

Daniel Was a Precious Man Before God

The opening verses of Daniel really describe the beginning of the fulfillment of God's judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah. If you were to read Deuteronomy 31:16-18, you would find that Moses prophesied that Israel would forsake God. In fact, God indicated the conditions for blessing, and the conditions for being disciplined. The Israelites did not take God's instruction to heart. They heard but they did not take it to heart.

ISRAEL TO BE DIVIDED DUE TO SOLOMON'S SIN. Five hundred years later, King Solomon did not take it to heart either. We discover in 1 Kings 11 that Solomon took for himself one thousand wives, and his wives pulled him away from the true God. He worshiped idols or other gods. He worshiped demons, in fact. As a result, God told Solomon that the nation would be divided

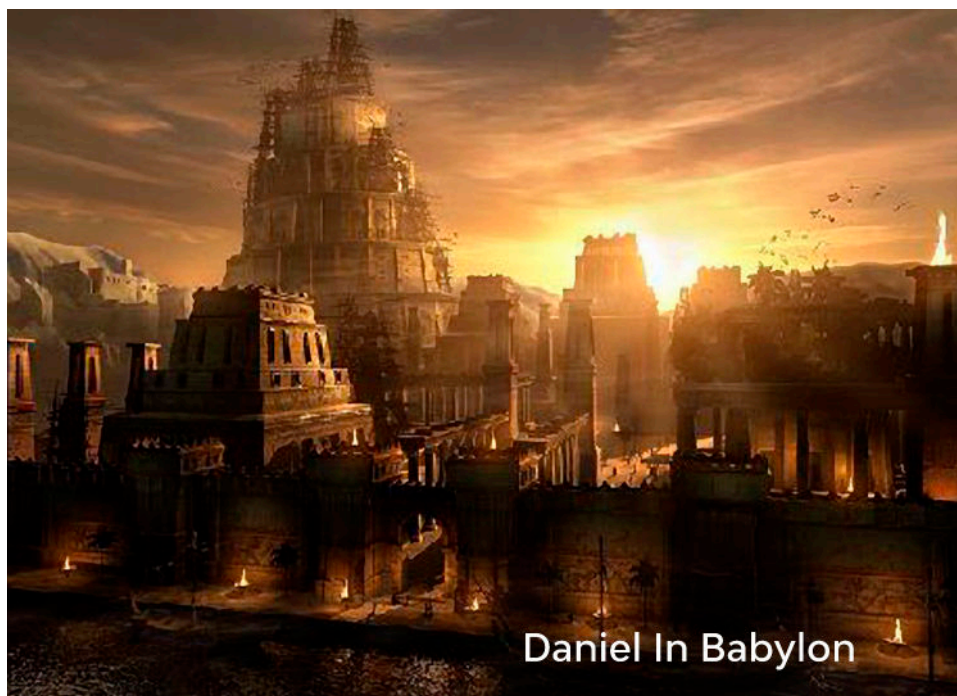
into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. The northern kingdom was known as Israel, and the southern kingdom was called Judah. God said the reason this was going to happen was due to Solomon's sin. Moses had prophesied that they would drift from God and punishment would follow.

Scripture tells us that almost all of the kings in the northern kingdom were wicked. There was only one king who was both good and evil. All of the rest of them were evil. In Hosea 4:9, the prophet warned the people in the northern kingdom that it would be "Like people, like priests." When I have read that verse in the past, I used to think of it from the standpoint of

a leader in a church—how the leadership in a church behaves will be reflected in the congregation. I think that is true, but the verse also says something else. The verse says, "Like people, like" what? Priests. Like the people, like the priest. The message is that how the people behave is how your priests typically will behave because the priests usually come from the people. The people and the priests are in it together. That was true of the northern kingdom.

