

To the Saints of God at Topeka, Kansas

April 16, 2017

Spiritual Courage/Bravery and Spiritual Cowardice

“We are not careful to answer thee in this matter.” - 3 Hebrew Children

Part 1

The topic for today's sermon and several more from me (just in the normal rotation) is spiritual courage/bravery and cowardice and an exposition of Daniel 3. Daniel 3 is about God and the faith of the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. The Bible is full of amazing works of faith and spiritual courage/bravery and this one is near the top of my “favorites” list. But, if you read too fast through it, you miss a lot of the context, which is what makes it so incredible. Today, I will just give you some context about these topics. This also builds on Elder Sam's sermon from a few weeks ago.

One of the things that is so admirable about these three young men in Daniel 3 is their great faithfulness. Under great stress they refused to cave-in, negotiate, or capitulate with the king regarding the standards of God. Mat. 25:23 *His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; **thou hast been faithful over a few things**, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.* Beloved, **the test is to be faithful over a few things!** This human experience is a great test. The Lord is proving us. Exodus 16:4 *Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.* If you are a brave and faithful steward over a few things now, God will make you a ruler over many important things in the next life. The exchange is not fair or equitable, it is one-sided!

In addition to being faithful to the standards of God we must not be ashamed of Christ or shorten the test. You cannot “cut that knot” (no cheating). You may not “jump over the wall” or take a shortcut. You must enter in at the strait and narrow gate. Mt 7:14 ***Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*** Lu 13:24 ***Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.***

You must be willing to suffer for His name to the extent that the world will hate you. This is actual suffering and actual hatred here and now. This is not metaphorical language. Php 1:29 *For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.* Lu 6:22 ***Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.*** Mat. 10:22 ***And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. 23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. 24 The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.***

Beloved, the servant is not above his lord. Christ suffered persecution and the Elect of God will too. That is what good looks like. This country is full of lukewarm, so-called “Christians” no one has ever heard of. They have not suffered anything for their service to Christ. They have no suffering related to their religious affiliation. In fact, most are loved by all, not hated and persecuted. To use a sports analogy, which even Paul uses as you will see, they are not even on the playing field. They are not even sitting on the bench, they didn’t make it on the bus to the game, and in fact, they didn’t even sign up to play. They just want to talk about it from a distance and not dirty their hands with the hard work of suffering and being hated for Christ. There is a reason for this – they are doing it all wrong. They are unprofitable servants. They have buried their treasure in the dirt, instead of working to increase it.

The elect of God must come out of great tribulation. Re 7:14 *And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they **which came out of great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.* Again, this is not metaphorical, fluffy, and flowery language. We have to pass the test, we have to come out of great tribulation and in the midst of that have great faithfulness in God to please Him. Heb 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that **diligently seek him**.* You must diligently (careful, constant, energetic and persistent work or effort) seek Christ.

These three souls did all of these things. They were faithful through it all. They never forgot who they were, what they were about, and never gave up the moral high ground. When people leave from this church, they typically give various specious reasons for leaving, but nearly the first thing they all do is to give up God’s moral high ground. They immediately start committing fornication, cutting their hair, and condoning great sin like sodomy and adultery, murder and the like. They start celebrating christmas and easter and all of the other pagan holidays and they forget God in everything they say and do. They become worldly in everything. Beloved, we must resist the devil and be strong in Christ.

2 Tim 2:1 *Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus (spiritual strength and spiritual courage and bravery).*

2 *And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

3 *Thou therefore **endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.***

4 *No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

5 *And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.*

Young and old alike, we are going to be tried. Our faith is going to be tested and proved in sometimes extreme ways like these three young men. We must be strong in the grace of Christ Jesus, we must be faithful men and women. We must have faith to look beyond the affairs of this life and see that the next life is what is at stake. We must **endure hardness** as a soldier of Christ and maintain the standards of God under stress and duress – that is a part of the test. And, we must not become entangled with the affairs of this life. The test is real and it is now.

