***Daniel 1:1-7 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god. 3Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king’s descendants and some of the nobles, 4young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. 5And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king’s delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. 6Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.***

As we begin our study of the Book of Daniel, it’s critical that we understand a few things about Daniel. First, we know that he was part of the royal lineage, of noble birth. Ancestors aren’t named, parents aren’t known, and we know very little about his birth. We know he was a member of nobility because he is brought to Babylon as Nebuchadnezzar decreed. Daniel comes to our attention as a captive, as the seventy years of captivity begin. We know Jonah was prophesying around 800 BC, Nahum around 680 BC, Zephaniah around 630 BC. Israel has already been taken into captivity to Assyria, now Judah has fallen to Babylonians. The Book of Daniel is set around 606 BC. Jeremiah and Habakkuk were still prophesying. Ezekiel was coming on the scene. Prophets were speaking loud and often to Judah and Judah would not listen, would not hear.

 In the Book of Daniel, we find prophecy that is astonishing and incredible dream interpretation. We’ll see him rightly prophesy the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms and the coming of the Messiah. Daniel is studied in parallel with Revelation often. I’ve heard it said that one cannot begin to understand Revelation without first understanding Daniel.

Daniel is honored in his young years by the Babylonians and, in his later years by the Medes. This book is a bright example of Focus, Faith, and Fearlessness. Daniel did not bend in times of trouble, he did not kneel in times of pressure, he did not yield to convenience and ease. He shows us what we hope to attain… honor before Almighty God.

Many of the prophets we’ve studied to this point in the Old Testament find fulfillment in Daniel. What a wonderful and powerful God we serve. All of this came true – and all will come to pass in Revelation. We can be confident in it.

Verse 1 *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.*Jehoiakimbecame king of Judah in 609 BC. 2 Chronicles 36:5 says *Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And he did evil in the sight of the Lord his God.* The 3rd year of the reign places us in 606 BC. While Nebuchadnezzar was besieging Judah, his father, Nabopolassar died. Secular historians tell us that Nebuchadnezzar rode across the Syrian Desert for 22 days – 420 miles to claim the kingdom.

Verse 2 *And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.* God gave Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand. Why? Because Judah and Jehoiakim were wicked. Assyria had been used to judge the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Now Babylon is being used to execute God’s judgement on the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Some of the articles of the house of God are taken and placed in the temple of Marduk, the Babylonians god. This was foretold in 2 Kings 20:16-17 - *Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord: ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the Lord.*

Verses 3-5 - *Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king’s descendants and some of the nobles, 4young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.* *5And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king’s delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.*In Isaiah 39:7, we find Isaiah prophesying to King Hezekiah - *And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.* Isaiah wrote this around 705 BC – about 100 years before all this is taking place. In fact, about 60 years before the Second Babylonian empire was established. Yet, here we are seeing fulfillment. Babylon was known for this form of humiliation and subjugation. Taking the nobles and royals from a people and forcing them to serve in the Kings palace sent a strong message to the conquered people. Nebuchadnezzar wanted the beautiful, unblemished, smartest, so they might be assimilated into Babylonian culture. Feed them Babylonian food. Make it seem an honor to be given ease and the best food. Most young people would fall right into that trap. It takes strong commitment to one’s beliefs to say no. Indoctrinate for three years so they might forget their heritage and serve before the king. It had worked with the Chaldeans, was working with the Assyrians, why not these young Jewish captives? Nebuchadnezzar hadn’t encountered Daniel… but Daniel had encountered God.

Verses 6 & 7 *Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 7To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.* What’s in a name? Notice that the first order of business is to rename these young men. This strips the identity. Daniel, meaning God is my judge, becomes Belteshazzar, meaning keeper of the treasures of Marduk or Marduk protects. Hananiah, meaning Yahweh is God, becomes Shadrach, meaning worshipper of the Moon god Aku. Mishael, meaning he who belongs to God, becomes Meshach, meaning worshipper of the goddess Shaca or Is who Aku Is. Azariah, meaning Yahweh helps, becomes Abed-nego, meaning servant of the god Nebo. Changing the names and the symbols is a way of bringing conformity and weakening worship. Give them pagan names and they will surely worship pagan gods. Nebuchadnezzar hadn’t encountered young men like these before… but these young men had encountered God.

In these first 7 verses, we see how the enemy operates. If Satan can get us to doubt the Bible, he can get us to doubt God. If Satan can take Christian symbols and demonize them, he can encourage wicked thoughts in our hearts. If Satan can make Jesus a make-believe character, great teacher, but not Son of God, he can lead everyone to Hell with nearly no resistance.

Tonight, let’s remind ourselves to stand strong in Focus, Faith, and Fearlessness. We need not scream and make a scene. We need only purpose in our hearts how we will answer that age old question: Whom will we serve? Joshua 24:15 *And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.****But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*** But we must choose carefully, staying on God’s path, steering clear of the slippery slopes of this world – remaining focused, faithful, and fearless, even as the enemy attacks.