The leaders of the northern kingdom were evil. They were not repentant. So in 722 B.C. God brought the Assyrian

Army against the northern kingdom, and captives were taken. Some years later King Nebuchadnezzar invaded the southern kingdom of Judah, and took many people captive. God punished both the northern and southern kingdoms. I find it amazing that

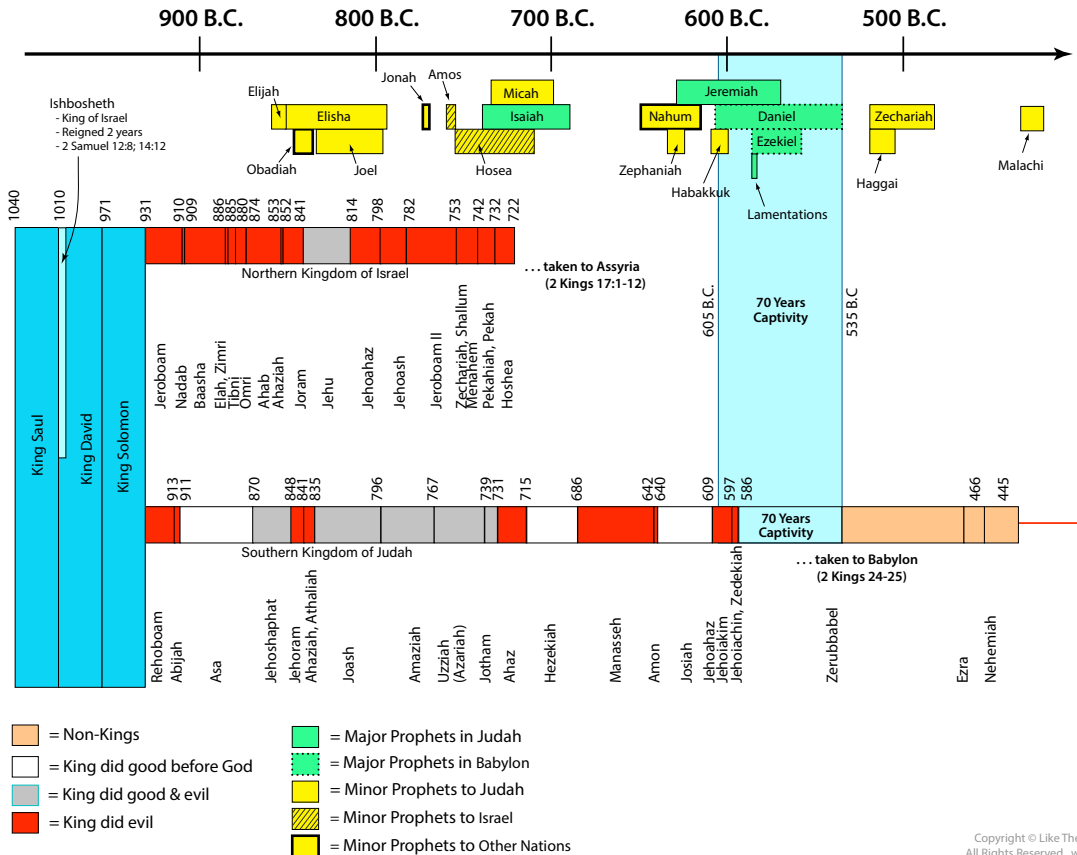


Daniel In Babylon

God did not take the southern kingdom immediately, along with the northern kingdom. I believe the reason He did not do that is that some of the kings in the southern kingdom were good. There were two kings in the southern kingdom who stand out as being absolutely terrific. One of them was Hezekiah. The other one was Josiah. We will talk about Josiah soon.

