***Daniel 1:1-10 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. 8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. 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.”***

We’re back in the Book of Daniel tonight. When we last studied on August 29th, we learned that Daniel was part of the royal lineage, of noble birth and that he is brought to Babylon at Nebuchadnezzar’s decree. He and other young men, the finest that Israel has to offer, are brought to Babylon to be trained and groomed to serve the king. The Book of Daniel is set around 606 BC. Judah has fallen to Babylonians. Jeremiah and Habakkuk are actively prophesying. Ezekiel is becoming active. It is a time of incredible intimacy between God and Judah. In the Book of Daniel, Daniel will prophecy the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms and the coming of the Messiah. It’s a powerful book! Not just for then, but for now – and we are so very fortunate to study it.

Our evening service has been a time of Old Testament study. In years past, I’ve had people argue with me that only the New Testament matters… that certain Prophets are worth studying and others are to be left alone. I don’t believe that. I believe that the whole Bible is to be studied – that the Old and the New knit together into a wonderful rich tapestry – telling of Jesus in every book. The Book of Daniel, like the other books, solidifies our confidence in our Saviors return.

Tonight, because it’s been a month, I want to recall our study on August 29th. It never hurts to refresh our minds. Verse 1 starts *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.*Jehoiakim’s reign started 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 his reign places us in 606 BC. Remember that, while Nebuchadnezzar was besieging Judah, his father, Nabopolassar died. Nebuchadnezzar rode across the Syrian Desert for 22 days – 420 miles to claim the kingdom. 20 miles today in a car is “close by” for us. In those days, by horse or camel, across the Syrian Desert, 200,000 sq miles of rock and sand, high plateaus and deep washes, scorching heat in the day, freezing cold at night, 20 miles per day shows a driven man.

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. Judah and Jehoiakim were wicked. Assyria was a tool used to judge the Northern Kingdom of Israel. 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. Isaiah prophesied this 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 – 100 years before it occurred. Interestingly, Isaiah spoke these words 60 years before the Second Babylonian empire was established by Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar’s father. Here we see fulfillment.

Babylon was known for this. It was intended to humiliate and subjugate conquered peoples. By taking the nobles and royals from a people and forcing them to serve in the Kings palace, Babylon sent a strong message of superiority 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 worked with the Chaldeans, worked with the Assyrians, worked with the conquered from the Northern Kingdom… why not these young Jewish captives from the Southern Kingdom of Judah? Nebuchadnezzar hadn’t encountered one such as Daniel. 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.* We talked about renaming these young men, stripping 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. 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 surely they’ll worship pagan gods. Nebuchadnezzar hadn’t encountered young men like these before… but these young men had encountered God.

Verses 8-10 *But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. 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 purposed in his heart. This describes Daniel throughout his life. He purposed to follow God and not man, worship God alone and not man. God paved the way by bringing Daniel into favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. God prepared the chief of the eunuchs for what Daniel would be asking. God was already in the resolution, while the problem has not yet presented. Oh, if only Christian’s could get our belief around this… how much less stress we would feel day to day. One day at a time is what we sing, but our minds are on things and days that may never arrive. Daniel purposed in his heart. We see the fear that the chief of the eunuchs feels, but God is at work and His will is about to be done.

Tonight, let’s remind ourselves to stand strong in Focus, Faith, and Fearlessness in these very peculiar times. As Christian’s, we need not scream and make a scene. We need only purpose in our hearts. God is at work. Are we resting in that certainty? The God that knows the end from the beginning, set the heavens and the earth in place, provided water in the desert, manna from heaven, clothes and sandals that didn’t wear out, that parted the Red Sea for His children and drowned the enemy in that same Red Sea – are we resting in Him? Daniel did. We can too. Let’s purpose in our hearts to remain focused, faithful, and fearless, even as the enemy continues to ooze from the darkness.