

# LESS IS MORE

DANIEL 1:8-21 SEPTEMBER 12, 2018

The phrase “less is more” is first attributed to a 1855 poem by Robert Browning about the Italian painter Andrea del Sarto.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary with Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael, Del Sarto was known by some as “the unerring” because of the perfect correctness with which he painted.<sup>2</sup>

We see a great portrait of another unerring young man here in chapter 1. Daniel’s faith would be put to the test right from the beginning of his time in Babylon. The question was: Here, so far from home, with so few options and such great pressures, would his devotion still be *real* or would his spiritual fire burn out?

As we see this remarkable man and his 3 friends triumph over adversity, we’ll also note that, with God, often times *less is more*. He can do much with little. He can satisfy thousands with five loaves and two fish. Daniel’s example should encourage us. Because even when we’re in the “less” times of life, in Christ we have more strength and backing and supply available to us than we could ever ask or imagine *and* we learn that God is doing more than we realize to accomplish His purposes.

When we last left off, Daniel and his 3 friends had been carried from Jerusalem to Babylon and put into a training program along with many other Jewish boys, where they would be fashioned into Babylonian academics and officials to serve the empire. We begin at verse 8 with what is probably the *key* verse when it comes to the *biographical, narrative* portions of Daniel.

**Daniel 1:8 - <sup>8</sup>But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.**

In the previous passage we saw that the young men in this program were the cream of the crop physically and intellectually. They were captives, yes, but had been recruited for this project and would be treated not unlike some of these big schools treat quarterbacks today. They were worked hard, but treated very well. In fact, the king was feeding them from his own table the best of the best that Babylon had to offer.

But, there was a problem. The menu would include non-kosher meats like pork (for example) and Babylon was a deeply pagan kingdom. This food would have been dedicated to idols, maybe even *at the start* of each meal. We run into this same issue in the New Testament as well. Paul has to give instruction to *Christians* about how to handle food offered to idols. Now, in *our* case as Church-age Christians who are *not* constrained by the Levitical law, Paul’s answer was to discuss liberty and how to handle it while not stumbling others around us. But for Daniel this wasn’t an option. This food was *doubly* prohibited. The problem was it was *all* the food he got.

It wasn’t like when I’ve gone to Colombia and have been served something I can’t really stomach. I know I can just sorta hold out or pass it off and then I’ll go get a bag of chips later on. This was it for Daniel. There wasn’t another menu for him to choose off of.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Less\\_is\\_more](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Less_is_more)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea\\_del\\_Sarto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_del_Sarto)

We're told here, though, that he "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself." What a great line! We see here the proper perspective *and* the practical response. Daniel wasn't concerned that he'd just *look* less spiritual to the other guys if he ate non-kosher food. His concern was that this personal choice would actually *ruin* his fellowship with the God he loved. He took a look at his plate of food on that first day and thought, "If I eat this, I'm breaking the bond of covenant between me and Jehovah." This was a big deal and a significant choice he would have to make. But Daniel had *resolved* that, no matter what, he was going to stay faithful and in fellowship with his God. So, not only do we see his *perspective* but also his *response* to his dilemma. He "purposed in his heart" what he would do. He installed this principle in the very core of who he was. Once he had done that, knowing *what* to do in a situation like this became clear. This is a consistent characteristic not only of Daniel, but of his 3 friends as well. At their core they desired to be in proper relationship to God. And so when these moments of testing come along, though they seem like *impossible* situations to us as readers, Daniel and the other guys can operate almost casually. They don't worry, they don't fear. They're operating according to this most important principle, and because of that, these personal decisions can become vehicles for a great work of God.

We shouldn't discount the *effort* this would require on Daniel's part. I'm not sure how many days it took him to figure out what he wanted to do, as far as petitioning the chief of staff and then bringing his plan to the steward, but needless to say, Daniel would've had some hungry nights. He's suddenly *fasting* from every meal, but trusting that the Lord would be faithful as *he* sought to be faithful to God.

Notice how Daniel approaches the chief of the eunuchs: He doesn't stage a protest. He doesn't make demands, rather he makes a *request* with respect and humility. And it seems he *explained* why he couldn't have this food: Because it would ruin his relationship with his God.

