

Dare To Be A Daniel

Daniel 1

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The one theme that really stands out in my mind, and I can't help but just jump right into this one theme; that is, when you study the book of Daniel you're awestruck with the idea that God rules from the heavens—that God is in control! Anytime you do a little study on the book of Daniel, most Old Testament scholars will agree or concur that the sovereignty of God, and the majesty of God, is clearly set forth throughout this entire book of Daniel.

Daniel is a prophet. He is a bit of a different prophet than that of Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Jeremiah in that he didn't really stand before the people of Israel and preach to them. He didn't warn them or proclaim to them. He was a child of the captivity, (as we are going to see as we open up chapter one) taken from Judah. He was one of the princes of the king, of royal blood and lineage, and carried away to the city of Babylon. There he had his ministry his entire life. He was probably taken from Jerusalem in his teens. We don't know exactly what age Daniel was—some say 14, some say 15, some say 16, some say 17, some say 18. What does that mean? We don't really know, but he was probably a teenager or at least a young man indeed. We know from the chronology of the book that he lived there in Babylon at least until 80 years old, if not older. We don't know how he died or how he passed off the scene, but he had an amazing life. He's one of the few Bible characters for which nothing bad is said about him. There is no indication of Daniel having any fault, mistakes, or any issues; so what an amazing person he was. He is one of only two in the Bible that God specifically says is greatly beloved. John the apostle was called the beloved of the Lord, and he wrote the Revelation. Daniel is kind of the Old Testament version of that, and he was called greatly beloved by God.

The book of Daniel actually is the Old Testament apocalypse. It goes hand in hand with the book of Revelation, which makes me think that we need to go into the book of Revelation after the book of Daniel to kind of put it all together. The key to the book of Daniel...there are different opinions to what the key verse might be, but look at Daniel 2:20. "Daniel answered and said," Daniel begins to pray and said, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his." We're going to be looking at the wisdom and the might of God. Notice verse 21, "And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: 22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him." I pick that as the key text giving us the theme of the book of Daniel as it describes just the wisdom and the power of God—He sets up kings and takes down kings and rules from the heavens. Go back with me now to chapter one.

There is a really simple twofold division of the book of Daniel. Obviously, it can break into a lot more divisions. We're going to develop the outline of the book, and you'll get to know it as we go through every week. Don't get discouraged. Hang in there. Go through the whole book and it all just kind of comes together, but the simple twofold division is: Chapters 1-6 Historical -

focuses on the man Daniel; and Chapters 7-12 Prophecy - focusing on Daniel's dreams and visions.

In the first six chapters, Daniel does interpret dreams but they're not Daniel's dreams. They're dreams that King Nebuchadnezzar and others have. In the last six chapters, God begins to reveal things to Daniel. The amazing thing about Daniel, again I won't go into depth because it'll unfold as we go through the book, but Daniel actually gives us history in advance. Someone described history as His story, and if you're looking around the world and it seems like God is not in control or where is God or what is God doing—read the book of Daniel. It'll encourage your heart to realize, “Yes, God is on the throne. God knows what He's doing, and God is indeed in control.”

In the book of Daniel, we're going to go from the kingdom of Babylon all the way up through the Roman Empire. We go from Babylon to the Medo-Persian Empire, to the Grecian Empire, to the Roman Empire, and then on to the second coming of Jesus Christ—even into the Millennium or the Kingdom Age or the thousand-year reign of Christ. Some of the most marvelous verses on the second coming of Jesus Christ are found here in the book of Daniel, but he gives such accurate description of history in advance that critics have attacked the book of Daniel. It's been attacked probably as much as any other book in the Bible. The reason they do that is because they don't believe in the supernatural or that God inspired Daniel—that he couldn't have written about history before it happened, so it must have been written at a later date. They actually give the date of the book of Daniel after the events that he describes. I don't want to get tedious, but there are a lot of good reasons why we can believe that Daniel wrote Daniel. He wrote it before the events, and if you want to do your own homework, you can study that; but I do find it interesting that Jesus, in His famous Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24, actually quotes from Daniel 9 and accredits that chapter to Daniel—that Jesus believed Daniel wrote Daniel, and if it's good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me. Amen?

