



SUNDAY, APRIL 7TH

Series Title: Growing Strong in Christ

Lesson Title: Growing Strong – Focus: The 3 Hebrew Boys

Key Scriptures: Daniel, Chapters 1-3

The Bible contains numerous scriptures about the importance of moving from being a babe in Christ into spiritual growth and maturity. The blessing of spiritual growth is twofold: it blesses the person who is growing and it blesses those they encounter.

Our Spiritual Growth Blesses The Person Growing

It blesses the person growing because as we grow in relationship with Christ, we can better navigate the situations we encounter; with discernment and wisdom gained over time, we can see and understand things from a spiritual standpoint. As we grow stronger in the Lord, we can face spiritual opposition and even extract the purpose from our pain in tough situations which helps us grow even more.

Our Spiritual Growth Blesses Those We Encounter

Our spiritual growth blesses those we encounter because when we move from being babes in Christ to spiritually mature or “seasoned” Christians, we can help raise up those around us. We can be an example - even those who don’t know God can learn about His ways from our godly conduct. For those in the faith, we can disciple them and help them to grow in Christ.

This expectation of growth is not only for people! In fact, Mark 11 tells the story of Jesus being hungry and seeing a fig tree...but it only had leaves and no fruit. Jesus cursed it and shortly thereafter, it withered away. Its purpose was to produce something and it did not, so Jesus cut it off.

Today, we’re going to talk about 3 very special young men whose spiritual growth and maturity was tested...and the impact of their stand for Christ.

THE BACK STORY – WHO ARE THE HEBREW BOYS?

Sometime around 600 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem, and took some of Jerusalem's best and brightest people to Babylon to help run his affairs. Most victorious kings typically only allowed people of their own ethnicity to rule while enslaving the citizens of the conquered nation. King Nebuchadnezzar, however, developed a 3-year government service training program for those with the best minds among the people within his kingdom, regardless of their race.

“And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his 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 skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans.” (Daniel 1:3-4).

Included in this group were three young men who we know as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego...but these are the names given to them by the Babylonian leader they worked for. Their real names were Hananiah (“God has favored” or “God has been gracious.”), Mishael (“who is what God is,”) and Azariah (“Jehovah has helped”). Daniel was also a part of this group.

These young Hebrew men were given Babylonian names in an attempt to negate their Hebrew culture and identity but they never forgot God.

CONSECRATED FOR GOD'S SERVICE – TEST #1

So these three young men were selected for the king's 3-year training program. They needed to learn the language and customs of the people and have the right demeanor to serve in the king's palace. They had to catch on quick; to be able to understand science and just have an overall wisdom – and they had to be “well-favoured”...in other words, these were not only smart, but handsome young men!

In order to keep them healthy and looking their best, they were granted a portion of the same food the king ate. But upon seeing what was offered, they refused to eat it. The Bible doesn't say what specifically caused them to refuse it, maybe it included animals that were unclean by Hebrew standards, or maybe it had been used in an offering to Babylonian gods, but they asked not to defile themselves with the king's meat. The Hebrew boys asked, and

were granted a 10-day test to see how they looked after eating a special diet that they requested; and only drinking water. The Bible says (Daniel 1:15, 20) that at the end of ten days their countenances appeared better than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king asked of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

The Hebrew boys stood strong for Christ and came out on top!

INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM – TEST #2

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that greatly “troubled” him and he was “anxious” to know its meaning (Daniel 2:1, 3). So he called for his magicians, wise men and counselors to interpret his dream (verses 2-3).

Making the situation especially dire, the king would not tell what his dream was to those he summoned to interpret it. He demanded that they both tell him his dream and interpret it or they would be destroyed (verses 4-9).

Prayer changes things! Daniel and the three Hebrew boys prayed that God would show them mercy concerning the secret dream so that they would not perish with the other wise men. God spoke to Daniel in a night vision and Daniel was able to tell the King both what his dream was and its interpretation. Daniel was promoted, and put Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in charge of Babylon.

The Hebrew boys came out on top once again – through the power and grace of God. However, the growth they experienced and strength they gained through trusting God and seeing Him come through for them would soon be put to the greatest test yet.

THE FIERY FURNACE – TEST #3

The Hebrew boys were faced with the ultimate test of faith – the king set up an idol and commanded that at a certain time, when music was played, everyone should fall down and worship the idol – or be thrown into the fiery furnace.

Well, word got back to the king that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were NOT bowing down to the idol when the music was played. So the king

sent for them to see what was going on – after all, these were his three top leaders in Babylon! How did that look for them not to obey his command? Nebuchadnezzar didn't realize that they only cared about how they looked to one King...the King of Kings!

Now, let's take a look into the king's court as the conversation unfolds!
(Daniel 3:14-30).

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 musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: 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.

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 flames 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.

Conclusion:

The three Hebrew boys stayed strong in God no matter what they faced. Even when they were taken from their homes and from their country, they still kept a heart for God and continued to worship Him only. As they were tested time after time, they continued to show their strength in God – they kept His principles, they prayed for His help and mercy and they came out with the victory.

Their show of strength and faith in God impressed the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar so much that he decreed no one could say anything bad about their God and stated that no other God could deliver like theirs. And if you were to read a little further, in Daniel 4:37, King Nebuchadnezzar says,

“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

May those we encounter see God more clearly through our strength and faith in Him!

SUNDAY SCHOOL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT
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1. (Fill in the blanks) According to the lesson, the blessing of _____ is twofold: it blesses the person who is _____ and it blesses those they _____.

2. List one way, according to the lesson, that spiritual growth blesses the one who is growing.

3. List one way, according to the lesson, that those who encounter a spiritually mature person are blessed.

4. Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?

5. List two ways the Hebrew boys excelled above the other trainees after the 10 days.
 1. _____
 2. _____

6. When the king was troubled by his dream, what two pieces of information did he require of the experts in his court (magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, Chaldeans, etc.?)
 1. _____
 2. _____

7. What did the 3 Hebrew boys (and Daniel) do in order to get the answers the king required regarding his dream?

8. When the music was played signifying it was time to bow to the idol, how did the 3 Hebrew boys show their spiritual strength?

9. How many times hotter than usual was the furnace heated for the 3 Hebrew boys?

10. What happened to the men who threw the Hebrew boys in the furnace?

11. Who was the fourth person in the fiery furnace with the Hebrew boys?

12. How do we know that the Hebrew boys made an impact on the King?
