**The Enemy’s Plan to Overtake the Church**

**Daniel 1:3-7**

 Good morning! Will you please open your Bibles to the first chapter of the book of Daniel. Today we will be looking carefully at verses 3-7. The title of the message today is “The Enemy’s Plan to Overtake the Church.” The reason that this is the title is because we are going to look carefully at the process that the King of Babylon used to overtake the kingdom of Judah. What we will discover is that through the process of assimilation and indoctrination, the king of Babylon worked to defeat the Kingdom of Judah not just physically, but mentally as well as spiritually. This method of taking over Judah is the same way that Satan is working to take over the church today and if we do not take the time to become familiar with this method we might fall into the trap of political correctness and compromise. Let us begin today by reading chapter 1 verses 3-7: “**Then the king told 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, youths in whom there was no impairment, who were good-looking, suitable for instruction in every kind of expertise, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability to serve in the king’s court; and he ordered Ashpenaz to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king also allotted for them a daily ration from the king’s choice food and from the wine which he drank, and ordered that they be educated for three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king’s personal service. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. 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 Abednego.”**

As we begin to familiarize ourselves with the passage we first see in verse 3 that the King of Babylon had taken and brought back with him members of the royal family as well as the nobles. These people of high esteem were the cream of the crop of the Kingdom of Judah and were samples of the young who would have been the future leaders of the nation. These young men most assuredly had physical as well as mental qualities that the king found to be suitable for service in his royal court. What we are going to see next is the list of qualities that the king was looking for in these men so that they would be able to serve him well.

 The first characteristic the king looked for in these men was that they were to have no impairment, meaning that they were not to have any imperfections physically or mentally. This requirement was important to the king because the men who were going to be working for him and representing him throughout the kingdom. For someone to have the title of being in the king’s court, these men needed to look the part.

 The second aspect of these men was that they were good looking. This requirement is very similar to what we just discussed, but what we can add here is that physical appearance plays a very big part of acceptance and public reaction to the edicts of the king. When these young attractive men were seen they would not only attract the young women of the kingdom, but the people would naturally be drawn to them, and they could catch attention of the crowds.

 The third trait was that they were “suitable for instruction in every kind of expertise.”As I was reading through this passage and came across this I immediately thought of something that I used to say to my football players all the time. I used to encourage them to be coachable meaning that the best way they could show respect to either myself or the other coaches was to do what they were instructed to do. Being coachable means that the player is willing to follow instructions and desires to improve at their skills. These young men needed to be teachable, but even more than they needed to have the ability to learn all the many disciplines they would be taught. We will see as the account of Daniel continues this training will be very important when Daniel serves the next king as well as the other kingdoms.

 They were seen to be men who were “endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge.” These men had a depth of knowledge and discernment that was not common among the people. The king needed men with this kind of wisdom because they would be able to apply that wisdom to help the king rule in a wise manner. These men would eventually serve as advisors in the royal court, so having a high level of wisdom would be crucial.

 Finally, these men had the ability to serve in the king’s court. This meant that with their previous experience being royalty and members of the nobility, they would have the experience necessary to be able to serve in the royal palace. So, as we can see, these men had special qualities that made them especially adequate for the position the king desired for them.

 In order to prepare them for the service in the royal court the king provided for them an education in both the literature and the language of the nation. We see that the Scripture reminds us that the people who had taken the children of Israel into exile were the Chaldean people. If we look back to Genesis, we see that this is where Abraham started out. He was from Ur of the Chaldeans and they were a nation who worshiped many Gods, meaning they were polytheistic. This point will also play a role later in the account, especially with the fiery furnace.

 The education of these men was designed to take place over a three-year period of time, where they would be totally immersed into the culture and religious life of the Chaldeans. During this time the purpose was to indoctrinate the young men into their new country while at the same time ridding them of their previous lives and ways of doing things. Many times, this was successful because the captives would be so impressed with all the special treatment, they would be willing to give up their previous way of life and adjust to the new culture. Not only were the men educated in the culture, but they were immersed into the way that the people in the country ate and drank. Scripture records that these men were offered the same food and drinks that were provided to the king. This was quite a privilege because not too many people in the country could make the claim that they were eating from the king’s table. Even though this was a special honor, we find that Daniel and his friends choose to reject this special treatment and decide not to accept the honor since doing so would make them break the law of God. We will get into this part of the account the next time we get together.

 Continuing in this passage we see the next step in assimilating these men into the Chaldean culture. Not only were they educated and fed the same way as the Chaldeans, but now the chief eunuch will take their original names and change them so that they would have names to honor the gods of the Chaldeans. One of the most interesting aspects of life for the Israelite nation was the fact that every name had a meaning and represented something specific about the person carrying that name. One such example is in the book of Genesis after Jacob had finished wrestling with the Angel of the Lord. God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, which means “one who struggles with God.” It is interesting that Israel becomes the name of the entire nation because as we see in the pages of the Old Testament the nation is always struggling with God.