KING MANASSEH WAS A BAD KING. Finally, during the reign of Manasseh, God announced that Judah would be disciplined. I find it interesting that it is not just the king on whom God pronounced judgment. God pronounced judgment on the people as well. In 2 Kings 21:11-12 we read,

The Kings and Prophets



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Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites did who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols; therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am bringing such calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.' 2 Kings 21:11-12 (NASB)

It was going to be so bad that people were going to struggle. Verses 13-15 add,

I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of

their enemies, and they will become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day. 2 Kings 21:13-15 (NASB)

What is the message? They had been doing evil for a long time. God had warned the Israelites that if they did not give Him honor, if they did not put God first in their life, eventually judgment would come. It happened to the northern kingdom. God had been patient with the southern kingdom. The sin of Manasseh was like "the straw that breaks the camel's back." Then God said, "Okay, Manasseh, because of your wickedness I am now going to judge the entire nation." What is very interesting in this passage is that we are told the people were part of the problem. The people were not exempt from

responsibility.

KING JOSIAH WAS A GOOD KING. When we come to the reign of King Josiah, we find that he was the best king. King Josiah had a heart for God. He loved the Lord God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind. We are told in the pages of scripture that he loved God more than any king did before him, and more than any king did after him. In 2 Kings, chapters 21 and 22, we are told King Josiah became king when he was eight years old, and reigned for thirty-one years. When his reign began, the Israelites did not know about God's law. They had not been reading the law. They lost interest in it at some point. Then the law was discovered in the temple and King Josiah had it read to all of the people. He asked them to be committed to God. He instituted reforms in the temple and its worship. The Passover had not been practiced for hundreds of years. Therefore, he reestablished the Passover feast during his reign. In 2 Kings 22:18, we read this:

But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD thus shall you say to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Regarding the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender . . . ' 2 Kings 22:18-19a (NASB)

God was talking to King Josiah in this verse. He said in verse 19,

" . . . because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD. 2 Kings 22:19 (NASB)

I like this. He loved the Lord his God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, and so he instituted reforms. He removed the idols. He removed the worship of false deities. Now listen to what God said in verse 20 as a result of his response,

"Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place." So they brought back

word to the king. 2 Kings 22:20 (NASB)

God told Josiah that because he had been a good king, God was going to protect him. He would not see the evil that God was going to bring upon the nation. We discover later in the pages of scripture that the king died before the Babylonian Empire invaded and carried captives away.

KING JEHOIAKIM WAS A BAD KING. The next king that followed after Josiah was King Jehoiakim. There was an intervening king who reigned only three months. But we will focus on King Jehoiakim. Both of these kings were evil. In 2 Kings, chapter 23, we are told King Jehoiakim reigned about eleven years. He became king when he was twenty-five years old. In Jeremiah 22:13-19, we find out that he did evil. He taxed the people and squandered their money on unnecessary buildings. He made a palace for himself. All of this was in direct violation of Leviticus 19:13. Those are some of the evil deeds King Jehoiakim committed.

THE MESSAGE FROM JEREMIAH. Jeremiah was a prophet who had a number of things to say during this man's reign. In Jeremiah 25:3, we find a very interesting statement. We are going to look at a number of quotes from Jeremiah. Here is Jeremiah 25:3,

From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened. Jeremiah 25:3 (NASB)

Jeremiah said, "I have been speaking to you now for quite some time, but you have not been listening to me." Then in verse 12 he said,

'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.' Jeremiah 25:12 (NASB)

Notice that God said He was going to use the nation of Babylon to punish the kingdom of Judah. Then after seventy years He would judge the empire of Babylon because of what

they will do to Judah. Scripture teaches us that God will use one nation to judge a sinful nation, and then turn around and judge that nation because of its own wickedness, and the pattern continues. Initially a nation is okay; then it turns evil and God judges it. Notice, verse 13 says,

I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. Jeremiah 25:13 (NASB)

Verse 14 adds,

(For many nations and great kings will make slaves of them, even them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds and according to the work of their hands.) Jeremiah 25:14 (NASB)

God said that not only were the leaders corrupt, but the people were corrupt too! In Jeremiah 26, we learn that God rejected the leaders. But what was the problem with the people and the leaders?

PEOPLE DO NOT FEAR GOD. Judges 21:25 gives us the answer, even though it was written long before the time of Jeremiah.

... everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Judges 21:25 (NASB)

Now that was not a description of the United States of America, but of the nation of Israel. As I was thinking about this passage, I could not help but be reminded of a breakfast I had recently at a restaurant. The waitress came to the table and asked me if I wanted coffee. After a while, I had a conversation with her, and discovered that she was a University of Arizona student. I asked about her major. She started talking, and told me that her major was human rights. I was curious and asked, "Well, where are you going to use that?" She said, "Amnesty International." So, I asked, "Who determines what are human rights? You are studying human rights. You are getting a major in human rights. Then you will seek a job with Amnesty International. How do you determine what are human rights? How do you establish by what morality you will operate?" She said,

"Oh, I am taking ethics classes." So I asked, "Have you stopped to think that ethics have changed? What was okay ten years ago is not okay today in our society. What was okay twenty years ago was not okay ten years ago, and is not okay today." Finally at one point I asked, "Did you know that the basic morality that you are operating by is just a residual of what Christians brought long ago to the United States? It is gradually disappearing. Do you realize the basic moral grid that you are operating by came from the Bible; it came from God?" At that point she was red-faced and left. At the end, just before we got ready to leave, she came to me and said, "You know, I am an atheist. You have given me something to think about." So I gave her a card for NeverThirsty.org and I have been praying for her. Do you realize what she was doing? She was operating by the principle described in Judges 21:25. She was doing what was right in her own eyes. She was not operating from a biblical standard. She was drifting morally and so is our nation.

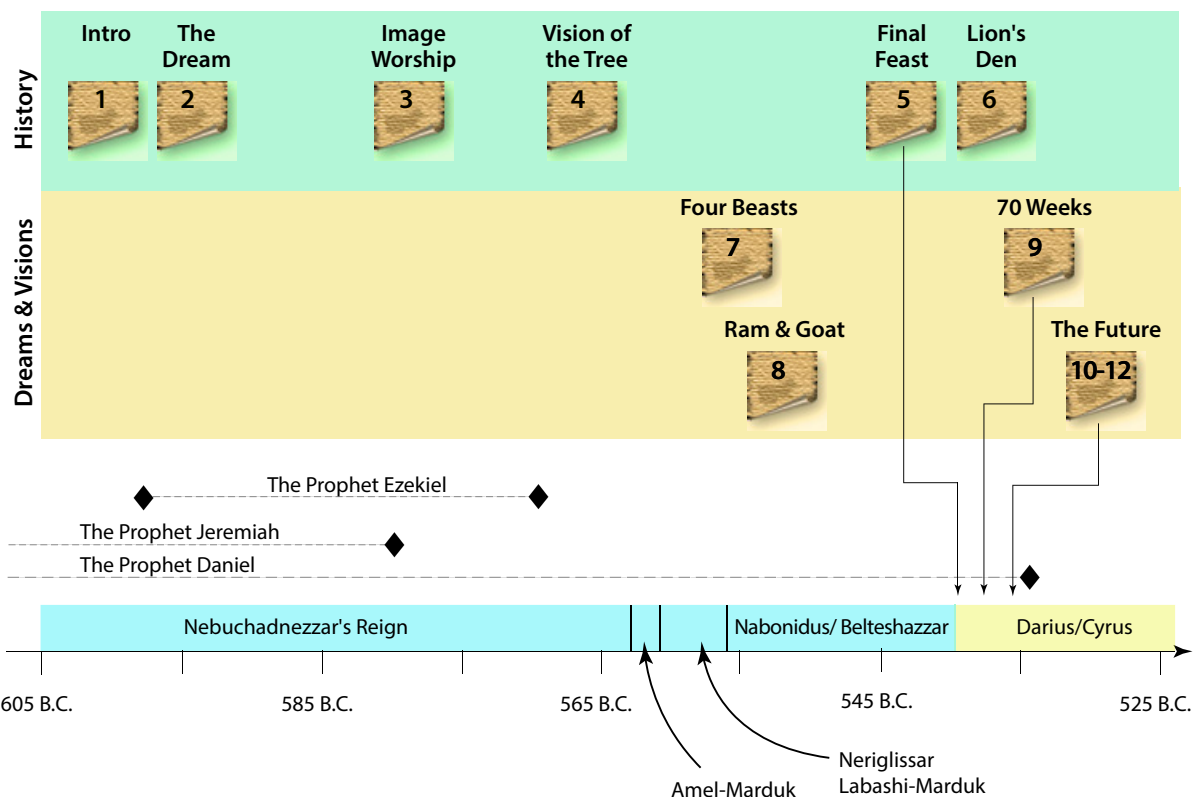
Israel abandoned God and the moral standard given by God. In 2 Kings 21-22 we are told that in the days of King Josiah, Israel was without the law. That is, they had lost the Pentateuch. Then one day a priest found it. They were surprised to find it. Its discovery was big news, and everyone read it. What a commentary on the priests! What a commentary on the leadership! What a commentary on the people! Then King Josiah instituted changes that were significant.