We must strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The expositors agree that Paul is talking about the Olympic games here. So in this one letter to Timothy he mixes metaphors of war and sporting games – so I am in good company when I do this! The Olympics started in Greece, where Paul spent a lot of time so he references them several times in his writings. These are the same Olympic games that we have. *Yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully...* He that is crowned, that is, he that wins the competition in the Olympic games must do so lawfully and comply with all of the rules or he does not win. There is no jumping the wall and sneaking into heaven. In the Olympic games last summer the U.S. men’s 4x100 relay team was disqualified for two infractions. The baton change was outside the official area for the exchange and one of the runners stepped out of the lane. They lost the bronze medal for that. We must follow the rules set by God. Gill - *No man that calls himself a Christian, minister, or any other, can expect the crown of life, the prize of the high calling of God, except he runs the race set before him, in the right way; looking to Christ, the mark, pressing through all difficulties, towards the prize, and holds on and out unto the end.*

The rules count! If you are a true partaker of the Elect of God you are going to endure hardness, great tribulation, be hated and have great tests of faith and you may be killed for Christ. It is part of the equation. Several years ago we wrote every Primitive Baptist church in the United States. We gathered a list of about 400 of these churches and sent them a long letter with a lot of scripture and colorful pictures, begging them to join us and get in the game and publically put themselves on the line and preach the commandments of God loudly and boldly. Ac 4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.* Php 1:20 *According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.* God’s elect are bold in Christ and God, just like the three Hebrew children.

We begged those Primitive Baptist churches to suffer for the things of God and take a public stand against sodomy, fornication, adultery, murder, idolatry and so forth. We got more than 100 letters back, as bad addresses (these were listed on the Internet). And as for the rest, we got zero responses. Do not tell me that sitting off in some corner as a “professor” of these blessed things of God, while great sin goes on all around you is preaching, or enduring hardness, or having the world hate you – it is just being ashamed of Christ – it is spiritual-cowardice! They will not be rewarded for that lazy effort. Mat. 7:22 *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

2 Tim 4:1 ***I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*** (Paul is saying - When you see some awful sin going on like in Ephesus in Acts 19, when the whole city and region were worshipping Diana of the Ephesians as a God at a huge temple, so much that the silversmiths had a trade just building idols to her - you do something about it. You say that is idol worship, and you go straight away and preach bold and loud about it and *stir up the whole city... the whole city was filled with confusion* – those people

were so mad at Paul's preaching they cried "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*" for two hours in a flash mob riot! He put the city in an uproar. You go and preach about it – you do not slink back to some hole in Kentucky or Georgia and have a prayer service or write an article in a little Primitive Baptist newspaper that 10 people read. That is spiritual cowardice. **3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.** (This is not optional for God's elect) **6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:**

Beloved, we must retain God's moral high ground (like these three young men) to please him that called us. Let me continue Paul's analogy of this spiritual fight being a war and enduring hardness faithfully as a good soldier. The Battle of Gettysburg was fought July 1-3, 1863. It was the turning point of the Civil War. It was fought in Pennsylvania. That is North country. The armies met somewhat by accident and the way the battle laid out, the terrain favored the north, they were on higher ground. There were 90,000 for the Union or the North and 75,000 troops for the South (under the command of Robert E. Lee). You might say, if you are for the South, why fight there if the terrain is against you? The reason, is that they were far from their supply lines and their men were starving. In short, they had no choice. The battle started when a Southern brigade was searching for badly needed shoes (that means they were pillaging the folk of Gettysburg looking for supplies) when they ran into Union Cavalry.

As the armies were getting into position Lt. Col. Joshua Chamberlin of the Union army was on the extreme left of the Union line and noticed that a hill called Little Round Top, which was close to Union lines was unoccupied. He immediately grabbed his men and they ran to secure it. He reached it just in time because Confederate General John Hood was trying to take the hill. Had the Confederates taken Little Round Top they could have fired down onto the Union army from a superior position and outflank them (that is to come around back of their position so the Union army would be fighting in front of and behind them). The battle may have come out much differently if Chamberlin and his men had not held that high ground. In a battle of 165,000 troops and a total of 44,000 casualties (22,000 on each side), who occupies the high ground of Little Round Top is a significant factor in determining who wins this major battle. Chamberlin and his men responded to many assaults from the Confederates to take the hill because the Confederates recognized its strategic advantage. Chamberlin and his men ran out of ammunition and executed a bayonet charge on the Confederates to finally repel them. That is enduring hardness. Chamberlin won the Medal of Honor for that. We cannot give up the moral high ground, we cannot negotiate on idol worship, adultery, fornication, sodomy, gender identity, and the rest even while this generation openly engages in great sin against God and for Satan. Today is so-called easter and we have been preaching against it for a long time as blatant idolatry. We must strive lawfully, we must comply with and hold the standards of God under great duress even if it means our death. It IS a hill to die on.