Critics basically reject the supernatural—that God knows the future, that God can predict the future, which is no problem for God. God dwells in eternity predicting the beginning from the end. God can, in such detail, actually predict the future before it happens. As we get to those prophecies, many of them have already been fulfilled; so it's so amazing to look at these prophecies and see how God has already fulfilled them, and if God kept them all and they were fulfilled, then why wouldn't God keep His promises for future events being that of the coming of the antichrist and Jesus Christ and the Kingdom Age. It gives us the framework for Bible prophecy. I don't believe that you can understand the book of Revelation without understanding the book of Daniel. I believe that you can't understand the study of last things or eschatology or future events without a proper understanding of this marvelous book of Daniel.

The name “Daniel” (I'm getting a bit ahead of myself, but I want you to have the meaning of his name) means God is my judge. That's what the name “Daniel” means. We are introduced to Daniel tonight, but his name means God is my judge. The first two verses introduce the book. Let's look at them. “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.” I want you to notice, this is

going to be a repeated phrase, “And the Lord gave...,” or God did this or but God. You’re going to see God active in all of this history that we read about. It says, “...Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand,” that is, into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand, “with part of the vessels of the house of God,” referring to the temple in Jerusalem, “which he carried into the land of Shinar,” another name for Babylon, “to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.”

I want to give you some dates, and I don’t want to get tedious again but if you’re taking notes you can write them down. There’s a little discrepancy about the exact time in some of the dates, but we’re pretty close on this; that is, in the year of the reign of Jehoiakim. “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and he besieged it.” It’s believed that this was 605 BC (about 605, some say 606 BC), but what you need to understand is that the nation of Israel was divided into two—the northern 10 tribes called Israel and the southern 2 tribes, Benjamin and Judah, which were just called Judah. We’re only looking at the captivity here of Judah in the south. Judah in the south had Jerusalem as its capital. Israel in the north had Samaria as its capital. It’s known in Israel’s history as the divided kingdom. If you’ve studied the Old Testament you’re familiar with that. The northern kingdom has already been taken captive by Assyria, almost 100 years before this 605 BC date. Now we find that the southern kingdom of Judah is taken away captive by Babylon. Syria has passed away, Israel has been taken away, and now Babylon comes on the scene. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, goes into Jerusalem and besieges it. The seizure was in three stages, and the three stages covered this period from 605 BC to about 588 or 586 BC. In other words, it wasn’t just one siege where he destroyed Jerusalem and took the Jews away back to Babylon but came in stages with time periods between them. The first seizure was 605 BC, the second was 597 BC, and the third, where Jerusalem was completely destroyed, was about 586 BC.

What we’re dealing with here in verse 1 was the first seizure where the Babylonians came in and besieged the city of Jerusalem. It was at this point and in this time that Daniel and his three Hebrew friends...we know them as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, right? We’re going to find that the king had their names changed from Hebrew to pagan names. He was trying to make them comfortable or trying to push them into a mold there in Babylon by changing their names. It was at this time (verse 1) that Daniel, as a young teenager, was carried away to Babylon.

Forgive me, I’ve got to explain what’s going on here. Why was Judah taken captive by Babylon? A very, very simple answer is because they had turned away from the Lord. They had fallen into idolatry, they turned away from Jehovah, and they were worshipping pagan gods. God had been very patient with them. For at least 490 years, God had waited and patiently sent prophets, Isaiah and the other prophets, to warn them that they needed to turn back to God or God would judge them if they didn’t return to the Lord. Up to their evil ways, they wouldn’t turn back to God, so God has to chasten them and sends Babylon. Babylon, this pagan nation, actually becomes a tool in the hand of God to bring judgment or chastisement upon His own people, which is very interesting that God could use a heathen nation to judge a

so-called godly nation.

