

Power Hour Lesson Summary for February 1, 2015

“Feasting and Fasting”

Lesson Text: Daniel 1:5, 8-17

Background Scripture: Daniel 1; Matthew 6; 9:9-17

Devotional Reading: 2 Chronicles 7:11-18

Daniel 1:5, 8-17 (NIV)

5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service.

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8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.” 11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

Matthew 6:16-18

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

TODAY’S LESSON AIMS

Learning Fact: To compare dietary restrictions and the witness that results from observing them through a study of Daniel’s 10-day testing period and Jesus’ fasting instructions from the Sermon on the Mount.

Biblical Principle: To demonstrate that blessings result when we handle trials with the strength that God provides.

Daily Application: To examine our motives so that our spiritual pursuits are not public displays but personal obedience to the Word of God.

INTRODUCTION

Faith and Food

Leviticus 11 sets forth many of the dietary restrictions of the ancient Israelites, but God did not wait for the nation of Israel to become a reality before He gave guidelines about food. The subject of food restrictions is mentioned as early as Genesis 2, where God commanded Adam that he could eat from any tree in the garden except “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (2:16, 17). Since only trees are mentioned, this has caused some to conclude that God intended for Adam and Eve to eat only nuts and fruit from trees and the seeds of plants. The instruction for Noah in Genesis 9:3, however, causes most to conclude that the initial diet also included green herbs.

After the great flood, God declared that “everything that lives and moves about will be food for you” (again, Genesis 9:3). An important restriction was that meat with the blood still in it was not to be eaten

(9:4). With the advent of the Law of Moses, God placed limitations on the foods that an Israelite could eat. Many of the animals used for sacrifices were eaten, and guidelines in this regard were given. The only purpose stated for the complex restrictions for the Israelites was that they were to “distinguish between the unclean and the clean” (Leviticus 11:47). The Israelites had to evaluate whatever they ate or did each day against that standard.

Today we have great freedom of food choice under the new covenant according to Mark 7:19; Romans 14:14; 1 Corinthians 8:8; 10:25; and Colossians 2:16. The few restrictions are noted in Acts 15:20, 29; Romans 14:1-4, 15, 20, 21; and 1 Corinthians 8:13. Is a person somehow superior by being a vegetarian or a vegan? No—that is merely a personal choice. It is not mandated by God; consequently, it should not be mandated by others (1 Timothy 4:3-5). Even so, the Bible has things to say about dietary choices for today.

LESSON BACKGROUND: Daniel

Time: 605 B.C.

Place: Babylon

For decades, the prophets had warned the rulers of Judah that their idolatry, immorality, and injustice toward the poor and needy would lead to the nation's ruin. The prophets saw the day coming when God would bring the Babylonian army to destroy Jerusalem and the temple and take the people captive to Babylon. A century before the fall of Jerusalem, the Prophet Isaiah had proclaimed this message (Isa. 13; 21; and 39), and Micah his contemporary shared the burden (Micah 4:10). The Prophet Habakkuk couldn't understand how Jehovah could use the godless Babylonians to chasten His own people (Hab. 1), and Jeremiah lived to see these prophecies, plus his own prophecies, all come true (Jer. 20; 25; 27). God would rather have His people living in shameful captivity in a pagan land than living like pagans in the Holy Land and disgracing His name.

The first part of our lesson comes from Daniel 1. The year was 605 B.C., and Daniel and others had been taken from Jerusalem to Babylon as hostages by King Nebuchadnezzar. To the Babylonians, having the best and brightest (Daniel 1:4) as hostages would weaken the resolve in Judah to rebel, and the captives would be taught to respect the power of Babylon. Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, evidently had decided to surrender rather than resist (at first), and the subjugation was symbolized by royal captives being taken to Babylon (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Chronicles 36:5-7; Daniel 1:3).

After making the 900-mile trip, some captives were selected to be immersed in Babylonian culture. This involved a three-year program in receiving the best education that Babylon could provide (Daniel 1:3-5). The indoctrination undoubtedly included being taught Babylonian literature, history, mathematics, astronomy, and religion. Would the Hebrew captives remain true to their religious convictions in the process, or would they compromise those beliefs? Daniel and his three friends chose their battles wisely in this regard, one of which involved dietary choices.

LESSON BACKGROUND: Matthew

Time: A.D. 28

Place: mountain near Capernaum

Our text from the book of Matthew is part of the Sermon on the Mount, which spans Matthew 5:1 to 7:29. Three verses from this section establish an interesting comparison with Daniel 1 in that both are about dietary restrictions and the witness that results from observing such restrictions. The Sermon on the Mount was given during Jesus' first Galilean tour. The name of the mountain is not given, but tradition places it just to the northwest of the Sea of Galilee.

What Do You Think?

- How do you apply, if at all, Daniel's concern regarding dietary choices to your life in the New Testament era? Why?
- How do we decide which issues and situations call for taking a definite stand for Christ (Acts 5:27-29) and which do not (Matthew 17:24-27)?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. We should choose to serve and please God despite what others around us may be doing. (Daniel 1:5, 8).
2. When we are committed to God, He will give us favor with other people and help us through our tests. (Daniel 1:9-15).
3. Making godly choices and being effective witnesses for Christ will bring glory to God. (Daniel 1:16, 17).
4. Our daily spiritual experiences should be without hypocrisy. (Matthew 6:16).
5. God openly rewards our secret encounters with Him. (Matthew 6:17, 18)

CONCLUSION

Testing Faith

The feasting and fasting episodes of this lesson may seem unrelated, even opposites. Daniel's feasting on certain foods while fasting from others was designed, in part, to achieve a certain outward appearance. Yet Jesus instructed that one's outward appearance should be unchanged while fasting. Even so, the two episodes have this in common: they represent spiritual tests for the person who eats or does not eat. Daniel was tested regarding the compromise of a core element of his spiritual heritage, and he passed the test. The hypocrites of Jesus' day were tested regarding whose approval was to be sought, and they failed the test.

The Christian will have to work through many tests in his or her spiritual walk, and selective use or nonuse of food may be one type (Romans 14:1-3, 15, 20, 21; etc.). "Divers temptations" are certain, and the secret is to rejoice and handle them so as to develop patience or steadfastness (James 1:2-4). Blessings result when we handle trials with the strength God provides. A tested faith is a stronger faith. When eternity begins, we will know the tests were worth it (Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

PRAYER

Almighty God, I ask for strength to resist the temptations to do good things for wrong reasons. May I successfully pass the tests that are placed before me. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Ask God to help you pass the tests.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "**Serving Neighbors, Serving God**" and relates the story of the Good Samaritan and shows that our love for God will be manifested in our love and service to others. Study Luke 10:25-37.