

## Identity and the Spirit of the Age Daniel 1:1-21

### Introduction

Let me state two very important truths that will help you understand the book of Daniel a little better, and make a little more sense of what is happening around you. The Bible claims from the very beginning in its first chapter that you are a human being who is made in the image of God. The Bible also states from the very beginning in Genesis 3 that there is an enemy who absolutely abhors you because you bear the image of the God of all creation.

Because you bear the image of the God of the Bible, you are not a member of the animal kingdom; you are above the animal kingdom. This is true for all human beings even if they do not act like it. The Bible states in Genesis 1:27, “**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**” Not only do you rank above the animal kingdom, but we as human beings have been given the mission and responsibility to manage what God created on earth. In the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve a mission that required only two things: 1) Fill the earth with more human beings who worship him, and 2) care and manage everything that God created.

We are introduced to our enemy in the third chapter of Genesis who was in the form of a serpent. The first thing he successfully did when he encountered Adam and Eve was to get them to question two things: 1) The serpent got Adam and Eve to question the legitimacy of the Word of God, and 2) the serpent got Adam and Eve to question the goodness of God in relationship to human beings and the rest of creation.

What we learn of the serpent is that his alias is also Satan. What Adam and Eve did not know was that Satan hates good and loves evil and has command over the thousands of demons who operate under him. He despises God and His creation with deep hatred. The Bible points to him as the originator of evil, suffering, and sin. Satan was not created evil, for his original name is Lucifer which means “Morning Star” and was created to serve as the highest-ranking angel in heaven. He chose to be evil, and the Bible states that, “**He was guilty of sinning from the beginning**” (1 John 3:8).

Satan also is known by other names such as Lucifer, the Adversary (1 Peter 5:8), the Beast (Rev. 14:9-10), the Deceiver (Rev. 12:9), the Devil (1 John 3:8), the Dragon (Rev. 12:9), the Enemy (Matt. 13:39), and the Evil One (John 17:15). There are other names for Lucifer, but the one that embodies all of his names, is found in 1 Peter 5:8, “**Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**” That someone he is seeking to devour is you and anyone else who bears the image of the God he hates.

What you also need to know is that Satan is not permitted to do anything he wants, for he is given some freedom that God will ultimately use to accomplish his redemptive purposes. What we also learn from the beginning of the Bible is that Satan will one day be destroyed. We are told that Jesus will be responsible for crushing him (Gen. 3:15), which includes a day when Jesus will have him bound and imprisoned for 1000 years (Rev. 20:1-3) and then will ultimately throw him into place called the Lake of Fire where we are promised Satan will, “...**be tormented day and night forever and ever**” (Rev. 20:7-10).

One of the titles that is given to Satan is found in Ephesians 2:1-2. We are told that we, who follow Jesus now, once followed him blindly like the rest of the world continues to do today: “**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—**” (Ephesians 2:1-2). As the prince of the power of the air, Satan is on a leash that God holds—a long leash—but a leash, nonetheless.

While on God’s leash, Satan is permitted to move and work in the affairs of humans and nations while at the same time, God is using Satan to ultimately accomplish his purposes. However, what is clear is that there is a spiritual realm where the forces of good are pitted against the forces of evil. God is at work to restore what was lost in the Garden while Satan continues to make every effort to further pervert what God called good by offering cheap counterfeits that only lead people further away from God. Satan is still asking the same questions: “Did God really say...?” and “Is God really good?” One such counterfeit is Babylon.

### **Babylon is the Spirit of the Age**

Babylon, as a dynasty and empire existed for roughly 300 years. It was both wealthy and powerful during its lifetime. In the Bible, Babylon is not just an empire God used to discipline the southern nation known as Judah; the city of Babylon also symbolizes humanity’s ambition to dethrone God; which was the sin that Adam and Eve were tempted by in the Garden.

