

**Theme:** Faith in Exile

**Title:** The Enemy's Ploy – Daniel 1:1-21

**Aim:** Reveal Satan's ploy against believers: rename, tame & claim us.

**Intro:** Well, the NFL playoffs are in full swing (alas, Patriots not in it). Last weekend – beginning of playoffs w/wildcard games; this weekend offers what's called the divisional series, leading to the AFC & NFC championships, leading to the Superbowl. For each game, each team's coaches devise what they hope will be a successful gameplan, designed to utilize their team's strengths & exploit the other team's weaknesses. Each game is sort of like a giant chess match, w/each coach & team trying to outthink & physically overmatch the opposition. They're only playing a game, but it's like they are at war, w/millions of dollars at stake. On a much, much grander scale, we who are Christians are in a real war, engaged in spiritual battle for the faith & in reality our very lives. It's always good in war as in football to know one's opponent & his battle plan, in order to be prepared to defend & launch a counter offensive. So, we must know our enemy. Spoiler alert: It's not the world. This world is not our home, but neither is it our enemy. As Paul wrote in Eph.6:12, "***We do not wrestle against flesh & blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.***" Theme: Faith in exile. Today as we look at the example of Daniel we will learn what our enemies' game/battle plan is – Daniel 1:1-21 [READ]. Once again we find the people of Judah in exile in Babylon. They rebelled against God & He sent them into exile. Nebuchadnezzar was God's instrument, His puppet, really, used to punish Judah & turn them back to Him. They would be there in exile for 70 years, during which they were to settle down, multiply & even seek the welfare of the people/place where they were. They were not to be deceived by false prophets not sent from God, but to seek God w/all their hearts, being assured they would find Him & be restored to Him. Daniel was a young man when he was deported to Babylon along w/other choice youths & leaders in 605 BC. Nebuchadnezzar indeed had a plan to squelch any

opposition: assimilate the youth. He would make them Babylonians. That's exactly Satan's ploy against the Church & those who would become part of the Church – he wants to make us children of the world. Nebuchadnezzar instructed his chief eunuch – Ashpenaz – to select a number of the youth of Judah who had been taken captive & prepare them to enter his service at the end of 3 years. According to Chris Hodges, in his book The Daniel Dilemma, Ashpenaz was to do 3 things with these selected youth, among whom were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael & Azariah: rename them, tame them & claim them, which is what Satan wants to do with us. I) **Rename** – This certainly happened w/all those taken captive, but we're given details about 4 young men (probably between 13 & 17 yrs). To Daniel, the name Belteshazzar was given. Daniel means "God is my judge;" Belteshazzar means "Bel's prince" (Bel being a Babylonian god). Hananiah means "beloved by the Lord;" Shadrach means "illuminated by the Sun-god." Mishael means "who is as God;" Meshach means "who is like Shach" (not O'neal, but Babylonian goddess). Azariah means "The Lord is my help;" Abednego means "servant of Nego" (another Babylonian god). This renaming of the Hebrew youth was in essence taking away their Jewish identity & identity w/God & instead identifying them w/Babylon & its gods. Satan would also seek to take away our identity w/Jesus Christ. There are all kinds of labels put on people today – some we take upon ourselves, others are thrust upon us. Democrat/Republican, liberal/conservative, pro-abortion/pro-life, etc. Then there are fairly recent pronoun designations – what's your pronoun (& there are many to choose from)? It's all a ploy to steal our identity, & give us new identities aligned w/the world. Pray for our children who are having labels thrust upon them. When we come to faith in Christ, we are identified w/Him – Christian means "Christ-follower." In Christ we are children of God, justified, forgiven, accepted by God. The father of lies, Satan, would seek to alter our identity in Christ, put other labels on us: hypocrite, hate monger, failure, etc. He would identify us w/our sin: idolater, adulterer, gossip, cheat, alcoholic, liar, thief, etc. But if you are in Christ, that's not who

you are anymore. You have been brought out of that & His righteousness counts for you. ***“And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, & by the Spirit of our God”*** (I Cor. 6:11). By God’s enabling, we are to walk in our newness, having put off the old man. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael & Azariah knew who they were. We need to remember who we are & not believe the lies of Satan/the world.