Several years ago I received a publication from BIOLA, a university I attended. The issue was concerned with biblical illiteracy. This has been a repetitive theme in the last decade or so. There have been a number of books published decrying the biblical illiteracy that exists in the United States. I want to read a short excerpt from this magazine. It is under the title "A Famine of Bible Knowledge." It says,

New Testament scholar David Nienhuis summarizes his understanding of the situation in an article titled "The Problem of Evangelical Biblical Illiteracy: A View from the Classroom":

For well over twenty years now, Christian leaders have been lamenting the loss of general biblical literacy in America. ... Some among us may be tempted to seek odd solace in the recognition that our culture is increasingly post-Christian. ... Much to our

Outline of Daniel



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embarrassment, however, it has become increasingly clear that the situation is really no better among confessing Christians, even those who claim to hold the Bible in high regard.

If I sound alarmist, I'm not alone.

These days many of us don't even know basic facts about the Bible.¹

Then he gives some illustrations near the end of the article.

In the book of Amos, people who experienced a "famine of hearing the words of the Lord" are portrayed as undergoing divine judgment. Amos paints a picture of people without access to God's revelation searching for a message from God like desperate

people — hungry and dehydrated — in search of food and water (Amos 8:11–12). In Amos they want it, but are not permitted to have it. In our case, although we have unlimited access, we often don't want it.²

It is a very powerful statement. It is an indictment, not only of the southern kingdom of Judah, but also an indictment of the United States of America. We have the word of God, but we do not want it. Many professing Christians are not interested in learning. Those longing to discover God and to learn more about Him are interested.

KINGDOM OF JUDAH REJECTED GOD. I have discovered in studying Jeremiah that I am not responsible for anybody's response. I can teach and preach the Word of God, but I cannot make anybody believe it. That is up to God. It is

1. Kenneth Berding, The Crisis of Biblical Illiteracy, Biola Magazine. May 29, 2014

2. Ibid.

ultimately between you and the Lord as to how it all comes together. At the end of Jeremiah 26, we find that God tells the prophet he will preach, but the people are going to reject what he says. Jeremiah will repeatedly warn them, but the people will not listen.

Jeremiah 26:7 says,

The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, “You must die!” Jeremiah 26:7-8 (NASB)

The people did not like what Jeremiah was saying. Jeremiah was warning them, and the priests and the prophets said, “You must die.”

“Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD saying, ‘This house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant?’” And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king’s house to the house of the LORD and sat in the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD’S house. Then the priests and the prophets spoke to the officials and to all the people, saying, “A death sentence for this man! For he has prophesied against this city as you have heard in your hearing.” Jeremiah 26:9-11 (NASB)

The basic message is that God pronounced judgment on the kingdom of Judah. But the people considered Jeremiah a bad prophet! We know what happened. The people rejected his counsel, and God brought the Babylonian king, King Nebuchadnezzar, against the southern kingdom and took the people captive to Babylon. That was the introduction to our study.