Ac 15:26 *Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In Judges 4 Israel was in bondage to Jabin the King of Canaan. The captain of Jabin's army was Sisera and he mightily opposed Israel for 20 years with 900 chariots of iron. Judges 5:17 (The Song of Deborah) *Gilead abode beyond Jordan: (they stayed home) and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore (beaches), and abode in his breaches. 18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field (Mt. Tabor). (What we do matters in this life and the life to come). 19 The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo (the other kings of Canaan came out to back up Jabin - Israel is outmanned and out "gunned"- In addition to Sisera's 900 chariots of iron, Israel is now dealing with a much larger army of men and supplies. These kings of Canaan took no gain of money. (They did not even have to be retained by Jabin for money – like mercenaries, they just came out voluntarily to kill Israel because they wanted to). 20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.* Zebulun and Naphtali fought for God when they could have run from the fight. That is physical and spiritual courage/bravery. It is like Goliath telling David he is going to kill him and feed his flesh to the birds and the beasts of the field and instead of being intimidated, David runs to Goliath, having faith that God will deliver Goliath into his hand. It is physical and spiritual courage/bravery. This is what we are dealing with concerning these three young Hebrew men.

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Daniel 3:1 *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. 2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. 3 Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, 5 That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: 6 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 7 Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. 8 Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. 9 They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. 10 Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: 11 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. 13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of*

the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well (I just want to make sure you completely understand the rules): but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (This is the Babylonian version of “stick it.” This is unheard of.) 19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. 20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. 25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. 27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. 28 ¶ Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. 29 Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon.

Beloved, it is a privilege to talk to you about the account of Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego). Their faith and fear of God is incredible. Mt 10:28 *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Ever since I was little I heard about the story of the “three Hebrew children.” But the spirituality of the story was completely missed. Let me set the stage for this amazing piece of scripture. Judah and Jerusalem (the Southern Kingdom) fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC.

Daniel 1:1 *In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. 3 And the king (Nebuchadnezzar - during the first siege) spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his (Nebuchadnezzar's) eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; 4 Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace (Nebuchadnezzar's palace (Babylon), and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. (This is a particularly vicious practice - this is how you stamp out an insurgency – these children will not learn and continue with their own culture and language but they will be forced to take on the victor's culture). 5 And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. 6 Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 7 Unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names: for he gave unto Daniel the name of Beltshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.*

Why did Nebuchadnezzar do this? Well, they could be human “trophy” of Nebuchadnezzar's success, that he could brandish and display when he chose. They could be symbols and a show to the public of his mercy and large heartedness. They could be used, in effect, as hostages. Nebuchadnezzar left some of the royals of Israel in charge, but if they ever wanted to see their children again (which he is taking to Babylon) then they better behave while he is gone or all he has to do if they misbehave is harm their children. They are in his ward in Babylon. You better conduct yourselves accordingly or I will slay your children. That is a powerful deterrent to those Jews acting against Nebuchadnezzar's interests when he is pursuing other parts of his vast kingdom. Josephus expressly states that Daniel was of the seed royal and was the kindred and family of Zedekiah. Gill says another ancient authority states that Daniel was of the seed of Hezekiah, and so fulfilled the prophecy in 2Kings 20:18.

2Kings 20:12 *At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. Hezekiah did not inquire of God about this man. Hezekiah is flying blind here. We must bring all things to the Lord in prayer. [Php 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.] 13 And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not. [This appears to be Hezekiah's pride talking?]. This is not about our pride and what we have obtained! God gave us everything we have – we secured nothing for ourselves. 14 Then came Isaiah the prophet unto King Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. 15 And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. 16 And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. 17 Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be*

carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. 18 And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

So, while Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are imprisoned in Babylon and sent to learn a sick version of the “force” there, Nebuchadnezzar eventually puts Zedekiah in control of Judah until Zedekiah and Israel rebel.