In Genesis 11, a group of people came together to build a tower to heaven to make a name for themselves; the tower and place were named Babel. From Babel we get the name Babylon. In Revelation 17, Babylon is referred to as “The Great Prostitute” with whom, “**the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk**” (v. 2). Babylon is likened to a woman who is later contrasted with the Bride of Christ (the Church):

**I (John) saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.**  
(Revelation 17:3-6)

In contrast to Babylon, the Bride of Christ is described as being clothed in bright, pure white fine linen, and unlike the great prostitute, all of heaven will one day sing a song to celebrate the Church's marriage to Jesus:

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*" (Revelation 19:6–8)

Babylon represents the spirit of the age that the world loves, while the Church represents the people of God who love him above all things. Babylon is a cheap counterfeit of what only God can provide through a personal relationship with himself through Jesus. When we come to Daniel 1, we see both physical Babylon and spiritual Babylon at work. Unlike his father Josiah, Jehoiakim was drunk with the spirit of Babylon; in Jeremiah 36, we learn that after the prophet Jeremiah wrote down what God warned was about to happen to Judah, that the king burned the word of God.

We also learn of how God used the evil motives of the empire of Babylon to accomplish his purpose in disciplining his wayward nation in Judah. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar besiege the Jerusalem, but he also robbed the temple by taking the sacred vessels for his own personal collection. King Nebuchadnezzar not only took the sacred vessels, but he also took certain Hebrew people who met five qualifications: 1) they had to be both of the royal family and nobility, 2) they had to be young, 3) they had to be without blemish, 4) they had to be smart, and 5) they had to be capable of standing in the king's palace (see vv. 3-4). In other words, the king took what belonged to God to make a name for himself while the spirit of Babylon was at work through him to create a counterfeit of the kingdom of God.

While Nebuchadnezzar was only doing what he did to other nations and people groups he conquered, I believe the spirit of Babylon was working through him to destroy the only tribe the promised Messiah would come through—the tribe of Judah—which was the tribe the royal family belonged.

### **Moral and Spiritual Assimilation is the Goal of Babylon**

After the grueling journey to Babylon, those who met the king's five qualifications and who survived the journey to Babylon were then castrated and made eunuchs. We are not told specifically that this is what happened to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but because they were prepared to serve as slaves to the king, they were most likely castrated like everyone else would have been. So, the first phase in assimilating the four men was the attempt to alter their sexual identity and any hope of marriage and children.

The second phase in assimilating Daniel and his three friends into the Babylonian culture was that they were given names linked with Babylonian gods in place of the names their parents gave them that were linked to the God they grew up worshiping. Daniel, whose name means "God is my judge" was given the name, Beltshazzar, which means: "Bel (short for Marduk) protects." Bel was the chief god of Babylon and worshiped as the god of order and destiny. Hananiah,

whose name means, “Yahweh is gracious” was renamed Shadrach, which means: “command of Aku (the Babylonian moon god and the patron god of the art of writing and vegetation). Mishael, whose name means “who is what God is” was renamed Meshach, which means: “Who is like Aku (the moon god). Azariah, whose name means “Yahweh is a helper” was renamed Abednego, which means: “servant of the shining one (Nabu).

The third phase in assimilating Daniel and his friends into the Babylonian culture was the mandatory Babylonian diet that was not kosher. Now, why is this significant? It is significant because worship for the Hebrew men and women who loved God and wanted to obey him was more than a religious experience; worship for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah was the culture of their life. The Hebrew dietary laws were not just about eating foods that were healthier or better for those living in the Middle East, it was a reminder that they were a people called by God to be holy like God. Nebuchadnezzar’s diet plan was meant to cause Daniel and his friends to become dependent on the king as their new master and to identify with him instead of Yahweh.

The fourth and final phase in the Babylonian assimilating process was to enter Daniel and his friends into a three-year intense education program that would end with the men knowing the language of their new home as well as myths, legends, and gods of the Babylonians to take the place of word of God as the source of their wisdom and worldview.