We need to be careful in America to think that we are immune from the judgement of God or that we're one nation under God and that God would never judge us. Not so. A really important issue was taking place. In the Old Testament, God told Israel that every seven years (I know this seems kind of tedious. We're going to get rockin' and rollin' here in just a moment.) the nation of Israel (in this case Judah) was to have a Sabbatical year—every seventh year you take the whole year off—can you dig it? So you go to work tomorrow and tell your boss, "Every seven years I get a whole year off." Particularly, the land was to lie fallow. They were not to till the soil or plant their crops; that God would sustain them, take care of and keep them during that Sabbatic year (the seventh year)—just trust in the Lord and look to God. It was a year of rest, and it was good for the soil as well. What happened was they were so greedy and so turned away from God that they failed to give God His Sabbath years. Here's what they did. They didn't give God His Sabbath years for 490 years, so God has them taken out of the land, He has Jerusalem destroyed, and Israel removed from the land. They are deported from the land for 70 years. Why 70 years? Because for 490 years, every seventh year, they didn't give God the Sabbatic year so God says, "I'm taking it back. You won't give it to Me? I'm taking it, and I'm going to chasten you." They're going to be captive for 7 years. Jeremiah, who was back in the land, was prophesying about the 70 years that they should build houses, settle down, it's going to be a long captivity—70 years. Daniel, reading the prophecies of Jeremiah, as we get to chapter 9, understands that the 70 years were almost up and begins to pray and seek the Lord. God gave him this great vision of what the future of not only the world would be but the future for Israel.

One of the unique things of the book of Daniel is we don't only get the future of Israel, but we get the history of the Gentile nations. In the New Testament Jesus talked about what's called the 'times of the Gentiles.' The 'times of the Gentiles' began with Babylon, Daniel 1:1, laying siege to Jerusalem, and I believe that it would go all the way up to the second coming of Jesus Christ. It's a pretty fascinating concept but clearly taught, I believe, in the Scriptures.

Look at verse 2. It says, "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand," God was in control, and that's the focus of the book of Daniel. God was working, so God would actually allow this pagan king, this pagan Babylonian king, to become an instrument of God. Now, he thought it was his might, his wisdom, and his power. I believe that he also wanted to disregard the God of Israel and show that his pagan gods were the true gods and not the God of Israel, so it's kind of a contest between the gods of Babylon and the God of the Jews. So, "the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God," because in the other two seizures, when they would come in to take the city, they would carry away more vessels of gold, more treasures, and more loot. Every time they attacked Jerusalem in those three sieges they would carry gold, vessels, silver, and other things away, "which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god," which would be Bel Marduk, the pagan god of the babylonians, and they were also worshipping many different gods. It was a test of whose god is the true God. "...and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god." We have kind of the clash of the two kingdoms—the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of

God. We have the kingdom of satan and the kingdom of God. Babylon is representative and stands for the evil world system apart from God—the pagan world system or satan’s kingdom, and all of the false gods of the heathen. We have them taking the treasures of the house of God in Jerusalem.

Verse 3 says, “And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. 5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years,” so the program in training and developing these Hebrews was a three-year process. They were going to be put into the University of Babylon and be trained so that they could serve the king of Babylon. “...that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. 6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,” these are the three guys that will be named Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. “Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.”

The king gave an order to Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs. It’s possible that this title “eunuchs” is an official title for a government official. It doesn’t actually mean he was an eunuch in the strict sense of the word, but it’s possible. The term became used for a title of a government leader or official. He tells them he wanted to bring “certain of the children of Israel, and of the king’s seed.” This is interesting because this in and of itself, right here, is a fulfilled prophecy. In Isaiah 39:7 Isaiah had warned King Hezekiah that his seed was going to be taken away captive to Babylon. Just write that down. You can look it up when you get a chance (Isaiah 39:7). Hezekiah had visitors come from Babylon, and he showed them the treasures of God in the temple. He gave them a tour of everything, and these guys are taking notes and looking at everything. Little did he realize that they’re going to come back and actually take everything. It’s like having some strange-looking person knock on your door saying, “What have you got in your house?” “Oh, come on in and check it out.” You gave him a tour of everything. “This is where we keep the jewelry, and this is where we keep our cash. This is where the alarms are...by the way, what was your name? Oh, good to meet you.” They go away. That’s a pretty stupid thing to do. Isaiah prophesied, “Hey, your sons are going to be taken captive and everything is going to be looted and carried away to Babylon.”

A little point I want to make here; that is, so many times children suffer for the sins of their parents. Here we have the sons of Judah suffering because of their parent’s sin. Daniel and his three Hebrew friends had not been around to turn to pagan gods and not give God His Sabbath years, but now the judgment comes upon them. Their generation is the one that pays for that. Some feel that Daniel, as a young boy, was in the land of Judah during the reign of the good king Josiah and under his influence a revival that took place where Daniel became a God-fearing devoted Jew, keeping the law of God. Many times God’s children do suffer for their

parent's sin.

