

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 163

Dearest grandchild,

Since several of you are already in college and others perhaps will be, this letter will deal with four Hebrew boys who found themselves in a pagan university in Babylon. Paul wrote to the Romans **“Be not conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2)**. Since these Hebrews resisted the temptation to conform, their godly example can be an inspiration.

As you probably remember, they were taken as captives to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. The fact that they were placed under the care of Ashpenaz, the master of the eunuchs, leads to the assumption that they had been castrated. Hopefully, it is only an assumption.

Their first sight of Babylon must have been overwhelming. Herodotus states that it's walls were 335 feet high and 85 feet thick. The four walls were between 10.5 and 14 miles long on each side. Jerusalem was puny by comparison. The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho 17 was miles, only slightly longer than one wall of that great city. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and when these boys arrived Babylon led the world in science, music, architecture and art. They were also the strongest military power on earth. The fact that the Babylonians worshiped many gods and conquered Jerusalem, created the illusion that their polytheism was superior to the monotheism of the Jews.

When these boys arrived in Babylon their Hebrew names honoring Jehovah, were immediately changed to Babylonian names honoring pagan gods. Daniel (God is my Judge) became Belteshazzar (Bel protect the king). Hananiah (Compassion of God) became Shadrach (Servant of Aku). Mishael (Who is like God) became (Who is like Aku). Azariah (Helped by God) became (Servant of Nebo). Bel, Aku, and Nebo as you have guessed, were pagan gods.

Their studies included the language and literature of the Babylonians. Since many things they were taught contradicted the Bible the temptation to compromise must have been overwhelming. The good news is that they not only kept their faith but rose to positions of great power in the Babylonian government. This stunning success would not have been possible if God had not been with them.

Their first trial and success in being non-conformists involved what they ate and drank. Since God brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs, a ten day trial was agreed upon. The Hebrew boys ate kosher food and their Babylonian counterparts ate the king's food. At the end of the ten days the Hebrews fared better than the others. God honored their convictions and they didn't have to compromise. Further, when they completed their education the king found them to be ten times greater than all the magicians and astrologers in all his realm (Dan. 1:20).

Their second trial and success came when king had a troubling dream and couldn't remember it. When God revealed to Daniel the dream and it's interpretation these four non-

conformists were catapulted to even greater positions of power. (Dan. 2:48, 49).

Their third trial and success came when they refused to bow down to an idol of gold. Their miraculous deliverance from the fiery furnace is legendary. It even caused the king to write a decree to all the world honoring Jehovah and promoting Sadrach, Meshach, and Abednego yet again (Dan. 3:28 - 30).

Later, as you know, Daniel read the handwriting on the wall the very night Babylon was conquered by the Medes and the Persians. Remarkably, Daniel not only outlasted the Babylonian empire but continued to be a world leader under Darius the Mede. It was during the reign of the Medes and Persians that Daniel again refused to conform and was delivered from the lion's den.

Sadly, it doesn't always work out this way. Some of the godly non-conformists of history were stoned, sawn asunder, and slain with the sword. They wandered about being destitute, afflicted, and tormented (Heb. 11:37). The Hebrews said it best to Nebuchadnezzar: **“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 thy hand, O king. But if not, but it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up”** (Dan. 3:17, 18)

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce