

Daniel The Prophet

'In the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Jerusalem and he besieged it. The Lord gave King Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand with part of the vessels of the house of God and he carried them into the land of Shinar (Babylon) to the house of his god (Baal) and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. The king told Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs to bring in certain ones of the children of Israel from the royal and noble seed, youths in whom there was no blemish but well-favoured and skilful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding science and had the ability to stand in the king's palace so he could teach them the learning and the language of the Chaldeans (Aramaic). The king appointed for them a daily portion of the king's dainty food and of the wine he drank so they could be nourished for three years and at its end they could stand before the king. Among the captives were children of (the tribe of) Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Ashpenaz gave (pagan) names to them. To Daniel he gave the name of Belteshazzar. To Hananiah, Shadrach. To Mishael, Meshach and to Azariah, Abednego' (Daniel 1:1 to 7).

Daniel was born approximately 620 BC. The exile took place sometime between the years of 606 BC to 530 BC so these dates reveal Daniel was about fifteen years old at the beginning of the seventy year exile to Babylon so he must have been about ninety years old at the end of the exile (Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9:2). Daniel was deeply loved by God (Daniel 10:11). He was born in Israel and was totally committed to God. Before the forced exile to Babylon Daniel lived a Godly life. He lived an aristocratic life of privilege, wealth and received the best education of the time. He would never have dreamed of ending up a slave in a foreign, idolatrous land like Babylon. Daniel was born during the reign of King Josiah, one of the most righteous kings Israel ever had. His reign brought great revival amongst the Children of Israel. The Scriptures were read out loud to the masses (2 Kings 23:2). Josiah died when Daniel was about 12 years old. The impact of this revival equipped Daniel for a lifelong commitment to God no matter what the circumstances. Daniel and his three friends did not bow to idols nor did they eat 'unclean' non-kosher foods. They were ruled over by the master of the eunuchs, Ashpenaz. Their names were changed from meaningful Hebrew names to pagan names. Their Hebrew names had spiritually significant meanings which reveals they were born to Godly, devout parents. Daniel means, 'God is Judge'. Hananiah means, 'The Lord is Gracious'. Mishael means, 'Who is He that is God?' Azariah means, 'The Lord helps'. Azariah's father Hilkiah was a high priest (1 Chronicles 6:13; 2 Kings 22:4). These four young men remained true to God despite shocking circumstances. There is no doubt many other Jewish people remained faithful to God throughout their ordeal of exile. We know that because at the end of the exile, devout Jewish people returned to Israel to rebuild the Temple. This Bible study is about Daniel and his three companions who were four of the men who remained faithful to God.

A prophecy in the form of a threat of judgement from God given to King Hezekiah from Isaiah must have seemed impossible and an unspeakable horror to the Israelites. 'Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear (listen to) the Word of the Lord, "Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and everything your forefathers have stored up until this day will be carried to Babylon. Nothing will be left. They will take away your sons who will be born to you and they will be eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace"' (2 Kings 20:16 to 18; Isaiah 39:5 to 7). The problem was, at the time of Daniel not all of the Children of Israel were living Godly lives. Many of the Jewish people of the time were steeped in idolatry and their disobedience infuriated the Lord. They all knew the commandment, "You will not make for yourselves idols, nor will you raise up an engraved image or a pillar (obelisk), nor will you place any figured stone (statue) in your land, to bow down to it for I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 26:1). Idolatry is something the Lord utterly hates. In Daniel's day, Israel was about to suffer God's judgement because some of the Israelites were idol worshippers and married pagan neighbours, something the Lord made very clear they were not to do or they would suffer the consequences of His wrath (Joshua 23:12, 13 & 16). During the days of Daniel's life, the Lord took drastic action to stop the idolatry.

We need to understand why the Lord took such drastic action. The Lord is our Righteous Judge and has the right to judge all mankind according to His holy principles. The Lord loathes idolatry and even items used in idolatry are tainted and must be burned. "You will burn the engraved images of their gods with fire. You will not covet the silver or the gold on them, nor take it for yourself lest you be snared in it for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. You will not bring an abomination into your house and become a devoted thing like it. You will utterly detest it and you will utterly abhor it for it is a devoted thing" (Deuteronomy 7:25 & 26). Idols are things devoted to evil. From the time of Abraham, the Lord began building and nurturing His holy Hebrew nation and would not tolerate anything that is an abomination to Him. All Jewish people had to be holy so when the Messiah came to Israel, they would be ready for a holy Messiah. If they were sinful, the Lord could not bring His Messiah to earth to save our souls from eternal damnation. Jesus came to show the entire world God is the God of salvation but only through Jesus. Salvation can only come from our Jewish Messiah (John 4:22). When a nation worships idols, so too the children will grow up to worship idols so to prevent that

from happening, the entire population had to be stopped. While in Babylon, many families continued their Jewish lives. Ancient documents reveal business deals, land purchases, tax records, olive oil deliveries, Jewish names, and a Jewish community in Babylon called 'the City of Judah' was once built there. The Jewish people exiled to Babylon were allowed to live together in their own communities, follow their own laws and traditions and raise their children in their own way, believing in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Many Jewish people remained in Babylon and Persia after their release from exile. Proof of that can be seen by the 'wise men from the east' who visited Jesus and gave Him the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh after He was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1 & 2). The 'wise men' would have been Jewish because they came to worship the Jewish Messiah. After they had been exiled to Babylon, the Jewish people sought an answer from the Lord to ask, "Why?" When they realised their idolatry was to blame for the exile, they repented and have never again been involved in any idolatry, but it took seventy years of exile to come to the point of repentance.

Daniel's family were righteous Jews who were victims of the collective judgement of God because of the sins of others. Nebuchadnezzar took almost all of the Jews captive. Only the poorest farmers were left in Israel to work in the fields (2 Kings 24:14; 25:12). Hebrew was the spoken and written language of all Jewish people living in Israel. They were snatched away from their homeland, away from their Godly homes and suffered terribly as slaves but their desire to follow the Lord went with them, even to the foreign land ruled by evil idolatrous men and through the most dreadful situation. While there the Lord prospered Daniel and at times he occupied high office in both the Babylonian and Persian Empires. Babylon was the scene of Daniel's initial ministry and was one of the major cities of the known world. The captive Israelites yearned for Jerusalem. 'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yes we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows in its midst we hung up our harps. For there (in Babylon) those who led us captive asked us for songs. Those who tormented us demanded songs of joy. "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing Yahweh's song in a foreign land? If I forget you Jerusalem, let my right hand wither and forget its skill. Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy' (Psalm 137:1 to 6).

Daniel maintained his righteousness before the Lord. He made a decision not to eat what the pagans ate but would only eat kosher food the Jewish people eat according to the Laws of Moses. He was taking a risk refusing food from the king's table. Even Ashpenaz was frightened. Daniel and his three friends ate only kosher food and the Lord blessed them. 'Daniel purposed in his heart he would not defile himself with the king's dainty (non-kosher) food nor with the wine he drank. He requested of Ashpenaz, he might not defile himself. God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion in the sight of Ashpenaz. Ashpenaz said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king who has appointed your food and your drink. Why should he see your faces looking worse than the youths who are of your own age? Would you endanger my head with the king?" Daniel said to the steward whom Ashpenaz had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Prove your servants I beg you for ten days and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our faces be looked on before you and the face of the youths who eat of the king's dainty food and as you see, deal with your servants." So he listened to them in this matter and proved them ten days. At the end of ten days their faces appeared healthier and they were fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate of the king's dainty food. The steward took away their dainty food and the wine and gave them vegetables. As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom. Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the days (three years) the king had appointed for bringing them in, Ashpenaz brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar' (Daniel 1:8 to 18).