"Children in whom was no blemish," notice the description. It doesn't tell us how many of them there were. There were more than just Daniel and his three friends, but the focus is going to be on Daniel and his three friends. "...but well favoured, and skilful in all wisdom," without blemish and well favoured means they were very good looking. They were tall, dark, and handsome. They were just good-looking, well-built, smart, bright, alert, "...and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans." They were going to be taught the ways of Babylon. Now, put yourself in their place. They're young teenage boys. They were just taken captive by this pagan nation. They're taken from their homes, carried away into this strange land, and put into this pagan university where they will be taught all of this learning and knowledge of the Chaldeans. They're going to be educated in the things of the world. What we're reading about here is that the king basically wanted to transform them into Babylonians. He wanted them to be well-trained, well-educated, and be able to stand before him so that he could use them for their knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. You basically have these men of God who are going to be put through college and receive a very, very secular education.

Today, Christians many times will go to a secular university or college and have to study things that aren't, by any means, Christian. I think that this is a classic example of the fact that they could be in the world but not of the world. They could be in the world but not polluted by the world. They could be in the world but rather than being transformed by the world they were transformers. That's true of everyone—you're either being transformed or you're transforming. You're either being conformed into the world around you, pressing you into its mold, or you're transforming others by taking a stand for the truth of God. First they had this learning, then they gave them a new language—the tongue of the Chaldeans, and they also had their diet changed (verse 5). "And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king."

What young teenage boy doesn't like to eat? I'm amazed! I don't know if I ate like that, but I used to watch our son. He was into water polo and would come home from practice and start eating and never stop! My wife called it grazing. He would just graze. She'd make a nice big dinner and then after the dinner he'd start mixing up his own stuff. He'd get into the refrigerator and eat, then he'd sit down and watch tv and be eating, and eating and eating. It's like, "Where does it go?" It's insane! Those of you that have multiple teenage boys at home, may God have mercy on you! I'm not sure how you even pay your mortgage trying to feed them.

The amazing thing is...it wasn't just because they didn't like food, God had given to the Jews strict dietary laws. God told them that if they ate meat it could only be certain kinds of animals, and God told them it had to be bled a certain way. They couldn't eat the meat with blood in it and so forth. The Jews, under the Levitical law, had very strict dietary laws. You might think that they would say, "Well, when in Babylon just do as the Babylonians do or eat as the Babylonians eat!" The cool thing is we're going to see that they purposed in their heart that

they wouldn't be defiled with the king's meat. We're going to see how tactfully and with what wisdom they handled this test—which was indeed a test for them—and God was preparing them to use them in this captivity. God always has a witness. God always has a remnant. Even at the worst of times, God is not without a witness. Even at what seems like the worst of times—our nation is destroyed, we're all taken away captive, we're being educated in these pagan religions of Babylon—God is still on the throne. Amen? God will be with them and because their hearts were right with God, God's hand was upon them. (If you're taking notes, you ought to write that down.) Because their heart was right with God, God's hand was upon them. I think the same thing is true of you and me. When our hearts are right with God, God's hand will be upon our lives.

“Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.” Let me give you the meanings of their names. Now, when I give you the meanings of these names, again, I find it interesting if you read 15 commentaries—15 commentators will give you 15 different ideas about what their names mean! That's why we can't be dogmatic. We're pretty confident about what their Hebrew names are, but when we get their Babylonian names there is a little confusion by some as to what exactly they might mean. The name “Daniel” means God is my judge. The name “Hananiah” means whom Jehovah favors—a great name, whom God favors or God shows favor. “Mishael” means who is compared to God or who is comparable to God. “Azariah” means who Jehovah helps or Jehovah helpeth—a great name. If you have a son you can name him Azariah which means Jehovah is his help.

Notice in verse 17 they changed their names. They put them in school to learn the ways of Babylon, then they changed their language, they change their diet, and now they change their names. To the name Daniel they gave the name Belteshazzar which means Baal's prince; to Hananiah they gave the name Shadrach which means inspired by the sun god, one of the gods in Babylon that they worshiped—inspired by the god of the sun; to Mishael they changed to Meshach, not a whole lot of change but it means who is like shak which was the Babylonian name for Venus; to Azariah they gave the name Abednego. I love that name! The name Abdnego means servant of the shining fire or servant of the god of fire—another one of their pagan gods that they worshiped, the god of fire. What are they doing? They're trying to press these Hebrew young men into their mold. They're trying to get them to conform.

