

Lesson 4

Last week we met Daniel and his three friends, and we saw how Nebuchadnezzar tried to change them by indoctrinating them and by changing their Hebrew names into Babylonian names. And we also considered the question of why we remember Daniel by his Hebrew name, but we remember his three friends by their Babylonian names.

When we got to verse 8 we reached the point where Daniel had to draw a line. He could go to their classes, and he could let them call him by another name, but he could not defile himself by eating their food.

And last week, we discussed the key phrase in verse 8, and perhaps a key phrase in the entire book - "Daniel purposed in his heart." Daniel was going to be faithful to God no matter who or what tried to stand in his way - even if that what was Babylon and the who was Nebuchadnezzar!

Let's continue now with the rest of verse 8.

Daniel used the word "defile" in verse 8. Even that strong word choice was courageous! He used a very direct word but an appropriate word.

The Babylonians could change many things about Daniel's life: his homeland, his culture, his name. But they could not change his heart. Daniel 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 separating and 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. The Babylonians wanted the exiles to adopt their worldview, their view of man, their view of God, and their view of morality.

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 school? Don't we all face these same pressures daily from our society's constant attempts to change our thinking?

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

How were they so strong? 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.

How were they so strong? There was the influence of their parents. We don't know 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 believe." 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!

How were they so strong? 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.

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

When (as we will see) the chief of the eunuchs does not grant his request, Daniel will ask 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.

Daniel 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. We can learn a lot from the maturity of this teenager!

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 as described 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 in receiving that favor. 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's faithfulness allowed God to use Daniel to fulfill his plans on this earth. And God still works that way through us today. We, like Daniel, are not passive observers. We have a vital role to play in God's plan.

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! And his fears were well founded. We will soon see an example of Nebuchadnezzar's rashness and harshness.

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. And, of course, that word "children" also confirms that Daniel was just a teenager.

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 whom 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 generally 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](https://www.amazon.com) returns over 2000 results for the Daniel Diet! Yes, it may be healthy, but that is not the point here. Daniel was not opposed to eating meat because he thought meat was unhealthy; Daniel was opposed because some of the meat was unclean (which, in at least some cases, also meant it was unhealthy) and because of the meat's association 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.

Let me say this about the Daniel Diet and the Daniel Fast - if all we get out of this wonderful book is a new diet plan, then we have seriously missed out! Such people are best described by a phrase I found

written on the inside cover of my grandfather's Bible - they 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 due to God working on him just as God 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, Daniel and his friends 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? Not at all.

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 remained 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 have been told 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."

What we are seeing here is a subtle reminder of perhaps the central theme of the book of Daniel - God is in charge. Not Nebuchadnezzar. Not Jehoiakim. Not Daniel. Not anyone else. But God alone is in charge. If anyone has anything, it is because God gave it to him.

Here we see that their learning and their wisdom were gifts from God. (And not due to their diet as vegetarians claim!)

But does that mean Daniel didn't need to study? Does it mean that Daniel just suddenly woke up one day filled with learning? No. We don't see that here. Verse 4 already told us that they were being taught these things. God gave them their minds, and God gave them their teachers, but once again we see another theme in this book - Daniel had a role to play in God's plan.

Yes, God is in charge, but God uses his faithful people to carry out his plans. We will see that theme over and over in this book. In fact, sometimes we will see God using unfaithful people to carry out his plans, and we have already seen with Nebuchadnezzar.

We also see other important foreshadowing in verse 17 - God gave Daniel wisdom and the ability to understand visions and dreams. Notice that while all four children received the first gift, only Daniel received this second gift. We will very soon see why this second gift was so important!

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 been in the country only a short time, 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: the food was unclean (not kosher), and the food had been offered to idols.

But there is also a third likely reason 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, then who would have gotten the glory when they stood before the king ten times better than all of the others?

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 and not from his captors.

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. If Daniel was 15 when he arrived in 605, then Daniel was 81 when Babylon fell to king Cyrus in 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. The word "until" or the phrase "even unto" in verse 21 simply means that Daniel survived into the next empire. Daniel lasted longer than the Babylonians did! Daniel had predicted their fall, and he was there to see it.