In chapter two we read about King Nebuchadnezzar who was obviously a little bit mad. He had a dream he could not understand. He demanded his sorcerers, magicians, astrologers and the Chaldeans tell him the dream and the interpretation but of course they could not read his mind so they were all going to be killed including Daniel and his friends (Daniel 2:1 to 12). Daniel asked Arioch the king's captain for time and took the matter to the Lord and asked Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah to pray also, so Daniel and his companions would not perish with the rest of the so-called wise men of Babylon. The secret was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Daniel's response was praise. 'Daniel blessed the God of heaven' (Daniel 2:19). 'Daniel said to Arioch, "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon. Take me in before the king and I will show to the king the interpretation." Arioch brought Daniel before the king in haste and said to him, "I have found a man of the children of the captivity of Judah who will make known to the king the interpretation"' (Daniel 2:17 to 19, 24 & 25). With the help of the Lord, Daniel was able to tell the king his dream and the interpretation. Once again this reveals the deep relationship Daniel had with the Lord despite his dreadful circumstances. Daniel was blessed because he did not cower at the threat of death but turned to the Lord for help. 'The king made Daniel great and gave him many great gifts. The king made him to rule over the whole province of Babylon and to be chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel requested of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon but Daniel was in the gate of the king' (Daniel 2:48 & 49).

In chapter three we see Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah's solid commitment to the Lord. In the face of death, they obeyed the Lord and were saved by the Lord. King Nebuchadnezzar had an enormous golden statue made in his image. Every person in Babylon had to fall down and worship the king's image whenever they heard any kind of music and whoever did not worship the image of the king would be thrown into a furnace and burned alive (Daniel 3:1 to 11). These three righteous young men continued to worship the Lord. Knowing they were sure to die a terrible death, they continued to refuse to bow down and worship the image of King Nebuchadnezzar. They had no idea the Lord would rescue them so their faith must have been very strong. 'Nebuchadnezzar asked them, "Is it on purpose, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, you do not serve my god nor worship the golden image which I have set up? If you are ready, whenever you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music to fall down and worship the image which I have made, well and good, but if you do not worship, you will be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace and who is that God Who will deliver you out of my hands?" Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar, "We have no need to answer you in this matter. If it be so, our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, we will not serve your gods nor worship the golden image which you have set up" (Daniel 3:14 to 18). How many modern Christians could have that strength of character and faith?

The king was furious. By the way Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah spoke to the king, they seemed to consider him somewhat of a fool, and their words showed their remarkably strong faith and complete trust in the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than normal and for the three young men to be tossed into the heated furnace. What happened next was astonishing because hundreds of years before Jesus was born on earth He came to their rescue. 'King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He said to his counsellors, "We cast three bound up men into the midst of the fire." They answered, "True, O king." He said, "Look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire and they have no hurt and the aspect of the fourth is like the Son of God." Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God, come forth and come here." Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came forth out of the midst of the fire. The satraps, the deputies, the governors and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men. The fire had no power over their bodies nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their clothes burned nor had the smell of fire passed onto them. Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Who has sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him. They have changed the king's word and have yielded their bodies so they might not serve nor worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, every people, nation and language that speaks anything evil against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, will be cut in pieces and their houses will be made a dunghill because there is no other God who is able to deliver after this sort." The king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon' (Daniel 3:19 to 30).

Daniel the prophet always spoke the truth even when his life was at stake. He warned King Nebuchadnezzar he was going to lose his kingdom. By this time Nebuchadnezzar knew better than to argue with Daniel because the Lord always stood by Daniel no matter what the pagans tried to do to him. Once again the crazed king had one of his dreams and told Daniel so it could be interpreted (Daniel 4:1 to 18). Daniel was so awestruck by the dream he was speechless for a while (Daniel 4:19). A short time later Daniel was able to give the interpretation. "This is the interpretation O king, and it is the decree of the Most High, which is come on my lord the king. You will be driven from men and your dwelling will be with the animals of the field, and you will be made to eat grass like oxen. You will be wet with the dew of the sky and seven times (years) will pass over you until you know the Most High rules in the Kingdom of men and gives it to whoever He will. They commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree. Your kingdom will be sure to you. After (seven years) you will have known the heavens do rule. Therefore O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you and break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, if there may be a lengthening of your tranquillity." All this came on the King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he was walking in the royal palace of Babylon. The king said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling place by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" While the word was in the king's mouth there came a voice from the sky saying, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken. The kingdom is departed from you. You will be driven from men and your dwelling will be with the animals of the field. You will be made to eat grass like oxen and seven times (years) will pass over you until you know the Most High rules in the Kingdom of men and gives it to whoever He will." The same hour was this fulfilled on Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from men and ate grass like oxen. His body was wet with the dew of the sky, until his hair was grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. "At the end of the days (seven years) I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven and my understanding returned to me. I blessed the Most High and I praised and honoured Him who lives forever, for His dominion is an everlasting dominion and His Kingdom from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as

