

Separation from God and Assimilation into Darkness

Imagine for a moment that, in this country, the church that we've come to know and love was taken from us. Imagine that in our lives as Christians, week in and week out, there's no worship, no preaching, no sacraments, no public prayers and no fellowship with God's people.

In this scenario, a pagan government has assured us that they will protect us and provide for all our needs, but we must listen to and depend on them. Of course, we know that we have promises that, ultimately, Christ will build his church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against her (Matthew 16:18); we know that God has promised his ultimate protection of the church according to his perfect will (Romans 8:28). And yet, if what we're imagining ever came true in our country, how much more quickly might the culture encroach into our lives than it's doing now?

This scenario that I'm describing became very real for the children of Judah generally and for Daniel and his three friends particularly. As we come back to Daniel 1 today, we're going to hear some of what Daniel and his three friends have in store for them. What choices will they face in a hostile, pagan land in which they've been taken away from the proper worship of God in the temple and taken captive by a foreign government?

My previous article was entitled "School Daze." Daze is a word that can mean to "dazzle" or "impress." To be "dazzled" by the wrong things or the wrong people can cause confusion, disorientation and a loss of clear vision. An illustration of this would be for someone to be dazzled by the world's views and the world's trinkets in such a way that they take their eyes off of God — for a long period of time or even in the moment.

We heard last time that there are four young men from Judah who are getting ready to be taken through the school of Babylon. This section of the narrative gives us some helpful clues as to how Satan works to distract us, draw us away from God and lead us into places of darkness. This happens when we become separated from the local, visible church.

Separation

This first part of the wicked king's plans takes us back to the initial capture of Judah.

If we look at verses 3-4, we see that Nebuchadnezzar wants to bring in some young men who, he believes, will eventually be a benefit to his wicked plan for the complete takeover of all of Judah. He wants the hearts and minds of the people of Judah, not merely their bodies.

The idea is that these young men — once they've been trained in the ways of Babylon — would be "competent to stand in the king's palace." These young, good-looking, intelligent men would help with the king's long-range plan. Therefore, to make this work, he needs to separate them from all they've known of their lives up to this point, including separation from their family, their friends and their worship of God in the now-destroyed temple.

This is an analogy of what it's like, even in the 21st century, to be separated from the local, visible church.

How sad it is that Christians often don't recognize that it's Satan's desire to take them away from the church. He wants to make them confused, discouraged and discontented with anything and everything, including the pastor and the leadership. They can become unhappy with the preaching and teaching of the word and see no real need for the sacraments and corporate prayer. Daniel and his three friends are separated from the temple and the worship of God, and this is just the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's wicked plan which also includes assimilation.

Assimilation

The word "assimilation" can be either positive or negative, depending on the context. For example, in a positive way, we want to try to assimilate people into the church to help them to become new members. We want them to get acquainted with what we believe and teach and we want to help them find a place to use their gifts and find fellowship. But, in the context of Daniel and his three friends, assimilation is clearly negative.

King Nebuchadnezzar is attempting to absorb these young Hebrew men into the cultural traditions and darkness of Babylon. We see this assimilation initially in Verse 4: "... to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans." In this case, assimilation includes the process of indoctrination. If these men are to assist the king as he intends, they will have to become Babylonians.

By God's grace, may Christian parents, as well as our children and grandchildren, stay close to Christ's church — where we can be blessed in many ways, including being constantly nourished on the true teaching of the scriptures.

We don't want to become separated from the word of God or assimilated into any area of darkness that could potentially draw us away from our Lord Jesus Christ and the church he died for.