*2 Chron. 36:13 And he (Zedekiah) also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. **14 Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. 15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldees (Nebuchadnezzar), who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burnt the house of God (Temple of Solomon), and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons** until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21 To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.*

So, this is how you get Daniel, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach) and Azariah (Abednego) to Babylon. The word rendered “children” (Daniel 1: 3, 4) means: *child, son, boy, offspring, youth*. We do not get much help here on their ages from the words used. Gill says they were between 15 and 20 years old. Jamison Faucet and Brown say they were 12 to 14 years old. Matthew Henry says: *He chose such as were young, because they would be pliable and tractable, would forget their own people and incorporate with the Chaldeans.* They were Jewish exile captives forced to leave their home country as children and enslaved and sent to Babylon. And they were castrated and made eunuchs. They were taken away from their families who were in the end probably murdered or dwelt with very harshly. They are foreigners to say the least! They were brought to Babylon to be taught the language and ways of the Chaldeans to be servants and minister to Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians are not going to let them have their women or let them have families of their own. This is the cruelty of the Babylonians. But God intended it unto them for good. Ro 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* They were not brought to Babylon to preserve the culture, religion and ways of the Jews. Through all of this trauma they remember their God and had faith in Him. This reminds me of Moses that does not forget the God of his people and forsakes the wealth of Egypt to suffer with the people of God.

According to Gill the Babylonians worshipped multiple gods (which in part were named for the sun and planets - Jupiter/Venus) including Rach, Shach, Nego, Merodach, Nebo, and Bel; from whom Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, received their Chaldean names. They did not even get to keep their own Jewish names. In some ways, they are treated very badly and everything, even their names and identity are taken from them. These names hearken back to the God of Isreal.

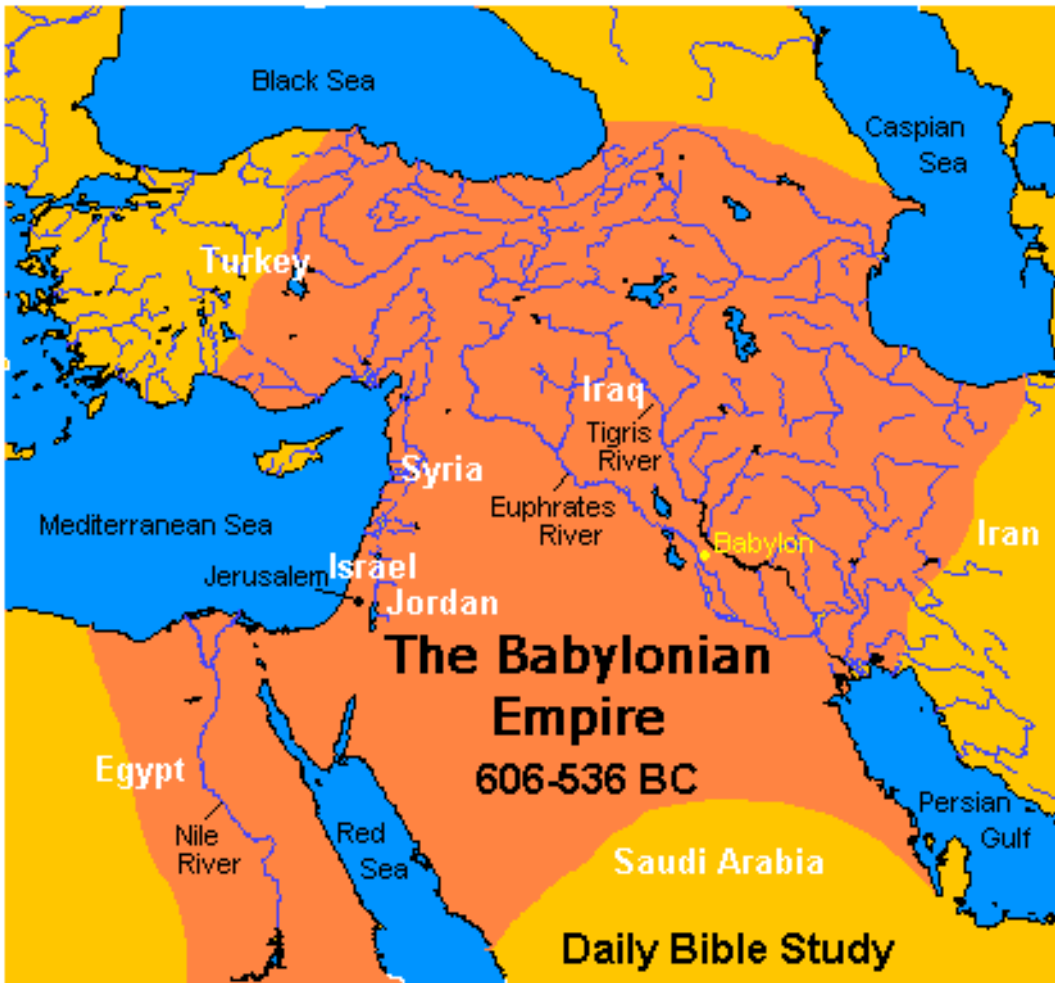
Daniel — God is my Judge; Hananiah — Jehovah has been gracious to me; Mishael — Asked of God; Azariah — The Lord is my helper

The Babylonians reasoned that to make these young men forget the God of their fathers, they would give them names of their idolatry.

