

DANIEL

“Keeping the faith when the heat is on”

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Chapter 1: Staying Strong Outside Your Comfort Zone

Definition: “A comfort zone is a place or situation where you feel safe or at ease and without stress. Notice how Daniel and his three teenage friends successfully responded to a situation that took them out of their comfort zone.

- Familiar language (Hebrew)
- Familiar families and familiar surroundings
- Familiar daily routines
- Familiar priests and temple practices
- Familiar foods

DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS ARE EXILED (Dan. 1:1-4a)

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia¹ and put in the treasure house of his god. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility-- ⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace.” (Dan. 1:1-4a NIV)

- This was Nebuchadnezzar's first of four invasions & deportations of Jews.1
- First invasion 605 BC: Nebuchadnezzar besieged² and deported Jews to Babylon, including Daniel and his three friends. Teenagers. They were taken out of their comfort zone!
 - Some commentators see this as the beginning of the 70-year Exile.
 - Some Jews were left behind to farm the land and pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar with the bounty they grew.²
 - Took some temple articles. Neb. took some temple articles (not listed but included gold & silver goblets (5:1- 2). He put these articles into the treasure house of his god (Marduk, Nabu, et. al.).

- Made Neb. look like he had power over Israel's God, Yahweh.¹
 - Nebuchadnezzar also believed that captives were less likely to rebel if they were taken away from the geographical area controlled by their gods.
 - Many were bitter against Yahweh, and lost faith.³
 - They were treated as "legal residents."
 - Not treated badly, could build houses and raise families.
 - Maintained tribal identities.
 - Many rose to positions of prominence but could not hold government office.⁴
 - They were taxed at a higher rate.³
 - Most likely became part of the commercial aspects of Babylon.
 - Later, many stayed when given the opportunity to return (Cyrus, 538 BC).
- Second invasion 597 BC: Neb besieged Jerusalem again and deported more Jews. He looted temple treasures again.
 - Third invasion 586 BC: Besieged Jerusalem again, deported Jews and destroyed Solomon's temple after taking all remaining Jewish treasures.
 - Some see this as the beginning of the 70-year Exile (586-516=70).
 - Fourth invasion 582 BC: Nebuchadnezzar deported a small group (175) of rebellious Jews to Babylon. More of a policing action than a siege.⁵
 - Question: Why do you suppose God allowed the Kingdom of Judah to be defeated by Nebuchadnezzar? (Hint: see Deut. 28:15, 25).
 - Ans: Read: Deut. 28:15 NIV "However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees, I am giving you today, all these curses will come on you and overtake you.
 - Ans: Deut. 28:25 NIV "The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies.
 - The Kingdom of Judah slowly drifted into sin and began to take on the culture and religion of their neighboring nations.
 - They abandoned God and worshipped idols.
 - They adopted the customs and religions of their heathen nations.
 - They practiced the Baal fertility cult.
 - They worshipped Molech.
 - They refused to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar.
 - Without God they became defenseless.

- **Question:** Why do you suppose these young Israelite boys were chosen to serve in the king's palace when there were plenty of other young Babylonian boys?
 - Ans: Possibly to publicly display Nebuchadnezzar's dominance over all other nations, especially Israel.
- **Question:** Why do you suppose Daniel and his three friends had to have an aptitude for learning?
 - Ans: Maybe to become fluent in Aramaic; learn culture details.
 - Ans: So that they would effectively become "Babylonians" in practice and knowledge thereby absorbing them into the Babylonian culture.

DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS ARE ENCULTURATED (Dan.1:4b-7)

"He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.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.⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. (Dan. 1:4b-7 NIV)

- They had to learn a new language: Aramaic, a cognate to Hebrew.
- They had to learn new literature. Probably very paganistic and centered on pagan gods.
- They were offered nutritious but objectionable food.
 - The Hebrew word for food here "pat-bag" does not necessarily mean "meat."
 - In Persian literature the word "pat-bag" often described baked sweet bread made with barley, wheat, and wine.
- They were given Babylonian names that honored Babylonian gods (1:7).
 - Their Hebrew names ending in "el" (Elohim) and yah "ah" (Yahweh) were changed to reflect association with the Babylonian gods.
 - Daniel (God is my judge) → Belteshazzar (a servant of Bel)
 - Hananiah (the Lord is gracious) → Shadrach (inspired by the sun god)
 - Mishael (who is what God is?) → Meshach (who is what the moon god is?)

→ Azariah (the Lord helps) → Abed-Nego (servant of Nebo)

DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS ARE EVALUATED (Dan.1:8-16)

“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^l 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. (Dan. 1:8-16 NIV)

- **Question:** Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the king’s food and wine (1:8). He and his three friends wanted only vegetables and water instead of the king’s food, and God blessed them. Does this mean Christians must not eat hamburgers? Should we boycott Burger King and MacDonalds?
 - First, it may have been offered to pagan gods (Marduk and Nabu).
 - Second: Meat with blood in it (raw, uncooked?) It may have been meat with blood still in it (raw?), which was prohibited by God’s law (Lev. 19:26 NIV).
 - Third, Daniel may have been annoyed at being given a Babylonian name and wanted to somehow avoid further enculturation.
 - Fourth, sharing a meal. It could have been that because sharing a meal with someone committed oneself to a covenant-like friendship that Daniel did not want to enter this kind of relationship with the king.⁸
 - Wine was not prohibited in the Mosaic Law dietary restrictions, but its use was regulated (e.g. Nazarite vow).
 - Ans: We are not under the Mosaic Law; these dietary laws do not apply to us. It’s OK to eat at Burger King and MacDonalds.
- Daniel and friends wanted only vegetables and water for 10 days then to be evaluated after 10 days (1:12).
- God caused the guard to show favor and sympathy on Daniel (1:14).

→ Notice how God is working behind the scenes throughout this chapter--
God's sovereignty in action!

- After 10 days Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better nourished than others (1:15).
 - Normally it takes weeks, sometimes months to see a change in one's physical appearance after switching from a regular diet to a vegan diet.

DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS ARE EQUIPPED (Dan.1:17)

“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.” (Dan. 1:17 NIV)

- God equipped these four teenagers by giving them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning (1:17).
- Daniel's particular gift of understanding visions and dreams was an ability he would need next (Chapter 2). God was equipping him for the next crisis.

DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS ARE EXCEPTIONAL (Dan.1:18-21)

“At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.” (Dan. 1:18-2:1 NIV)

- At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food
- They passed the test and were exalted by being approved to enter the king's service (1:19).
- Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus” (about 538 B.C.).
 - Daniel was about 14 years old when taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC.
 - Cyrus became king in 538 BC, some 66 years later.
 - Daniel was about 80 years old, or older, when he wrote, or dictated, this

letter. (14 + 66 = 80 years old).

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APPLICATION

Question: What can we learn from this chapter to help us the next time we are out of our comfort zone and in a very difficult situation? (Hint: See James 1:2-5; 13-15).

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” (Jas. 1:2-5 NIV)

- You can decide to put your full trust in God knowing that it can make you more mature (Jas. 1:3).
- You can ask God for wisdom so you can see the situation from his perspective (Jas 1:5).
- Don't compromise your Christian values when you are out of your comfort zone (Jas. 1:13-15).

Sources used in this series

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End Notes

- ¹ (OpenAI, 2023). Neither Scriptures nor Babylonian records identify the number of Jews deported to Babylon
- ² In the context of the Book of Daniel from the Bible, the term "besieged" refers to a military action where a city or stronghold is surrounded by enemy forces in an attempt to capture it. This typically involves cutting off supplies and entry or exit points, leading to the eventual surrender or weakening of those inside. (OpenAI, 2023).
- ³ (Payne, 1954, p. 156)
- ⁴ (Payne, 1954, p. 154)
- ⁵ (Payne, 1954, p. 150)