**Daniel 1:9 - <sup>9</sup> Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.**

Every time we see Daniel or his friends doing something remarkable, we see God doing something even *more* remarkable. Here, the curtain is drawn back and we see that, behind the scenes, the Lord was working on the heart of this official, to give grace and compassion for Daniel.

Remind yourself of this truth which is presented so often in Scripture: God is very busy on levels high and low, in your home and around the world, working and accomplishing His purpose. You know, the stand out verse in this passage *is* verse 8, and particularly that phrase, "Daniel purposed in his heart." But it should always remind us of the fact that *God* purposes in *His* heart toward you.

**Psalms 57:8 (NLT) - <sup>2</sup> I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me.**

**Romans 8:28 - <sup>28</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.**

God is at work *around* you, *in* you and *for* you. As we stay in communion with Him He is able to do great things, even through small details of our lives.

**Daniel 1:10 - <sup>10</sup> And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who *are* your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."**

The chief knew his king and he was afraid of him. Rightly so! Nebuchadnezzar had no problem killing anyone on a whim. Now think about *our* King, Jesus Christ. God *with* us. The One who *gave* Himself that we might live. The One that *loves* us and keeps us and lifts up our heads. We are to have the fear of God, but we aren't to be *afraid* of Him. Are you ever *afraid* of God? Of what you think He might do? Remind yourself that our Lord is *not* Nebuchadnezzar. He is the Kinsman Redeemer. The Good Shepherd. The Comforter. The Unspeakable Gift.

Notice, too, that for this chief of eunuchs failure would mean death. What about when we fail our King? He meets us with forgiveness and help and instruction. Though we fail Him every day, He saw all those deficiencies and missteps from before the foundation of the world and loved us the same. Think of men like Peter, James and John and the profound failures they produced during Jesus' ministry on the earth, yet the King took men like that and used them fantastically.

Before we move on, we should appreciate the strength of Daniel's resolve. His faith had endured the discouragement of captivity. Then the temptation of the delicacies. Here, it would endure the pressure of friends. He and this man Ashpenaz had a real friendship together and Ashpenaz tells him outright: "Your religion is going to get me killed!" That's a lot of pressure. Apparently the conversation was left open-ended, without Daniel being given a direct command, because in verse 11 he pivots his plan to *another* official.

**Daniel 1:11-14 - <sup>11</sup> So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants." <sup>14</sup> So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.**

It's not clear whether Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had been in on this with Daniel from the beginning but at some point they had joined with him in his determination. Here we see them unified and speaking as one. They supported and strengthened each other in the Lord in the midst of difficulty. Let's be brothers and sisters like that.

Now, they go to the steward not just to say, "We don't want to eat this food," but they come with a plan. I like that. Because it's all too easy for me to generate a complaint, but what's really needed is not a complaint but a vision and a solution to issues. The plan they bring is reasonable, but it also is full of heavenly expectation. They put the term of 10 days on it, probably because anything more would be too much of a gamble for the frightened Babylonians, but they *obviously* had a great confidence that God would respond to their faith providentially. Even after being taken to Babylon, these guys never once allow themselves to think that God is defeated or *unable*. Rather, they *assume* His power will prevail and that God will move in their lives as they serve Him.

The alternative diet they suggest was probably not just peas and carrots. The term used here would include all plant-based foods, from veggies to beans to roots and grains. So, they were going vegan. And, at the end of the 10 days, they wanted not just to be evaluated, but to be *compared* to the others. "Stand us up next to our peers who eat the king's food, and take a look at the difference."

Like we saw back in verses 1 and 2, Daniel is the story of a cosmic contest. God vs. the wicked world. Your king vs. mine. Of course, Daniel would've known Deuteronomy 8:3 quite well, that man does not live on bread alone. And, knowing what God could do with a little manna powder in the

wilderness, what might He be capable of doing with all the vegetables and grains and more that the fields had to offer? Their veggie diet would *seem* like less from one vantage point, but in reality it was more than necessary for the Lord to use.

There are 4 stories here in the first half of Daniel where their lives were going to be put on the line and they all have a consistent element: In each case, Daniel and his friends will make it clear that, no matter what happens, they will *not* compromise, but that they were going to go the Lord's way. We see it here at the end of verse 13 when Daniel says, "[at the end of the 10 days] as you see fit, so deal with your servants." In other words, "Why don't we try this out, but, just so you know, after 10 days, we're *still* not going to eat this food, so you do what you gotta do." That's resolve.

