

## **The Test: God's Way or Man's Way? #2**

Daniel 1:8-16; 1 Timothy 4:12

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Greg L. Price

Often you, young people, hear me preach from texts of Scripture that were written by older men or written about older men/women, and you may be tempted to think, "When I am older, then I will take my faith in Christ seriously, then I will study God's Word more diligently, then I will spend more time in prayer. Right now, I am just a youth, a teenager, a young man/woman. I've got plenty of time to become serious about my relationship with Christ."

Young men/women, don't allow this temptation to settle in and become the way you think and act. Don't think for a moment that Jesus does not want to use you at your age to build His kingdom. He has a work to do in your life. He has work for you to do now, not just in the future. He may be training you now for that future work, but the work He has for you now is very important (even if it seems small and insignificant). Your work in your family and home, in school, in jobs outside the home, and in the church must not be wasted or considered unimportant. God speaks directly to you in His Word (Ecclesiastes 12:1; Ephesians 6:2-3; Proverbs 1:10; Proverbs 5:20; Proverbs 19:27). The Lord has included in His Word the example of children (like Samuel), teenagers (like Joseph, Daniel, Mary), and young men (like David and Timothy) in whose steps you are to walk in your youth. Rather than spending your youth on yourself and your pleasures, it is time for you to pray and meditate upon what God would have you to do for Him even now in your youth. Don't waste these years—use them for His glory. Your families and church need you. God uses the young to accomplish great things.

We return today to the great test in which God placed young Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah after they had been taken captive to the foreign city of Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, separated from family, friends, and the sacred ordinances of the one true religion. We covered the first main point last week: (1) The Firm Resolve of Daniel in This Test (Daniel 1:8). The next two main points we consider today: (2) The Means God Used to Deliver Daniel in This Test (Daniel 1:9-14); (3) The Conclusion God Brought to This Test (Daniel 1:15-16).

### **II. The Means God Used to Deliver Daniel in This Test (Daniel 1:9-14).**

A. Soon after arriving in Babylon, the Lord tests the loyalty of Daniel and his three friends. Will they walk in faithfulness to their glorious God only when it is easy, or will they do so even when it is hard with the possibility of deadly consequences?

1. Nebuchadnezzar had "appointed" (in Daniel 1:5) daily meals from his own table to feed these teens (14-15 years old) in preparation to serve as officers in his royal court. It was the best food in the kingdom, and nothing the king appointed was optional—to defy the king could mean death (Daniel 1:10). However, there was a major problem with the king's food—it was first offered to the gods of the Babylonians as a sacrificial meal. After careful consideration of God's will in this matter, Daniel "purposed in his heart" (Daniel 1:8) that he would not defile himself and sin against God His Savior by eating the food offered to idols (actually to demons as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:20).

2. This young teenager made up his mind what was God's will even before he knew what consequences would befall him. Once he knew God's will, his trust in the Lord and love for Him would lead him the rest of the way. Like the teenager, Joseph who would not defile himself with his master's wife even though it meant he was thrown into prison for years, so it was with young Daniel. That kind of commitment will only come in your life, young people, from spending time with Christ and in His Word. Daniel's heart, mind, and body were completely devoted to the Lord (Romans 12:1-2). Daniel had purposed in his heart what

he must do. Now he must work it out practically in word and in deed.

B. Did Daniel go directly to the king and tell him that he would not eat his food offered to demons?

1. He could have done so, but Daniel sought other means to remove himself and his friends from the idolatrous sacrificial meal before it became necessary to directly confront the king. It was not necessary that the king know what Daniel had decided, all that was necessary was Daniel not sin against God by eating the sacrificial meal. He went to one of the king's chief officers (Ashpenaz) who was given the responsibility to prepare these young teens for the royal court (Daniel 1:8,3). Because Daniel had purposed in his heart to do the will of God regardless of what it cost, God worked in a marvelous way (God often waits to work in our lives until we do the same). The duty is ours, the results are God's.

2. Daniel's purpose and act to obey God meant he must disobey the king. This was civil disobedience (First Commandment, Acts 5:29—we ought to obey God rather than men). Rulers do not have the authority to command disobedience to God and His truth (as did Nebuchadnezzar), or to act by law/mandates as though they own our bodies (which are God's) or own the church (which is Christ's). If rulers are not by their constitutions and laws "the minister of God to thee for good" (Romans 13:4) nor acting as such, then they do not have God's lawful authority to rule because they are not ruling on behalf of God. Civil disobedience is not mob rule or riots in murdering people or torching cities. It is taking a stand as did Daniel and his friends that they will not defile themselves in sinning against God, even though it is commanded by rulers of the land. Books are filled with the faithful testimony of such witnesses and martyrs for Christ—and we are to follow them as they follow Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:1).