nothing and He does according to His will in the Army of Heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. None can stay His hand or tell Him, "What are You doing?" At the same time my understanding returned to me and the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and brightness returned to me. My counsellors and my lords sought me, I was established in my kingdom and excellent greatness was added to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, extol and honour the King of Heaven for all His works are Truth and His ways Justice. Those who walk in pride He is able to abase" (Daniel 4:24 to 37).

Belshazzar was the pagan name given to Daniel by Ashpenaz (Daniel 1:7) and means 'Bel, preserve his life'. After the death of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, his wicked son Belshazzar (meaning Bel, protect the king) ruled in his place. Bel (also Baal) was one of Babylon's many false gods (Isaiah 46:1; Jeremiah 50:2). King Belshazzar's mother gave Daniel an amazing tribute. "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the holy God ... an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting of dreams, showing of dark sentences and dissolving of doubts were found in the same Daniel" (Daniel 5:11 & 12). Another incident in Babylon revealed the hand of God on the lives of the Israelites in exile. That incident shocked and terrified the wicked king. 'Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar ... commanded them to bring the golden and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the Temple in Jerusalem so the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. They brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the Temple of the house of God in Jerusalem ... They drank wine and praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone. In the same hour came forth the fingers of a Man's hand that wrote (in Hebrew) over against the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace. The king saw the part of the hand that wrote on the wall then the king's face was changed in him. His thoughts troubled him and the joints of his legs were loosened. His knees struck one against another ... All of the king's wise men came in but they could not read the writing nor make known to the king the interpretation. King Belshazzar was greatly troubled and his face was changed in him. His lords were perplexed ... Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked Daniel, "Are you that Daniel who are of the children of the captivity of Judah whom my father the king brought out of Judah? I have heard of you, that the Spirit of the Gods is in you and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you ... I have heard you can give interpretations and dissolve doubts. If you can read the writing on the wall and make known to me its interpretation, you will be clothed with purple, have a chain of gold about your neck and will be the third ruler in the kingdom." Daniel answered the king, "Let your gifts be to yourself and give your rewards to another, nevertheless I will read the writing to the king and make known to him the interpretation ... You Belshazzar, son of Nebuchadnezzar have not humbled your heart though you knew when your father was struck down those seven years, but have lifted up yourself against the Lord of Heaven and they have brought the vessels of His house before you so you and your lords, your wives and your concubines have drunk wine from them and you have praised the gods of silver, gold, brass, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see, nor hear, nor know and the God in Whose hand your breath is, and Whose are all your ways, you have not glorified. The part of the Man's hand sent from before Him and this writing was inscribed ... MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the writing. MENE; God has numbered your kingdom and brought it to an end. TEKEL; you are weighed in the balances and are found wanting. PERES; your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians." Daniel was clothed with purple, a chain of gold was about his neck and the king made a proclamation saying he would be the third ruler in the kingdom. That night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. Darius the Mede received the kingdom being about sixty-two years old' (Daniel 5:1 to 31).