I'd have us note, also, the fact that two things were true of Daniel and his friends: They were on record as being servants of the Most High God, but they were also quick to call themselves servants of their steward or the earthly king throughout these chapters. Their *higher* loyalty was not hidden away, but it also didn't keep them from doing their job and doing it well. They would, in fact, *faithfully* and *effectively* serve in the empire while never betraying their true loyalty to the God of heaven. It's a balance most of us have to strike in our own lives and it *can* be done.

**Daniel 1:15-16 - <sup>15</sup> And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. <sup>16</sup> Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.**

This is a miraculous work of God. It's clear that's how Daniel wants us to read it. Some commentators try to suggest that it was due to the fact that a diet of moderation is healthier, but, in reality, this wasn't some long period of time, it was less than 2 weeks. And, when I consulted some websites about what happens to you when you *do* switch to a plant-based diet, generally you can expect to *lose* weight, not gain it, and you might experience increased fatigue.<sup>3</sup> In the long run, there are a whole lot of benefits to being plant-based, but we're talking about the first 10 days here. And yet, there was a clear difference between Daniel and the others. The others, we remember, would've *included* some of the Hebrew boys they grew up with who *knew* what was going on and had made the *opposite* choice, to *not* honor the Lord in this decision, but to go the world's way, and were impoverished for it in more ways than 1. They had more in the chow hall, but much less in the heart.

We're told in verse 16 that they would stay vegan for all 3 years of their training. Afterward, having a measure of freedom and independence as government officials, they would've been able to make their own diet, clear of non-kosher foods or those sacrificed to idols. In chapter 10, Daniel will reference that he, once again, was an eater of meat and wine.

But for those 3 years, the guys were *happy* to have 'less', because it meant *more* in the areas that mattered. It meant fellowship and intimate communion with their God.

In the last few verses we see their transition from classroom to commission.

**Daniel 1:17-20 - <sup>17</sup> As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. <sup>18</sup> Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the**

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/food-and-drink/vegan-body-changes-what-happens-no-meat-dairy-physiology-a8027991.html>

eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. <sup>20</sup> And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers who were in all his realm

These 4 boys would each have, undoubtedly, scored a genius-level IQ. They were not only the heads of their class, but when they hit the office Monday morning, they were already outperforming the best of the Magi. It wasn't diet that did it or their own academic efforts, though they were faithful in those personal areas. It was the Lord working through their minds, giving them knowledge and skill. Additionally, we're told Daniel had a gifting for understanding visions and dreams. This will, of course, come up a number of times later in the book.

But, in the mean time, these guys were so solid they became fixtures in the king's presence. And, just like that, God had installed 4 incredibly faithful, spiritual men right next to the throne of the greatest king on earth. During the 3 years of training, the other Jewish boys must've thought they were saps. "Look how much they're missing out on. They have so much *less* than we do." And yet, *since they had communion with God*, they had much more. 10 times more by Nebuchadnezzar's count.

The chapter ends with an important biographical note:

**Daniel 1:21 - <sup>21</sup> Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.**

Daniel lived beyond the first year of Cyrus. It seems that was the year of his retirement. But, more importantly, the text draws our attention to the fact that this was the year when the captivity ended and God's people could go free. The God Daniel trusted so confidently had *not* forgotten His people, and He has not forgotten us either. He is still *just* as able, *just* as busy as He was in this text. And we learn here that He can do great things through even small, personal choices in your life. God can use your *face* to accomplish His work. Think of Daniel. Think of how much of this story swings upon how their *faces* looked. What a great thought! That God can use my life, my words, my sufferings, even my *countenance* to do His will and bring Himself glory. And what is my part? The heart is my part. To keep my heart intimately communing with my Savior, trusting Him. Expecting Him to work, and choosing to go His way, even when that means I might be getting *less* from the world's perspective. Because, in reality, in all the ways that count, I'll come out on the other side with so much more. More than they realize. More than *I* realize, because our gracious God loves to make more from less, to magnify Himself in us and to lavishly work in and through our lives as He accomplishes His purpose.