Do you know that's what the world is trying to get you to do? The world is trying to press you into its mold. I love J.B. Phillips translation of Romans 12, “Don't let the world press you into its mold.” They want you to think like them, act like them, have the same world view and values as the world; but we want to be shaped, molded, and think godly thoughts. We want to think Biblically. We want to have a Biblical world view. We want to be spiritual men and women who live for God and His kingdom. We don't want to be transformed or conformed by the world but transformed from the inside out by the Spirit of God.

Notice what Daniel does (verse 8). This is the classic dare to be a Daniel. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might

not defile himself," he didn't order him, he didn't yell at him, he was polite, kind, and just requested. Now notice verse 9, and this is the key, "God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs." God did it. When your heart is right with God and you purpose to keep yourself pure before God, and purpose not to defile yourself with the world but to be committed to God, God will give you favor. God will bless you. God's hand will be upon you. Amen?

If I could just talk to young people today, to middle-aged or old, whatever it may be, especially to young people, this is a great book for young folks—you whippersnappers out there. As I was studying Daniel today I was thinking, "Man, I'm officially an old guy now. I can talk to the young kids." Purpose in your heart not to defile yourself with the king's meat. It becomes kind of a battlecry. It becomes kind of a mantra, "I'm not going to live like the world, think like the world, or act like the world. Everybody's getting drunk—I'm not going to do that. Everybody's losing their virginity at an early age. It's just a common thing to do—I'm not going to do that. Everyone's taking drugs, you know, and partying—I purposed in my heart I'm not going to do that." That you have a purpose, and you dare to take a stand in spite of the consequences or results. What motivated Daniel and his three friends was they wanted to honor God, they wanted to please God, and they wanted to obey God. Because Daniel, as a teenager, (Daniel is very likely in his teens at this time) purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the king's food, he lived to a very, very, very ripe old age and was used marvelously and wonderfully by God. Do you want to be blessed? Purpose in your heart that you will not defile yourself with the world's food or meat. Again, it just becomes kind of a picture of I'm not going to think, act, live, or be like the world. Don't let the world press you into its mold of living, acting, or being like the world.

They were gracious toward this authority, the eunuch, that was in charge of them. They requested graciously that we would have just a period where you can test and try out the situation, this diet. Notice verse 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." They didn't want to endanger someone else, but "Then said Daniel to Melzar," which is believed to be a title for a government official, not a proper name, "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," vegetables, "to eat, and water to drink." You know that when teenage boys are in Babylon and refuse the king's wine and food—it must've been awesome stuff! It's kind of like being on a cruise with an open buffet, and all you have is salad and drink water every day, bummer! You know these guys are dedicated to God! You know that they're devoted to God. They said, "Just give us some water to drink and some vegetables to eat," and verse 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. 14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days." Just give us a test. Just let us have a little 10-day period where we don't have to eat the king's food, we just eat these vegetables which are kosher and okay for us to eat according to our laws, and instead of the king's wine.

A lot of the king's meat would also be offered to pagan gods and would bother the conscience of these Hebrews to eat this meat, so they wanted to be dedicated to God. This fella gives them permission to go on this 10-day diet, and we're going to see in just a moment that they came out of this diet healthier, stronger, better-looking, sharper, kind of head-and-shoulders above all the rest in the class. God honored their commitment; God honored their stand to purpose in their heart.

Let me say something about this concept again of purposing in your heart. I believe with all my heart that the time to resist temptation is before the temptation arrives. You decide that you're going to obey God before you're tempted to disobey God—that's where the battle lies. You decide right now that you'll not lie, you're not going to steal, you're not going to connive and scheme, you're going to be honest and a person of integrity, you're not going to be promiscuous, you're going to have God's standards for morality and purity, and you're going to guard your thoughts, eyes, heart, and actions. You decide right now before the temptation comes. You purpose in your heart, "I'm not going to go that way. I'm not going to follow that path." And when the temptation comes to you, the decision is already made!