In our last study, we learned in verses 1 and 2,

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. Daniel 1:1 (NASB)

This means the people in Judah rejected Jeremiah and followed the king. Verse 2 says,

The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar . . .

Shinar was Babylon.

. . . to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. Daniel 1:2 (NASB)

Youth From Royalty and Noble Families. Verse 3 adds,

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles . . . Daniel 1:3 (NASB)

Here we are told that Nebuchadnezzar ordered his chief of the officials. Now, some of your Bibles may have footnotes that say the word “official” actually means “eunuch.” That is true. Sometimes “official” can mean eunuch, but sometimes it does not. In Genesis 37:36 we are told that Potiphar was chief of the officials. If you remember, he was married to a woman. Obviously he is not a eunuch at that point. Sometimes the word that is translated here as “official” can mean “eunuch” or it may not mean “eunuch.” It is probably best to understand Ashpenaz was not “the chief of the eunuchs.” Instead, he was “the chief of the officials.”

So King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the chief of the officials to bring him some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles. Historians tell us there were youths from Judah and other countries. This means Ashpenaz could have chosen men from Phoenicia, or Assyria, or Egypt, as well as from the kingdom of Judah. We are told in this passage he chose sons of Judah. There were sons of nobles and some from royal families.

Youth Were Educated. Verse 4 explains why the king selected them. It says,

. . . youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking,

showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and he ordered him to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. Daniel 1:4 (NASB)

This verse reveals these youth were being brainwashed. The whole purpose was to reeducate these youth so that they would be beneficial to the Babylonian court of King Nebuchadnezzar. The education involved learning the Babylonian culture, science, religion, and history. Then we are told they learned the language of the Chaldeans. Today, we refer to this language as the neo-Babylonian language. What is important in this verse is that we are told they were going to be attending “the university of universities.” What an education! What an opportunity! The king had the best youth selected, and he had them re-educated to serve the kingdom.

Youth Given the Best Food. Verse 5 states the king also gave them food to eat, and the food was the king's best food.

The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. Daniel 1:5 (NASB)

Why is the king doing this? Verse 5 gives us the answer. The purpose was to make them part of the king's personal staff.

Names of the Youth Selected. Verse 6 gives us the names of several of these youth.

Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Daniel 1:6 (NASB)

Years ago, I sat on an ordination council. The purpose of an ordination council is to commission a man to become a pastor. This is often done for men graduating from seminary. During the ordination council, they are asked Bible and theological questions. But when my church scheduled an ordination council, we would ask them questions in preparation for their ordination. One of the common questions was, “Please name the books of the Bible in order.” They had to start at Genesis and end up at the book of Revelation, and do it perfectly. Another

question was, “Who are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah?” I will tell you, it is amazing how many seminary students did not know who those three individuals were. But when they were asked, “Who are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?” they knew the answer. Well, verse 7 states the latter were the new names of these three youths.

Then the commander of the officials assigned new names to them; and to Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abed-nego. Daniel 1:7 (NASB)

So the youths were renamed. This is all part of the brainwashing process. It is also interesting to note that it was customary in that day to rename anybody who was added to the royal staff, or into the royal administration. We are given their Jewish names here followed by their new Babylonian names.

I do not want to miss Isaiah 39:7. Here we are told that Isaiah prophesied there would be some youths from the line of Hezekiah, who would be in the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The name of “Daniel” is “God is my judge.” He is renamed as Belteshazzar, which means “Bel, protect his life.” Hananiah, which meant “Yahweh is gracious,” was renamed as Shadrach, which means “command of Aku.” Aku was the moon god. Mishael's name meant “who is what God is,” was renamed Meshach, “who is what Aku is.” Azariah was “Yahweh has helped,” is renamed Abednego, “servant of Nego.” These four men were given new names since they were going to become part of the king's royal administration.

