***Daniel 1:11-21 So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12“Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king’s delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.” 14So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days. 15And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies. 16Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. 17As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. 20And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm. 21Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.***

We’re back with Daniel this week. Remember, we left this scene in verse 10 - *And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king.”* Daniel had purposed in his heart not to defile himself, even though the delicacies were inviting, even though everyone else was doing it, even though this is what the king wanted – he purposed in his heart. Verse 9 told us that God had given Daniel favor with this officer. Yet, verse 10 finds the chief of the eunuchs refusing… kind of. More or less, he left the door open – he feared for his head, but if someone else could be held responsible… well….

In verse 11, *So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.* The King James uses Melzar. There’s a long running debate among theologians whether this is an under-officer, known as a cellarman, who would have been the person actually serving meals to the prisoners and ministering to their needs… or if this is a proper name of a person. Round and round the educated go. But the important thing here is that Daniel sensed an opportunity, an open door, to go to this steward after the chief leaves the room, and he seizes that opportunity. God caused Daniel to purpose it in his heart. Daniel knew that God is a way maker. Daniel sees a way being made and runs through the door.

Many times, Christian’s take the first no as the final answer… and sometimes never ask for fear of a no. Man’s no is not God’s no. Man’s no may be God’s “Not that way, this way.”

Verses 12 & 13 *“Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king’s delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.”*Daniel proposes a test. Again, the officer in view here is a steward or under-officer ministering to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, given charge to see to their food, drink, and training routines. Ten days – remember that verse 5 tells us that this is a 3 year training. Daniel proposes 10 days. Feed us the proposed diet and then examine us. You make the final call Mr Melzar – as you see fit, so deal with your servants. 1095 days and we ask 10. Realize that the steward was taking a risk. He was under authority. His head was on the block. The easy answer was – NO! Eat what you’re given and drink what you’re given.

Verse 14 - *So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.* The steward doesn’t take the easy way. He consents. He tested 10 days. Vegetables and water. God can turn any heart to His purposes. Word may have reached the chief of the eunuchs. Others may have started asking for special treatment. The four young men may have started to look emaciated and drawn. Yet, at the risk of his own well-being, he consented (this is the same Hebrew word used when Solomon asked for an understanding and intelligent heart). He listened intelligently and agreed to try.

Verse 15 *And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies.*So, we’ve zipped forward 10 days and the steward examines the young men. The four would have been teenagers. Feed vegetables and water to 4 growing boys. Most would lose weight and look gaunt. There’s still 1085 days to correct the issue if one is found! None is found… in fact, these four appear better than all the young men eating the king’s food. The Hebrew has the suggestion of healthier and fairer in complexion. This is nothing short of God’s grace. Realize they were eating vegetables, legumes, roots, and drinking water, while their fellow young men ate meat, bread, drank wine. But the food may have been offered to idols or cooked improperly, all of which could be defiling.

Verse 16 *Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.* The kings food was meat, fish, lamb, various fowl, honey, barley, dates, wheat, lentils, peas, beans, olives, pomegranates, grapes, bread, pistachios, and various other vegetables. The steward kept the agreement and gave these four vegetables and water. Though nothing is said, I’ve no doubt that he kept his eye on their looks. 1085 more days.

Verse 17 *As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.* God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature (language and culture, philosophy) and wisdom (translating into something more like science). God gave them minds to learn and understand. But Daniel appears to excel the other three. He has understanding of visions and dreams as well. We’ll see later that he hears God’s interpretation of dreams.

Verses 18 & 19 *Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king.*When the three years had been accomplished, training complete, the king sent for the young men and the chief of the eunuchs brought them before Nebuchadnezzar. The king interviewed them… remember this was the king credited for restoring Babylon to it’s former grandeur, creating the hanging gardens of Babylon for his wife Amytis – a royal granddaughter of the Medo empire… which will figure prominently very soon on the world stage. He finds no one like them. Therefore, they are approved to serve the king.

Verse 20 *And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.* In all matters – the king spoke with them on many different subjects. Nebuchadnezzar was known to choose the people for his court very carefully and hold them to a very high standard. He was ruthless in his demands. Yet, he found these four ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers – this description should be understood as “all those who studied the natural world and the things that happened in it” – who were in all his realm – all those who served him. God honored Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael. They sought to honor Him and He honored them.

Verse 21 *Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.* Of course, King Cyrus will be critical to the return of the Jewish people to their homeland. Daniel would have been an older man by the first year of King Cyrus. The point is that God honored Daniel throughout the captivity.

Focused, Fearless, and Faithful. The journey continues. Daniel purposed in his heart a God honoring purpose. God remembers those who honor Him. Let us purpose in our hearts to be like Daniel and friends, even during the evil times we find all around us today.