 Daniel and his three friends will all have their names changed to be assimilated into the Chaldean culture. Let’s take a moment to see their names in Hebrew, what their names meant and then what their new Babylonian name was that was given to them and what it meant in their culture. I will share with you the way this is described by Amir Tsarfati in his book titled *Discovering Daniel.* The first fact we need to point out is that the names of these young men were changed to praise the chief god of the Babylonians, whose name was Marduk. The men would now have names that would be used to praise that false gid, not the true God of Israel. Let’s first start with Daniel, whose name in Hebrew means “God is my judge.” His Babylonian name would become Belteshazzar which means “Bel protect the prince.” In that name, Daniel was now a man whose name was used to bring honor to one of the gods in Babylon known as Baal who was the god of fertility. Daniel’s friends are also going to have name changes. Their original names were Hananiah name means “Yahweh has acted graciously” and was changed to Shadrach which means “command of Aku.” Mishael’s name means “Who is like God?” was changed to Meshach meaning “Who is like Aku?” and finally Azariah meaning “Yahweh has helped” was changed to Abednego meaning “Servant of Nabu.” In each of these name changes the chief eunuch wanted to solidify the life of these men and institute them into the service of the gods of Babylon. When this was accomplished the plan of the King of Babylon to assimilate the young men into the Chaldean culture was completed.

 One final physical aspect of this transition was that all eunichs had to be castrated, which means that they would never have wives, and they would not have the ability to reproduce. This was done because the number one priority in the life of these men needed to be their service to the king and the people of Babylon. If their desires to have a family were to overtake this responsibility, then they would not be able to carry out their work efficiently. We do not want to overlook this point because when this was done to the men it drastically changed their lives and redirected what they would be doing from that point onward.

 Now that we have become familiar with this assimilation process let us return to the title of the message today which is “The Enemy’s Plan to Overtake the Church.” What we will be discussing as we conclude the message today is the way in which the enemy of the church (Satan) has been attacking the church and what methods he is using to assimilate the people of God into the secular culture of the modern age. Just like King Nebuchadnezzar, Satan not only wants to infiltrate the Church of Jesus Christ, but he wants total assimilation of every follower of Chrit so that each of them will follow him to his punishment rather than spend eternity in the presence of God. We have an enemy that will stop at nothing to take as many with him to hell as he can when God finally throws him into the lake of fire after the last judgment. What we, the members of the church, need to do today is guard our hearts and our minds against these attacks and use the talents and abilities we must grow God’s kingdom so that the people Satan is trying to deceive do not fall into the trap of being misled into teachings that are not in line with God’s Word. As we discuss this today let us look at a couple of ways that Satan is working to indoctrinate people today into lifestyles that are not acceptable to the Lord.

 In our passage today we see that the first step used by the king of Babylon to take over the people of Judah and assimilate them to his culture was that he took the brightest minds he could find and force them to transition into his culture. We see this in the culture today because many of the brightest minds and best-looking people who look on the outside like sheep are infiltrating the church and teaching a false gospel. The number one most common false gospel message coming from those who look good and have bright intellects is the prosperity gospel, which teaches that for someone to receive the blessings of God that person must show faith not in how they live in obedience to the Word, but in how much money they invest in the work of the kingdom. In Sunday School a couple of weeks ago we were discussing how some preachers like to use their financial prosperity to show off and make others desire to be like them. Rather than teach that salvation comes from Jesus Christ alone and that to be delivered from sin a person must repent of sin, change their way of life, place trust in Christ alone and live as best as they able in obedience to Christ, these preachers focus on material prosperity and things that will not last. We are warned several times in Scripture that Satan uses these types of teachers to deceive many and lead them away from the one and only true God. The Apostle Paul in his first letter to Timothy **“ Just as I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, to remain on at Ephesus so that you would instruct certain people not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to useless speculation rather than advance the plan of God, which is by faith, so I urge you now. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith. Some people have strayed from these things and have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (1 Timothy 1:3-7).** Paul is making clear that the true gospel teaches love from a pure heart, not selfish ambition that results in empty talk, which does no good for the listener and becomes useless speculation. Not only does Satan use those who are attractive and seemingly wise to deceive others, but his target is to go after those who have influence who can be used to lead others astray. We cannot be misguided or distracted by those who may look the part but are teaching doctrines that are against the true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

 The second way the king worked to indoctrinate these young men was by teaching them the literature and language of Chaldeans as well as having them enjoy the foods and wine of the nation. By doing this the hope was that these men would forget their former lives and become totally devoted in service to him. Satan also wants to use the wisdom of this age in literature and the new ways of thinking to takeover our minds so that we will begin to questions God’s Word and begin replacing it with the new secular humanism that permeates our culture. Rather than becoming indoctrinated with these new doctrines we need to hold on to our faith and wait patiently for the return of the Lord. Once again, the Apostle Paul speaks to this struggle in 1 Timothy. Hear these words **“ If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a sick craving for controversial questions and disputes about words, from which come envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between people of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (6:3-5).** Paul is reminding Timothy that those who reject the truth of God do so because of their desire for selfish gain. Those who remain faithful to God’s Word are seeking an eternal reward for not only themselves, but for others who so badly need to know the truth. Those who seek godliness know that their lives will be blessed, and they will receive a reward that is much greater than anything this world may offer.

 I would like to make one final comment regarding the changing of names. Even though we are sometimes labeled as Christian nationalists or are given other derogatory names we should not become discouraged. Remember the words of Jesus when He told the disciples that they would suffer for the kingdom and that suffering would lead to eternal life. Even if the whole world hates us for loving the Lord let us cling to each other because this world is not the final goal for those who love the Lord. We will be change and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes on that day we join Him in paradise. Next week will see how Daniel and his friends reman faithful to God through the hardships, and we will learn that when God’s people work for the growth if His kingdom amazing things will happen for those who witness that bold stand.

Ask if there are any questions or comments regarding the message. Prayer.