II) **Tame**. All these Hebrew youth were to be taught/trained for 3 years. Since many of them were from Jewish nobility, they were certainly taught the word of God & ways of God by Rabbis in their homeland. They spoke Hebrew. They knew the Law of Moses. Now they were to be taught the literature & language of the Babylonians. That literature surely spoke of the Babylonian gods & ways. That language praised those gods. In essence, they wanted these youth to unlearn what they had been taught & learn everything Babylonian. If the young men embraced that so-called truth, in reality lies, that would prevent rebellion. If they all thought alike, it would be better for all, according to their captors. That’s Satan’s ploy for us today. “Don’t study the word of God, that will make you different. Just think like the rest of the world.” Hodges, in The Daniel Dilemma points out that what we (believers) hold true will be questioned” because much of the world believes there are no moral absolutes. “If it feels good, do it! What is esteemed is pluralism, relativism, tolerance, diversity – w/out critical reflection of the implications.” What is that doing to our children? To us? Hodges wrote that “we must have a firm grasp of the foundation of our faith. Worldview requires truth & Scripture is the ultimate truth. [Sadly] most Christians have a non-Christian worldview, but if we use the world’s worldview, it will mess up our lives here & now.” It certainly won’t be following Christ. Quite a dilemma! We’re called to settle down in this world & multiply while remembering this world is not our home. We’re not to simply blend in, but stand out as those who belong to God & name the name of Jesus. In the world but not of the world. The world/Satan wants to tame us, assimilate us, but as we follow Christ & know

who we are, the world can't press us into its mold. III) **Claim**. These Hebrew youth were to be fed from the king's table, eating & drinking the very food & drink Nebuchadnezzar ate & drank. David Gudzik wrote that "the king's delicacies were intended to be a special honor, to win over these young men." "It's not so bad in Babylon! I can get used to this life!" I imagine it was pretty fine fare, probably better than they had ever eaten. It was also intended to make them healthy & strong. The problem was that most likely all of it was 1<sup>st</sup> sacrificed to Babylon's idols/gods. It certainly would not have been kosher. Much of it would have been considered unclean by Jewish standards. Also, in that day/time, as it is today, to dine w/someone meant fellowshiping w/them, entering into their way of life. In much the same way, Satan's ploy is to feed us what the world has to offer, to get us to partake, become involved w/the things of the world, to defile us & stunt our growth in Christ & make us ineffective in His work. We need to follow Daniel's example in vs8 [READ]. To resolve is to make up one's mind. Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself w/the king's food & drink. To defile is to pollute. Daniel didn't protest or file a complaint. He didn't make a big deal of it publicly. He simply appealed to the chief of the eunuchs – Ashpenaz – asking him to allow him not to eat/drink what was being offered. He made it clear that it wasn't just a whim but he had a spiritual basis for his request. He believed eating/drinking the king's fare would defile him. Note that God gave Daniel favor in the sight of Ashpenaz. He understood the request & wanted to do it for Daniel (& the other 3), but what if the king found out? What if they were in bad shape when presented before the king? Not only would it affect them but also him. Daniel asked for a 10-day trial. "Feed us vegetables & water & see how we're doing after 10 days." Those in charge agreed & at the end of the trial period, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael & Azariah were in better shape than all the others, so they were given vegetables & water throughout the 3-year period. Like Daniel, we need to make up our minds ahead of time, before the test/trial comes, having resolve not to be defiled. Hodges wrote that "convictions are all about choices we

make before we're tested. Faith is our ability (by God's enabling) to act on our convictions when we're tested (& we will be tested)." We must decide to follow Jesus every step of our lives & then do it! After the 3 yrs were up, all of the young Hebrew men were brought before Nebuchadnezzar so he could speak w/them & question them. Daniel, Hananiah, Misael & Azariah were the cream of the crop! In every detail they were 10 times better than the rest. They all entered into the king's service. Daniel eventually became 2<sup>nd</sup> in command over all the land. Satan's ploy is to squeeze you into his mold. Culture wants to claim you & tame you & rename you. You don't have to let it. Be encouraged in the Lord. Be God's man/woman/child in this world we're just passing through. Of course, it takes faith – faith in exile.