I think of Joseph. He too was a man in the Bible with no indictment or any real fault. He's almost a Christ-like character. As a young man, he is taken away as a slave to Egypt. In Egypt, he gets a job with Potiphar. He's doing the right thing and something bad happens to him—Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him. Again, how easy it would have been. Joseph is a young boy, a handsome brut, and she gets eyes for him. It would have been so easy to say, "When in Egypt, do as the Egyptians do," but Joseph said, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" You see, he had already made up his mind—it's a sin against God! It's a great wickedness! I'm not even going to go there! I'm not even going to think about that! I'm not even going to follow down that trail because I've already purposed in my heart that I'm not going to be defiled by the king's meat.

Some of you might be in a secular university campus—purpose in your heart not to think or act like the world. Some of you might be in a pagan environment much the same as Babylon where you work—you say, "That's me. I work amongst a bunch of pagans!" Purpose in your heart that you won't be defiled with the king's meat. Purpose in your heart to take a stand against these things.

Let me give you some reasons why we should purpose in our hearts to live holy lives. First, because God commands it in Scripture. God says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." Secondly, it's why Christ came into the world—not only to forgive our sins but to make us holy. Did you know that? That's why Jesus died on the cross—not only to forgive and take you to heaven but to make you holy right now. When you, as a Christian, practice sinful behavior, you're partaking of sins that placed Jesus on the cross and the purpose He came was to make you holy. Thirdly, it is evidence that you're saved. When I have somebody come to me, "Pastor, I fell again. Pastor, I fell again. Pastor, I fell again. Oh, here I am, Pastor. Pray for me I got drunk this week," or "I slept with somebody this week," or "I committed adultery. I fell again. Oh, pray for me." I know that God is a God of the second chance but sometimes I have to admit, "Have you really been

born again? Are you saved? Are you really a Christian?" When you just yield to sin and let the world press you into its mold, you should be asking, "Have I really been born again? Am I really a child of God?"

Fourthly, it proves your love for God. Do you love God? Do you really love God? Do you want to please and honor God? Then, purpose in your heart that you will not be defiled by the things of the world, philosophies, and ways of the world. Fifthly, we should purpose in our heart because it's the only way to bless other people. Do you know one of the tragedies I see when people backslide and fall into sin, professing Christians (at least I can call them professing Christians), is that they hurt other people. Do you know if you commit the sin that you might be entertaining or playing with, do you know that you don't sin alone? You're going to hurt God, which is the first Person you ought to think about; and if you're married, you're going to hurt your spouse and your children. I think some of the greatest pain that I've ever seen in a person's face is when they find out that their spouse has been unfaithful. Worse than the pain of finding out your spouse has just been killed in an automobile accident, is to find out that they've been unfaithful. You don't sin alone. You're going to hurt other Christians. You're going to hurt the witness and testimony of the church in the body of Christ, so we should purpose in our heart because we want to bless other people.

I sometimes think about that. I want to honor God. I want to be a blessing to my wife. I would never want to do anything to break her heart or hurt her. I have kids that I love. I would never want to do anything to disappoint them or to break their hearts. I have grandchildren now, and I want to be a testimony to them. I want them to be able to look at their grandfather as a man that obediently followed, served, and lived for God. It's so very important.

Sixth, purposing in your heart not to be defiled by the king's meat is one of the only ways to be happy. Did you know that holiness and happiness go together? Did you know that sin leads to sadness? You say, "Well, doesn't the Bible say sin is pleasurable?" Yeah, but only for a season, and sometimes that season is really short and then turns bitter. You know, the only way to be truly happy is to be holy—happy are the holy when you purpose in your heart that you're not going to be defiled by the things of the world.

Lastly, seventh but not the least, is that it prepares us for heaven. It really does! It prepares us to go to heaven. You know, if you live a heavenly life here on earth then you're all ready to go! Now, you don't earn your way to heaven or deserve your way to heaven but you certainly do live like you're going to heaven when you purpose in your heart not to be defiled with the king's meat or food.

Let's finish up our story, verse 15. "At the end of the 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. 17 As for these four children," here it is again, "God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 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. 21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus,” which was about 539 BC, and in Daniel 10:1 we find that Daniel actually went at least until the third year of the reign of king Cyrus. At that time it would put Daniel at about 80 years of age. He was ripe and flourishing in his old age which to me is amazing!