C. As Daniel purposed to do the will of God and not defile himself, so the Lord granted another way for Daniel to obey the Lord without compromise and without directly confronting the king—Daniel found help through a lesser magistrate (Daniel 1:9-14).

1. It was the Lord who had brought Daniel into the good favor of Ashpenaz, a chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:9). Ashpenaz loved Daniel. That was the work of God in the heart of Ashpenaz, but the means that God used was no doubt the godly, respectful life that Daniel lived before Ashpenaz. Ashpenaz saw in Daniel a young man who was honest, who was faithful to God and to his duties, who was an example before the other young men, who had a tender heart, who was respectful, and was unwavering in his convictions. As God had graciously given to Daniel a new heart of faith, love, and obedience to Him, so God caused Ashpenaz to love and appreciate what he saw in Daniel's life. Young Daniel became a godly witness even among the wicked who had taken him from his home and family. It was the grace of Christ in Daniel that was seen. Rather than living in discouragement and hatred toward those who had taken him captive (which would have been easy to do), he showed his captors that he was truly free in the Lord.

2. Ashpenaz listens to Daniel, but he tells Daniel that he fears for his life if the king should hear that he has changed their diet (Daniel 1:10). Here we see the difference between those whose loving submission is to the King of kings which brings courage (Daniel) and those whose fearful submission is to earthly kings which brings terror (Ashpenaz). Courage is not the absence of fear but doing the will of God in spite of fear. When we struggle to do the will of God because it is hard or because of the consequences we will likely face, fear will paralyze us—that is sin. Jesus delivers us from fear as we stop fighting and struggling against God's will and rather trust Him, love Him, and purpose to do His will regardless of the consequences (Hebrews 13:5-6). Fear arises from looking to our weaknesses. Courage arises from looking to Christ's power.

3. Daniel is not deterred by the fear of Ashpenaz, but goes to the melzar—an officer under Ashpenaz (Daniel 1:11-14). Whether this was done with the approval of Ashpenaz or not, we are not told. It may be that Ashpenaz simply referred Daniel to the melzar. It is likely the Lord gave this plan to Daniel by way of revelation—not presumption, but faith.

a. “Pulse” comes from a Hebrew word that means that which is sown by seeds (including vegetables, grains, perhaps even fruits). Though this was a vegetarian diet, the Lord teaches that eating meat is lawful (clean animals were eaten in the Old Testament in Leviticus 11, clean and unclean animals were eaten in the New Testament in Acts 10; 1 Timothy 4:4-5). Daniel was content to have less and forego the king’s food in order to be faithful to the Lord. He was willing to incur the wrath of the king, to lose his job, to lose the comforts of life, and to lose his life in order to walk in faithfulness to Christ. Jesus said you cannot serve two masters. The decisions you make daily reveal who it is that you are serving—Christ or yourself. Do you care? Do you pray that you will put Jesus first in how you spend your time and money? Who you will spend your time with? What you will watch and listen to? What you will read?

b. This was not a test that would require months to judge whether the vegetarian diet was having a beneficial or ill effect upon Daniel and his friends. It was purposely made short (10 days) so as to make it abundantly clear that God was blessing the food eaten in a remarkable way. If the test had been longer, perhaps there would have been greater reluctance to try it by the melzar. And yet the 10 days was intended by God to show forth His mighty power in such a short period of time. God’s blessing upon our food is not a mere ritual—God really does bless it. By the power of God, the melzar consented to Daniel’s plan (Proverbs 21:1).

4. The means God used required Daniel to do what was not easy or pleasant, but the Lord provided a way for Daniel to be faithful to God, to keep his job, and to save his life. Let us not despise the means God uses to teach us, train us, and test us (Naaman the Syrian in 2 Kings 5—wash in the Jordan instead of the Abana or Pharpar rivers).

### **III. The Conclusion God Brought to This Test (Daniel 1:15-16).**

A. After the 10 days, Daniel and his friends clearly appeared healthier in their bodies, eyes, faces, hair. “Fatter” means simply means they did not look gaunt, lean, or skinny, but were filled out and strong. After that brief test, the melzar was so convinced that he was safe and not at risk, he from that time fed them with the vegetarian diet and water that had not been offered to the gods of Babylon for three years. The Lord brought them through this perilous test as they purposed in their hearts to do God’s will, and then not only purposed but followed through in doing so (John 13:17). God’s blessing comes in not merely knowing God’s will or not merely purposing to do God’s will; but in doing God’s will even when the cost may be painful.

B. I appeal to you, young people, as Paul appealed to Timothy: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Dear young people in the Lord, you are being tested daily as Daniel was. Don’t discount or minimize the tests God brings into your life. Call upon Jesus who was tested as no one was ever tested. He will guide you through them. You are not alone. These tests are preparing you for ways in which the Lord will use you now and later. Don’t despise them, rather see the hand of God in them teaching you to trust Him, love Him, and obey Him regardless of what it may cost you.

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