Daniel sought the Lord even when his life was in danger. There were some government leaders who were jealous of Daniel because he was so highly favoured and although they could not fault him, they came up with an idea that could see Daniel put to death. These jealous men tried to dupe the new King Darius into killing Daniel by having the prophet thrown into a lion's den but their scheme backfired spectacularly. Daniel was one of the presidents but because he was Jewish, the other government leaders wanted him out. 'It pleased King Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred twenty viceroys who would be throughout the whole kingdom, and over them three presidents of whom Daniel was one. These viceroys would give account to the presidents so the king would have no damage (over his reign). Daniel was distinguished above the presidents and the viceroys because an excellent spirit was in him and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. The presidents and the viceroys sought to find occasion against Daniel regarding the kingdom but they could find no occasion nor fault, because he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. These (jealous) men said, "We cannot find any occasion against this Daniel except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. The presidents and viceroys assembled together to the king and said thus to him, "King Darius, live forever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the deputies, the viceroys, the counsellors and the governors, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a strong interdict. Whoever will ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days except you, O king, will be cast into the den of lions. Now O king, establish the interdict and sign the writing so it not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians which does not alter." King Darius signed the writing and the interdict' (Daniel 6:1 to 10).

Daniel would never agree to cease praying to the Lord even for a month so in full sight he disobeyed the interdict. Praying three times a day is not a Scriptural obligation but was deeply instilled into Jewish custom from ancient times. 'When Daniel knew the writing was signed, he went into his house. His windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem and he kneeled down three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God as he did before. These men assembled together and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. They spoke to the king concerning the king's interdict. "You signed an interdict, every man who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you O king, will be cast into the den of lions." King Darius answered, "This is true according to the law of the Medes and Persians which does not alter." They said, "That Daniel who is of the children of the captivity of Judah, does not regard you O king, nor the interdict you have signed but makes his petition three times a day." When the king heard these words he was very displeased and set his heart on Daniel to try to deliver him. He agonised over how to rescue Daniel until the going down of the sun. These men assembled together to the king and said, "Know O king, it is a law of the Medes and Persians, no interdict nor statute the king establishes may be changed." The king commanded and they cast Daniel into the den of lions. The king said to Daniel, "Your God Whom you serve continually, He will deliver you." A stone was laid on the mouth of the den and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords so nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. The king went to his palace and passed the night fasting, neither were instruments of music brought before him. His sleep fled from him. The king arose very early in the morning and went in haste to the den of lions. When he came near to the den to Daniel, he cried to Daniel with a lamentable voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God Whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions?" (Daniel 6:11 to 20). The faith shown by Darius was confirmed. Amazingly, Daniel called out from deep inside the den. "O king, live forever. My God has sent His Angel and has shut the lions' mouths. They have not hurt me because before God innocence was found in me and also before you O king, have I done no hurt." The king was exceeding glad and commanded they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no manner of hurt was found on him because he had trusted in his God. The king commanded and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they were cast into the den of lions with their wives and children. The (starving) lions had the mastery of them and broke all their bones in pieces before they landed on the bottom of the den. King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and languages who dwell in all the (known) earth, "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, in all the dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for He is the living God and steadfast forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed and His dominion will be even to the end. He delivers and rescues and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius the Mede and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian' (Daniel 6:21 to 28).

Daniel was a man of God and we can all learn from his example. He did remarkable things like interpreting dreams and visions, interpreting God's handwriting on the wall but he never took any credit, refused to take bribes or listen to flattery, always referring back to the Lord. Daniel and his friends showed purity of character, righteousness and a decisive commitment to follow the Lord in all circumstances regardless of the danger they faced. Daniel prayed in a deep, spiritual way. Every circumstance that came his way was taken to the Lord in prayer. It is clear Daniel read the Scriptures because he realised the Jewish exile to Babylon was to end after seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11 & 12 and 29:10) and he responded with prayer and repentance (Daniel 9:3 to 19). By this time Daniel would have been about eighty or ninety years old. He was a young man when he was forced into exile and seventy years had passed. Daniel's prayer began with acknowledging the greatness of God then continued with confessing sin on behalf of Israel the nation and named the sins. He did not shy away from accepting responsibility for the sins of his nation. He used the phrase, "Shame of face." He was voicing the shame he felt because the Israelites sinned against the Lord of Glory. Daniel expressed the righteousness of God several times. He knew the disaster of the exile was due to the judgement of God because of idolatry and the other sins of Israel. Daniel finally petitioned the Lord to restore Jerusalem and to forgive the Jewish people (Daniel 9:19). When the seventy years of exile were fulfilled, thousands of Jewish people began the journey back to Israel. Ezra moved to Jerusalem in the year 458 BC. We need to study the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah to gain knowledge of the Jew's return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple.