I want you to note that first of all they were healthy. Secondly, they received revelation (verse 17) as gifts from God. God gave them knowledge. These guys were smart, tall, good-looking, top of their class, but because their hearts were right with God, God gifted them. You know, it's much more important to have God's hand upon your life than to have an education. Education is great, and if you combine it with God's hand on your life, that's a wonderful thing, but to have a heart that loves God and seeks after God...the fear of the Lord is the beginning of what? Wisdom. You can have a PhD and be a phenomenal dud is what you can be, you know, in moral weakness, not committed to God, and you can be educated beyond your intelligence—what good is that? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and God prospered and blessed them.

God gave them health, revelation and understanding, and then He gave them promotion (verse 19). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah stood before the king. Guess what? No accident! God was in control. God was orchestrating all of it! You have this pagan king thinking he's defying the God of Israel—he destroys the city of Jerusalem, takes their treasures, brings them to Babylon. A little later, Belshazzar is having his drunken feast when the handwriting appears on the wall! He ordered them to bring the gold chalices from the temple in Jerusalem so that he could actually drink out of them and praise the gods of silver and gold and so forth—mocking the God of Israel—but we know that the God of Israel is the God who sits on the throne and rules from the heavens! Amen? This chastisement brought upon Israel, God is going to orchestrate even these three Hebrews—they're going to stand before this wicked king, interpret dreams, have understanding, and win favor with the king.

You see, the lesson for us is when we purpose in our hearts that we will not be defiled with the king's meat, there is no telling what God can do for us, with us, and through us in our lives. You want a mind-blowing life? Is it okay to use that term? You want a life that'll just blow your mind of how amazing God is and how wonderful it is to serve the Lord? Just purpose in your heart not to be conformed to the world. Purpose in your heart to follow God, to love God, to serve God, and watch what God will do. It's amazing! By the way, this ties in with my sermon on Sunday morning—He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. When the Lord is your Shepherd, you have everything you need! You trust Him. You follow Him, serve Him, wait on Him, and He leads, guides, blesses, uses you, and puts you places you never thought you would be!

You know, when you read this story, Nebuchadnezzar thought he was the big shot. The

Babylonians thought they were awesome! Guess what? God is the One that is the big shot! God is the One that is on the throne! God's the One who is pulling the strings. God's the One who is in control. These three little Hebrew fellas that stand so tall and strong in this pagan environment letting their light shine for Jehovah God, God wanted His people to be a light to the other nations, that's what they would become not like the other nations. Then, it tells us that Daniel continued. They had health, revelation, promotion, and continuation. I love it! Verse 21, "And Daniel continued," they're not just a flash in a pan, but there is continuation there.

God gave Nebuchadnezzar the victory. God gave Daniel and his friends favor. God gave Daniel and his friends ability, and God gave Daniel long life and a ministry. God did it, God did it, God did it, God did it, God did it. Do you want to know why? Because these three boys purposed in their hearts that no matter where they were or what was going on or what their environment was like, no matter what education they had, no matter how hard the world tried to press them into its mold, they would not be defiled with the king's meat. You can do the same right now. Before you leave church tonight you can say, "I'm not going to have that affair. I'm not going to steal that money. I'm not going to get drunk Friday night. I'm not going to get drunk ANY night. I'm not going to look at those magazine anymore. I'm not going to watch that porn on the internet anymore. I'm not going to defile myself with the king's meat.

Psalm 1 says, "Blessed is the man," or woman, "that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Did you notice how in that chapter Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus? Daniel lived through the Medo-Persian Empire and the Grecian Empire. He went through four kings that ruled, and Daniel outlived and outshined them all because he purposed in his heart that he wouldn't be defiled by the king's meat. We can do the same. We're either being conformed or we're transforming those that are around us. We're either having an influence for good on other people around us or we're being pressed into the world's mold and becoming like the world. Again, if you're a young person, do you want to be really radical? Do you want to be radical? Stand for Jesus Christ. Amen? Believe God; take Him at His Word. Especially if you're still in middle school, high school, or college, purpose in your heart as it has been put in a little poem:

Dare to be a Daniel,

Dare to stand alone!

Dare to have a purpose firm!

Dare to make it known.

Amen?