Daniel/Beltshazzar - The treasure of Bel; Hananiah/Shadrach — The inspiration of the sun; Mishael/Meshach — He who belongs to the goddess Sheshach (under which name Venus was worshipped); Azariah/Abed-nego – Servant of the god Nego

One of the expositors says: *Though they would not force them from the religion of their fathers to that of their conquerors, yet they did what they could by fair means insensibly to wean them from the former and instill the latter into them.* I believe that is exactly what they wanted – to force their filthy religion down their throats. Understand that Babylon was covered with false temples and idols from one end of the city to another. Also, remember that this servitude by Israel to the Chaldeans is going to last 70 years (2 Chron 36:21) and Daniel is going to be there the whole time.

On the other hand, in some respects, Nebuchadnezzar is going to treat these young men of Israel somewhat well (given that they are in slavery). When Zedekiah rebels, he keeps Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah alive. He also feeds them, houses them, and educates them at his own cost, like



they were his own family. He spared no expense. Matthew Henry: *This was an instance of his (Nebuchadnezzar's) generosity and humanity; though they were captives, he considered their birth and quality, their spirit and genius, and treated them honourably, and studied to make their captivity easy to them.*

At the height of the Babylonian Empire under Nebuchadnezzar the II its territory included Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Jordan, and parts of Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The capital city of the Babylonian Empire (our Washington, D.C.) was Babylon. Historians believe that at its peak, the city of Babylon was the largest city in the world at the time. The largest city in the world right now is Tokyo, Japan at around 35 million people. On the next page is a drawing of the city. You will notice it was surrounded by water as a means to protect it and at the center is a great idolatrous temple – one of many in the city. There was a great wall around the city that was 56 miles in length.

The expositors says it was the head of the heathen world. It was known for its gross sin and unmatched spiritual idolatry, whoredoms and fornication. It was known for its rebellion against God and relentless oppression and persecution of God's people. This is not your garden variety cesspool of a city. Its great sin was so intoxicating that it spread to all nations – but it starts there. It is the mother of all antichristian, ungodly and Satanic states. The city of Babylon is mentioned six times in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. You cannot miss the symbolism. The city of Babylon is the arch type of where Satan dwells. The power of Satan is there. There was a lot of evil going on in that city and it is representative of the evil of false religion and the like during the times of the Revelation. There is amazing symbolism

here. The word Babylon literally means confusion. It references back to the tower of Babel. You know that where you find confusion, you find Satan. Satan loves confusion, chaos and rebellion. Beloved, this place where these young men took up residence was apparently the most evil place on earth at that time, and was dangerous to any of God's people that lived there.

Rev. 14:8 *And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*

Rev. 16:19 *And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*

Rev. 17:5 *And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. 6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.*

Rev. 18:2 *And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*







This is a recreation of the Ishtar Gate in Babylon – you can see this in Berlin today. Of course, the original was torn down by the Medes and Persians, but you get the idea.

It is also important to understand the nature of the government, this was not a democracy. It was a monarchy with Nebuchadnezzar having complete control of the entire government. There were no other branches of government; no checks or balances. There were no appeal rights from Nebuchadnezzar's decisions. We really do not have anything to compare it to in our generation. To cross the King was to die. *"Whom he would he slew; and whom he would he left alive."* (Dan. 5:19)

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Gardens were said to be constructed by Nebuchadnezzar. It was a remarkable feat of engineering. It included an ascending series of tiered gardens and trees. It was said to resemble a green mountain it was so massive. (The image below does no justice to that marvelous work of God!) The City of Babylon would have been a massive city full of the wealth of the countries they had conquered.



Now you have the stage of this story about these amazing, focused, sober young men who, in light of all of this wealth, power, sin, idolatry and intoxicating Satanic thought, intended to corrupt them, stand with God. They remembered the commandments and hearkened back to their call to salvation, and the God that they love and they steadfastly refuse to bow down and worship the filthy image.

Exodus 20: 1 And God spake all these words, saying, 2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

I will continue this story next time.

I love you all! Amen.