

*Read also Mark 13:1-4. Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.
For further information about the status of Israel/Judah during this time, read 2 Kings 24-25.*

Imagine this:

You lose your job	You lose your language
You lose your possessions	You lose your food
You lose your house	You lose your religion
You lose your car	You lose your freedom
You lose your country	You lose your name

What would you do?

You can imagine how people in Houston feel. A friend's daughter lives there and has two small children. They lost their house, car, and all their possessions. Daniel's story, which we begin today, is not a myth. Some people have experienced similar losses. Daniel and his friends lost everything.

And yet they did not lose their faith.

The story begins when King Nebuchadnezzar II attacked Jerusalem in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had defeated Egypt and then turned his assault against Judah. He conquered their King Jehoiakim (11-yr reign, 608-597 B.C.), took the temple treasury, and carried off to Babylon many prominent Jews as hostages, including Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar would attack again and again over the next nineteen years, burning houses and destroying property and lives until Jerusalem was nothing but a heap of smoldering rubble.

That is not a pretty picture but it is a reality substantiated by Chaldean and Israelite government records which depict its rulers' military campaigns.¹

Those records coincide with the recordings in Scripture.

We are imagining here, but what would you do if you found yourself

- ~ In a different country
- ~ Having to wear different clothing styles picked by someone else
- ~ Living in a home not your own
- ~ Eating different food
- ~ Your name changed
- ~ Your church gone and there's no church in that country

It's hard to imagine.

¹ The Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, (called the ABC5, and also known as The Jerusalem Chronicle), is part of a series of the Babylonian Chronicles which contains records of Nebuchadnezzar II's first eleven years of reign. It continues the ABC4 Chronicle wherein Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned as the Crown Prince.

But it's not impossible for such a thing to happen. Some people in Houston are experiencing some of those losses today. Last century, for example, Dresden, Germany, previously with democratic rule became communist ruled.

How would we cope? Hopefully, we would find each other and be together.

Don't you find the relationships you have with other believers to be a significant part of your life and wellbeing? Never take gathering as the church for granted. Never take one another for granted.

Daniel had his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Do you think they would try to get away sometimes so they could call each other by their Hebrew names? Surely they did, because Daniel wrote this book and he refers to himself and the three men by their Hebrew names.

This first chapter also tells us that "Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus." That was many years and numerous rulers later, in fact, Daniel lived into his eighties.

So we enter Daniel's story when he is a young man. We enter into a period of hard national circumstances. His faith was intact; faith instilled from studying the Bible; from religious practice; the fellowship of believers, and witness of God's people, just as you and I have today because we are part of the community, the church.

We never enter hardship alone when we belong to Christ. Yet hardship can be expected.

Once Jesus was with the disciples and as they were leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him,

"Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (Mk 13:1-2)

This alarmed them, of course, but it did happen about thirty years after Jesus predicted it. Jerusalem was once again destroyed by her enemies.

In times of trouble, most of us hope we would cling to God. In a minute we will consider where God is in Daniel's circumstance. But first, let's consider how we would regroup. Let's imagine we are taken out of this building. Would we still be the church if we lost this building? Would we still be the church if we were not in Texas?

Remember Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz? Her home was hit by a tornado and she and Toto, the dog, were lifted up and whisked away, inside the tornado. When they landed, she said to the dog, "Toto, I feel that we are not in Kansas anymore!"

If nothing was familiar what would we do? How would we move forward?

Daniel clung to the spiritual disciplines of his faith to find grounding. He was well trained in the Torah that gave him an ability to discern when he was exposed to Babylonian studies.

How proficient are you in understanding the Bible? Does it help you to recognize false teaching? This is very important for those of you in college.

What are spiritual disciplines that would help us today?

- Keeping the Ten Commandments
- If single, keeping yourself sexually pure (1Tim 5:22)
- Don't get drunk (Eph 5:18)
- Pray (Mat 6:9)
- Fast (Mat 6:17)
- Read the Bible (Ps 119:11)

You get the picture. All of these things help you stabilize when disaster strikes (and at all times!); they protect you. They guide you.

Daniel also adhered to a particular diet as established by his Jewish faith.

That discipline was rewarded by God. He remained healthy. God gave him favor with the palace master, and the palace master even risked his life to accommodate Daniel and his friends.

If you follow God's commands there are some natural blessings that come:

- If you are sexually pure when you are young, you will avoid sexually transmitted diseases, and you'll protect your self-respect.
- If you control your drinking, you will be less likely to turn to the bottle whenever some stressful situation comes your way.
- If you fast regularly, you will be better able to control what you eat.
- If you read the Bible, you will gain invaluable wisdom and guidance.
- If you pray, you will get to know Jesus on a very personal level and invite His power into your life.

If you follow God's commands you will be rewarded for your faith. Let's say that:

If I follow God's commands, I will be rewarded for my faith.

Why did Daniel show this self-discipline of refusing the king's meat and wine for vegetables? It was an expression of his *faith lifestyle*. It reminded him who he belonged to when there were few other reminders.

Where was God in all of this? Here's Daniel's testimony:

- ~ God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, (v. 9)
- ~ God gave them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. (v. 17)
- ~ Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. (v. 17)
- ~ The king found none equal to these four; so they entered the king's service. (v. 19-20)

God gave them wisdom and understanding that was ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in Babylon because God knows what he is doing.

Are you disciplining yourself to seek God? Or, are you going by your own desires?

God was at work, even in the midst of this disaster. Israel and Judah fell. But God had His people positioned for leadership in strategic places so that God's promises would indeed become a reality.

Are you in a disastrous—or even mildly stressful—situation? Strengthen yourself with some spiritual disciplines. Then you, like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, will come through shining like a champion.

Are you ready to get started?

AMEN