The only thing that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah stood against regarding Babylon’s assimilation program was the king’s diet plan. There were some things that were completely out of their control, for starters, castration was forced upon the men; it was not something they chose but it was also not something that affected their identity as men who bore the image of God. The second thing they had no control over was the names the Babylonians chose to call them; just because the king gave them new names, it did not change the fact that they were known by God. The third thing they had no control over was the educational system they were forced into; just because they were required to learn the language and the literature of the Babylonians, did not require them to forget God or to recall his Word from their Bible (The Old Testament).

Understand this: The goal of Babylon is always a moral and spiritual assimilation that distances you and alienates further from God. This is the spirit of the age that is at work in every culture, people group, and nation.

### **God’s People are Called into Babylon But Not of Babylon**

To eat the king’s diet would require the men to violate their conscience and the dietary laws in the Old Testament prescribed by God. To go against their conscience and to compromise their faith by eating things they were not supposed to eat would have been sin, and they could not do it in good conscience. This is the only thing in the Babylonian assimilation process that was a legitimate threat to their faith and identity as Yahweh worshipers. So what did Daniel and his friends do? For starters, they understood that they had a God-sized problem that only God could solve and trusted that God was big enough to work and move through their circumstances that were out of their control. Notice that Daniel did not make any demands, but instead charitably and graciously appealed to the chief of the eunuchs: **“Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ‘Test**

**your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see”** (Daniel 1:11–13).

Just so you know, the king's diet was not meant to lower a person's BMI (Body Mass Index), which is the way one measures body fat based on their height and weight. The king's diet was meant to make those who ate it fatter. Daniel's diet had nothing to do with getting fit, but it did have everything to do with honoring God. Daniel and his friends believed that by honoring God by the food they ate, their diet would have a similar affect that eating pork, shrimp cocktail, and drinking wine daily would have on them physically. So what happened? After ten days, we are told that, **“it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food”** (v. 15). The NIV translates verse 15 by stating that Daniel and his friends, **“looked healthier and better nourished.”** The Hebrew word for “better nourished” is *bā-rî* which literally means “fat.” At the end of the 10 days, Daniel and his friends were fatter than everyone else. The point of Daniel 15 is not that they four youths each had sixpack abs at the end of the 10 days, but that the wisdom of the age is foolishness compared to the wisdom of God and the power of Babylon is weakness compared to the power of the living God.

When the chief eunuch saw the results of Daniel's menu choice, he **“took away their food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.”** But that is not all! During their three year Babylonian indoctrination process, they kept their eyes on Yahweh and their minds set on his Word, the result was that God, **“gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams”** (v. 17). So when the four young men were presented to Nebuchadnezzar, we learn that he was not only impressed with them, but promoted them: **“And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom”** (Daniel 1:19–20).

Why did the king promote Daniel and his friends, because even though the goal of Babylon is demonic and anti-Christian, God has called his people to be salt in a rotten world and light in the darkest of places for the purpose of accomplishing his redemptive purposes.

### **Conclusion**

Listen, the spirit of Babylon wants to assimilate you morally and spiritually into an identity that is contrary to the one God has assigned to you since conception! You are a human being born in the image of the living God, and although you were born into sin, God has provided a way for you to be reconciled to him through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Because you are a human being who bears the image of God, the spirit of Babylon wants you to question the word of God and the goodness of God for the purpose of further alienating you from the one being through whom you were made and meant to thrive. The push to devalue a human life to a body and not a person, the belief that you can chose your sexual identity based on your feelings over your biology, the idea that a person's worth is determined by skin color or

ethnicity, and the hope that politics will fix the world's problems instead of the one person who can, Jesus Christ - is all from the spirit of Babylon!

The Spirit of Babylon is a counterfeit of only what God can give you and offers you through the true King of kings and Lord of lords: His name is Jesus Christ!