Daniel was indeed a holy prophet. God through the Messenger angel Gabriel gave Daniel information regarding the first coming of the Messiah Jesus that no other prophet was given in such a graphic way with the exact timing for when the prophecies would be fulfilled and when Jesus would come to earth and die as our Messiah (Daniel 9:21 to 27). This long prophecy was authenticated by Jesus (Matthew 24:15). By understanding what was written in the Book of Daniel, some Jewish people living in Israel when Jesus was born were able to recognise the Messiah and worship the Lord for the miraculous event because they were actually waiting for Him. The information they had came from Daniel. 'Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, looking for the Consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, he would not see death before he had

seen the Lord's Anointed Messiah. Simeon came in the Spirit into the Temple. When Mary and Joseph brought in the Child, Jesus (Yeshua) so they might do concerning Him according to the custom of the law (of Moses), Simeon received Jesus into his arms and blessed God, and said, "Now you are releasing Your servant, Master, according to Your word, in peace" ... There was a woman named Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with a husband seven years from her virginity and she had been a widow for about eighty-four years. She did not depart from the Temple, worshipping with fasting and petitions night and day. Coming up at that very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord and spoke of Jesus the Messiah to all those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem' (Luke 2:25 to 32; 36 to 38). The Book of Daniel is a true historical document with marvellous miracles and prophecies, many of which have been fulfilled, prophecies confirmed by archaeology several times.

The Bible does not say Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were made eunuchs but they were forced into slavery at a time and place where some young men were castrated. The Bible does say some of the sons of the Children of Israel would be made eunuchs by the king of Babylon but the Bible does not specifically name these young men as having suffered that terrible fate. In fact it was very unlikely because Azariah married and had children and they were all involved in the construction of the Second Temple. After the exile Daniel returned to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 10:6). This was probably the time when he completed the Book of Daniel. Daniel had been writing notes in the form of a diary (Daniel 7:1) but it was not compiled until after he had 'gone his way' and returned home to Israel (Daniel 12:9). Hananiah returned to Israel and became the governor of the Temple and was in charge of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:2). Mishael returned to Jerusalem to help rebuild the Temple (Nehemiah 8:4). Azariah married and had a famous family who will forever be in the minds of everyone who reads the Bible. Ezra, the man who helped build the Second Temple was the grandson of Azariah. 'Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah' (Ezra 7:1).

Nobody has a perfect life. We will all suffer terrible things or have seriously devastating news sometimes but our reaction to dreadful situations depends on our relationship with the Lord. He will love us no matter what we suffer. He will honour us if we remain committed to Him. The Bible says God has no respect for people who fall away from Him because of difficult circumstances (Hebrews 12:1 to 17). We do not have to remain in a place of depression, sorrow and defeat. The Bible says we can overcome depression, or the spirit of heaviness by consciously 'putting on' the garment of praise and receiving the oil of joy (the Holy Spirit) (Isaiah 61:3). This means to remove negative thoughts and replace them with praise and worship. In the eternal scope of our lives, whatever happens to us here on earth will only give us better eternal rewards once we go to be with the Lord forever. 'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us' (Romans 8:18). God has plans for our lives for our eternal good. "I know the thoughts and plans I have for you. Thoughts and plans for welfare and peace, and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome," says the Lord (Jeremiah 29:11). Terrible circumstances refine us like gold. 'God knows the way I take and when He has tried me, I will come forth like gold' (Job 23:10), and He makes us fit for the Kingdom of God (Colossians 1:12). We need to do what Daniel did and make a conscious decision to live for God, to live with God, to be righteous and in constant communication with our Saviour. We will not be able to understand why the Lord may have allowed terrible circumstances to happen to us until we receive our eternal rewards on Judgement Day. "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth (who have died) will awake to everlasting life ... The teachers (of the Scriptures) and those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who turn many to righteousness will give forth light and shine brightly like the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:2 & 3).

Amen and God bless you.

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