Who was King 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 homeland. Cyrus is mentioned by name in Isaiah 44 and 45 long before he was born. (We also saw this with King Josiah. God had been planning for these events for many years!)

We will have much more to say about Cyrus and how he came to power later in our study of this book.

So what modern day lessons have we learned from Chapter 1?

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 of Daniel our question should be what is the great schoolmaster teaching us?

For starters, Daniel shows us that our first battle is not how to make our hostile culture into a Christian culture. Instead, our first battle is how to continue living as a Christian in that 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 himself before he could ever hope to teach others about God.

Second, Daniel shows us how to interact with a culture that is hostile to everything that we believe - and that is a lesson we need to hear because that is precisely the kind of culture in which we now 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 things that God defined long ago - marriage and gender - and labels as hate mongers and seeks to cancel any who stand opposed. It reminds me of a riddle: how many legs does a dog have if we call a tail a leg? And the answer? Four. A dog has only four legs without regard to what we call his tail.

Isaiah 5:20 - Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

Romans 3:4 - Let God be true, but every man a liar.

What should we do? We can learn much from Daniel. He shows us how to live as Jesus told us how to live:

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.

Revelation 2:10 - Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Daniel is an example of someone who was wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. Daniel is an example of one who endured to the end. Daniel is an example of someone who was faithful unto death.

Daniel found himself at a crossroads in Chapter 1. The government, the authorities, the public, and perhaps even some of his friends wanted him to compromise and defile himself. What should he do?

There is one thing we do not see Daniel doing here. We do not see Daniel agonizing over what he should do. Why not? Because Daniel had already decided what he would do long before the temptation arose. Daniel had already purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.

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. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Chapter 2

The second chapter of Daniel is one of the most remarkable and important chapters in the entire Bible.

Before this chapter ends, the most powerful pagan king in the world will lie prostrate before an exiled Jew. And before that happens, that powerful pagan king will hear one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Bible - a prophecy that begins with his own kingdom (which he will learn is temporary) and that will end with God's eternal and indestructible kingdom.

When it comes to understanding God's plan for the church, Daniel 2 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. Few chapters in the Bible (old or new testament) tell us more about the church

than does Daniel 2. Daniel 2 is one of the famous "Church Chapter Two's" - Psalm 2, Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, Joel 2, Acts 2, and Ephesians 2, among others.

Daniel 2 covers world history from Babylon to Rome, and Daniel 2 provides the foundation for understanding the other apocalyptic sections of Daniel that will follow.

Daniel 7 will expand upon Daniel 2, especially with regard to the second and third kingdoms. Daniel 11 and 12 will expand upon Daniel 2, especially with regard to the second, third, and fourth kingdoms. These later chapters of Daniel will supply many details that are not mentioned here in Daniel 2.

What is the message of Daniel 2? One of the primary messages of Daniel (and especially of Daniel 2) is that God's promises to Israel had not been forgotten. The Gentiles (those outside of the covenant) seemed to be in charge now, but one day (under the Messiah) the kingdom would be restored to the faithful remnant. God had not forgotten them or his promises.

That was a message that Daniel and his fellow exiles needed to hear. They needed to hear a message of comfort and assurance from God. And if our understanding of this book would have had no meaning to its original readers, then our understanding is wrong!

Many commentators read these verses and conclude that they are focused on our own time and our own generation. They tell us the end is near and that we are living in the final days. They look at these prophecies and they find our modern times, our modern conflicts, and our modern politicians.

And people have been doing that same thing for millennia! If we think we have found some modern day event prophesied in these pages, then warning bells should go off immediately. Why are we special? Why is our generation special? Why are we right where all of the others who have made the same claims in past generations proved to be wrong? Why is the modern Pat Robertson right, when all of the past Pat Robertsons have proved to be false prophets? And the answer, of course, is that the modern Pat Robertson is just as much of a false prophet as all the Pat Robinsons that came before him.

Time frame and context! They are what will carry us through these remarkable prophecies. We will see the time frame soon. What is the context?

The context is that God's people have just been carried off into exile, and it looks to them and the entire world that God has washed his hands of the Jews and his promises to the Jews. Either that, or perhaps God is just not as powerful as the gods of Babylon. The context of this book is to provide a

resounding refutation of those false views about God.

