!

## **Daniel 1:21**

### **21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus.**

Verse 21 tells us that Daniel was around from 605 until *at least* 539 BC.

Verse 21 does not say that Daniel died during the first year of King Cyrus. We know that was not the case because in Daniel 10:1 he receives a vision in the third year of Cyrus. It simply tells us that Daniel survived into the next empire. Daniel lasted longer than the Babylonians did! He had predicted their fall and he was there to see it.

Who was Cyrus? He was the first Persian emperor that took over after the Chaldeans were defeated. He released the Jews from captivity and allowed them to return to their land. (Read Ezra.) Cyrus is mentioned by name in Isaiah 44 and 45 long before he was born. (We also saw this with Josiah. God had been planning for these events for many years!)

What modern day lessons have we learned from Chapter 1? For starters, Daniel shows us that the first battle is not how to make our hostile culture Christian, but is rather how we can continue to live as a Christian in a hostile culture. Yes, we must proclaim the gospel to all the world, but first we must be sure that we remain in God's grace ourselves. If we become absorbed in this pagan culture, then not only will we fail in the great commission, but we will fail to obtain our own reward. Daniel knew that first he must remain undefiled before he could ever lead others to believe in God.

Second, Daniel shows us how to interact with a culture that is hostile to everything that we hold dear — and that is a lesson we need to hear because that is the kind of culture in which we live. Our values and our beliefs are openly mocked and ridiculed. Almost any time a preacher is shown on television or in movies, he is soon revealed to be a sexually immoral hypocrite. We live in a nation that seeks to redefine that which God has defined — marriage — and labels as hate mongers any who stand opposed. In short, we live in a culture that calls good evil and calls evil good. What should we do? We can learn much from Daniel. He shows us how to live as Jesus told us how to live:

**John 17:14** — *I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

**1 Corinthians 5:9-10** — *I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortion-*

*ers, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.*

**Matthew 10:16** — *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

**Matthew 10:22** — *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

Daniel — wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove! Daniel — one who endured to the end!

In Romans 15:4, Paul tells us that what was written before was written for our learning. He tells us in Galatians 3:24 that the law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. And so throughout our study our question should be what is the great schoolmaster teaching us with these events recorded for our learning in Daniel.

Daniel found himself at a crossroads in Chapter 1. The government, the authorities, the public, and most of his friends wanted him to compromise and defile himself. What to do? We know the path that Daniel took. Which path do we take when we have those “Daniel moments”? And we have them every day — most are not public, but we are tempted to compromise every day.