Daniel's Commitment to God. Verse 8 introduces us to the young man, Daniel, in a dramatic way.

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. Daniel 1:8 (NASB)

Scripture teaches us that King Josiah was a good king and Jehoiakim was a bad king. It is amazing that there were youths like Daniel who would take such a stand. Some have asked,

Names of Daniel and His Friends

Hebrew Name	Meaning	Chaldean Name	Meaning
Daniel	God is my judge	Beltashazzer	Bel, protect his life
Hananiah	Yahweh is gracious	Shadrach	Command of Aku
Mishael	Who is what God is	Meshach	Who is what Aku is
Azariah	Yahweh has helped	Abednago	Servant of Nebo

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“Why did he do this? Why did Daniel not want to eat the choice food?” It is easy for us to say, “It was not kosher food,” or “Maybe it was offered to idols.” But we are not sure why he did not want to eat the food. It is amazing that he did this, because that was not the culture in which he grew up. I want you to think about that. He had been living in a nation of people that did whatever was right in their own eyes. There were only two kings that were good who could serve as models. Hezekiah and Josiah were stand out kings.

It is estimated that Daniel was about fourteen to seventeen years old at this point. Plato tells us that the Persians began educating their youth at the age of fourteen. Most commentators today think he was probably about seventeen. So, it is a ball park estimate that he was an older teen. This would mean that most likely Daniel was familiar with King Josiah. King Josiah was a man who loved God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, and with all of his mind. He would have also been familiar with King Jehoiakim, who had been deported, according to verse 2. In fact, Jehoiakim ended up dying like a donkey in Jerusalem, and the birds came and ate his flesh. That was judgment on King Jehoiakim. Daniel would have known about these two kings. It is amazing that Daniel’s attitudes are unusual among the people in the kingdom of Judah,

and unlike the leaders in his nation.

CONCLUSION. Daniel 6:7 will tell us that Daniel was put into the lions den. Remember that the leadership there in Babylon was upset with him. They wanted to kill him. They asked King Darius to make a decree that if there was anybody who did not pray to the king would be put into the lions’ den. What did Daniel do? Daniel continued to pray to God as he had always done! He left his windows open when he prayed. I wonder how many of us would have closed our windows and doors. Daniel leaves them open!

In Daniel 9:2-3, we learn that Daniel is reading the book of Jeremiah. Do you know what that tells me about Daniel? Daniel prayed and Daniel read scripture. In Daniel 10:12, we learn this about Daniel.

Then he said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God . . .” Daniel 10:12 (NASB)

I like that. Daniel humbled himself. He was an incredible young man.

He was so incredible that Daniel 9:23 says,

At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued,
and I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed . . . Daniel
9:23 (NASB)

Gabriel the angel told Daniel that he was highly esteemed. The Hebrew word that is translated here as “highly esteemed” means “precious.” Daniel was called precious. Daniel was an incredible individual. He was not like his king, and he was not like the people. We live in a world that is more concerned about external form than we are about a relationship with the Lord.

Remember what Jeremiah did? He warned them and warned them. Did they listen? No. What is happening in our churches? BIOLA is a Christian university and Christians come to the university from churches all over America. BIOLA has been reporting that the youth who are coming now know less about the Bible than their predecessors. Our

churches are not teaching the word of God as they should. The people are often not that interested in the word of God. Hosea says it is an indictment on a nation: not only are people not taught, but people are not even interested. That was the kingdoms of Judah and of Israel.

I see two extremes among Christians. I am thinking of James 2, where we are told that faith without works is dead. I find some Christians who say, “I have few works, but I still have faith in God.” But that is not what James 2 says. If you have faith, then you are going to have works. On the flip side, people say, “Look at my works! They show that I am a Christian.” But the Pharisees had great zeal, and they sure did not go to heaven. Think about it. A true Christian will have faith AND works. We are told that King Josiah loved the Lord his God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, and with all of his might. That is like Daniel and Daniel was committed to God. Scripture calls him “precious.”