God had not forgotten his people. God had not forgotten his promises. God was not powerless against Babylon. God had a plan to bless the entire world through the coming Messiah, and God was at this very time moving all of the pieces into place so that Jesus would find the perfect cradle when he came into this world to establish his eternal kingdom. And those events happened in the first century, just as Daniel will tell us in this second chapter.

That is the context of Daniel. And if we read it as find nuclear weapons being used against the antichrist and his horde of soldiers invading the Holy Land, then we have strayed very far from what this book is about.

If our view of God's word changes with the headlines, then we need to very seriously reconsider how we are approaching, studying, and dividing God's word. This book means the same thing today that it meant when it was first written, and our task is to discover that meaning.

Daniel 2:1-2

1 And in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. 2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

The world's most powerful ruler has just assumed the throne - and almost immediately Nebuchadnezzar is troubled by his dreams and can't sleep. God was trying to tell him something, and Nebuchadnezzar found that troubling.

Nebuchadnezzar calls all of his wise men to come and interpret his dream. Notice that the term "Chaldean" is used in verse 2 in a narrow sense to denote a special class of wise men. Nebuchadnezzar was himself a Chaldean in the broader ethnic sense, but Nebuchadnezzar was not a Chaldean in this more restrictive sense.

The Babylonians believed that indications of future events could be found in the skies, in bizarre births, in the shape of animal livers, and in dreams.

The Jews agreed with only the last of those. God had spoken through dreams in the past. He did so

with Jacob, Abimelech, Laban, Joseph, Pharaoh, the baker and the butler, and Solomon. Numbers 12:6 and Jeremiah 23:28 suggest that God spoke to all the prophets in dreams (but not to Moses that way).

Was Daniel already a wise man in the king's court at this time or was Daniel still in training?

I think that Daniel was likely still in school when these events occurred. Why? Because that would explain why he was not present when the king first spoke to the wise men. And that makes the events here even more remarkable - that a student was able to do what none of the king's wise men could accomplish!

Also, this was the second year of the king's reign and the training lasted three years (1:5), which suggests that Daniel was likely still in training.

Why just likely? Because the first year of the king's reign was called the Year of Accession, with what was called the first year of his reign actually being the second year. Also, according to Hebrew usage, a part of a year was reckoned as a whole. This would mean that the "three year" program could have lasted less than two full years if it consisted of a full year and parts of two others. Also, perhaps Daniel just graduated early.

Later in verse 13 we will see that an edict against the wise men applied to Daniel and his friends, so whether or not they were still in training, they were considered members of the group of wise men.

However long the training lasted and whether or not Daniel was yet officially a Babylonian wise man, Daniel was still very young when all of this occurred. He would have been only seventeen or eighteen, and possibly younger. He was not the old prophet with the long white beard that many people imagine when reading this chapter. That is probably what he looked like when he was tossed into the lions' den, but that is not what he looked like here.

The sorcery and witchcraft that we see in verse 2 were widespread in the ancient world, and such practices are condemned in the Old Testament.

Exodus 22:18 - Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

But people were still listening to them.

Jeremiah 27:9-10 - Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your

dreamers, nor to your enchanter, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: For they prophesy a lie unto you.

Sorcery and witchcraft are also condemned in the New Testament.

Galatians 5:20 - Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies.

Revelation 21:8 - But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Witchcraft remains a problem to this day, not only with astrology and horoscopes, but with some environmental groups that have veered into the worship of nature. When I was teaching engineering at SMU, the theology school invited a witch to be a guest speaker at one of their seminars!

Ancient Babylonian "dream manuals" have been found that list historical dreams and the events that followed them. These wise men would have been very familiar with those very long volumes. But without the content of the dream, the experts had no way to interpret the dream. Their plan would have been to listen to the dream and then look its meaning up in their book - but Nebuchadnezzar has other ideas!

One of the dreams listed in the Babylonian "dream book" is the appearance of a god's statue. So the king's wise men would have had an answer had the king told them his dream, but would it have been the right answer? As the magic eight ball says, doubtful!

#daniel