

Be Not Afraid, Only Believe

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When we choose to believe, exercise faith unto repentance, and follow our Savior, Jesus Christ, we open our spiritual eyes to splendors we can scarcely imagine.

Babylon and Daniel

Twenty-six hundred years ago, Babylon was the world's great superpower. One ancient historian described the walls of Babylon that surrounded the city as more than 300 feet (90 m) high and 80 feet (25 m) thick. "In magnificence," he wrote, "there is no other city that approaches ... it."¹

In its day, Babylon was the world's center of learning, law, and philosophy. Its military might was unparalleled. It shattered the power of Egypt. It invaded, torched, and looted the Assyrian capital, Nineveh. It easily conquered Jerusalem and carried away the best and brightest of the children of Israel back to Babylon to serve King Nebuchadnezzar.

One of these captives was a young man by the name of Daniel. Many scholars believe that Daniel was between 12 and 17 years old at the time. Think of it, my beloved young Aaronic Priesthood holders: Daniel was very likely your age when he was taken into the king's court to be educated in the language, laws, religion, and science of the worldly Babylon.

Can you imagine what it would have felt like to be forced from your home, marched 500 miles (800 km) to a foreign city, and indoctrinated in the religion of your enemies?

Daniel had been raised as a follower of Jehovah. He believed in and worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He had studied the words of the prophets, and he knew of God's interaction with man.

But now, at a very young age, he was a prisoner-student in Babylon. The pressure on him must have been immense to abandon his old beliefs and adopt those of Babylon. But he stayed true to his faith—in word and in deed.

Many of you know how it feels to defend an unpopular truth. In the Internet slang of today, we talk about getting "flamed" by those who disagree with us. But Daniel wasn't just risking public ridicule. In Babylon, those who challenged the religious authorities understood what

it means—figuratively and literally—to be “flamed.” Just ask Daniel’s friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.²

I don’t know if it was easy for Daniel to be a believer in such an environment. Some people are blessed with a believing heart—for them, faith seems to come as a gift from heaven. But I imagine that Daniel was like many of us who have to work for our testimonies. I’m confident that Daniel spent many hours on his knees praying, laying his questions and fears on the altar of faith, and waiting upon the Lord for understanding and wisdom.

And the Lord did bless Daniel. Though his faith was challenged and ridiculed, he stayed true to what he knew by his own experience to be right.

Daniel believed. Daniel did not doubt.

And then one night, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled his mind. He assembled his team of scholars and counselors and demanded that they describe the dream to him and also reveal the meaning of it.

Of course, they could not. “No one can do what you ask,” they pleaded. But this only made Nebuchadnezzar more furious, and he commanded that all the wise men, magicians, astrologers, and counselors be cut in pieces—including Daniel and the other young students from Israel.

You who are familiar with the book of Daniel know what happened next. Daniel asked Nebuchadnezzar for a little extra time, and he and his faithful companions went to the source of *their* faith and moral strength. They prayed to God and asked for divine help at this crucial moment in their lives. And “then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a ... vision.”³

Daniel, the young boy from a conquered nation—who had been bullied and persecuted for believing in his strange religion—went before the king and revealed to him the dream and its interpretation.

From that day on, as a direct result of his faithfulness to God, Daniel became a trusted counselor to the king, renowned for his wisdom in all of Babylon.

The boy who believed and lived his faith had become a man of God. A prophet. A prince of righteousness.⁴

Are We like Daniel?

To all of us who bear the holy priesthood of God, I ask, are we like Daniel?

Do we stand loyal to God?

Do we practice what we preach, or are we Sunday Christians only?

Do our daily actions reflect clearly what we claim to believe?

Do we help “the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted”?⁵

Do we just talk the talk, or do we enthusiastically walk the walk?

Brethren, we have been given much. We have been taught the divine truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. We have been entrusted with priesthood authority to help our fellowmen and build up God’s kingdom on earth. We live in a time of great outpouring of spiritual power. We have the fulness of truth. We have priesthood keys to seal on earth and in heaven. Sacred scriptures and teachings of living prophets and apostles are available as never before.

My dear friends, let us not take these things lightly. With these blessings and privileges come great responsibilities and obligations. Let us rise up to them.

The ancient city of Babylon is in ruins. Its splendor is long gone. But Babylon’s worldliness and wickedness live on. Now it falls to us to live as believers in a world of disbelief. The challenge is ours to daily practice the principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and to live true to God’s commandments. We will have to stay calm under peer pressure, not be impressed by popular trends or false prophets, disregard the ridicule of the ungodly, resist the temptations of the evil one, and overcome our own laziness.

Just think about it. How much easier would it have been for Daniel to simply go along with the ways of Babylon? He could have set aside the restrictive code of conduct God had given the children of Israel. He could have feasted on the rich foods provided by the king and indulged in the worldly pleasures of the natural man. He would have avoided ridicule.

He would have been popular.

He would have fit in.

His path might have been much less complicated.

That is, of course, until the day when the king demanded an interpretation of his dream. Then Daniel would have found that he, like the rest of Babylon’s “wise men,” had lost his connection to the true source of light and wisdom.

Daniel passed his test. Ours still continues.

The Courage to Believe

Satan, our adversary, wants us to fail. He spreads lies as part of his effort to destroy our belief. He slyly suggests that the doubter, the skeptic, the cynic is sophisticated and intelligent, while those who have faith in God and His miracles are naive, blind, or brainwashed. Satan will advocate that it is cool to doubt spiritual gifts and the teachings of true prophets.

I wish I could help everyone to understand this one simple fact: we *believe* in God because of things we *know* with our heart and mind, not because of things we *do not know*. Our

spiritual experiences are sometimes too sacred to explain in worldly terms, but that doesn't mean they are not real.

Heavenly Father has prepared for His children a spiritual feast, offering every kind of exquisite food imaginable—and yet, instead of enjoying these spiritual gifts, the cynics content themselves with observing from a distance, sipping from their cups of skepticism, doubt, and disrespect.

Why would anyone walk through life satisfied with the light from the candle of their own understanding when, by reaching out to our Heavenly Father, they could experience the bright sun of spiritual knowledge that would expand their minds with wisdom and fill their souls with joy?

When you and I talk to people about faith and belief, don't we often hear, "I wish I could believe the way you do"?

Implied in such a statement is another of Satan's deceptions: that belief is available to some people but not to others. There is no magic to belief. But *wanting* to believe is the necessary first step! God is no respecter of persons.⁶ He is your Father. He wants to speak to you. However, it requires a little scientific curiosity—it requires an experiment upon the word of God—and the exercise of a "particle of faith."⁷ It also takes a little humility. And it requires an open heart and an open mind. It requires *seeking*, in the full meaning of the word. And, perhaps hardest of all, it requires being patient and waiting upon the Lord.

If we make no effort to believe, we are like the man who unplugs a spotlight and then blames the spotlight for not giving any light.

Recently I was surprised and saddened to hear of an Aaronic Priesthood bearer who seemed to take pride in the fact that he had distanced himself from God. He said, "If God reveals Himself to me, then I will believe. Until then, I will find the truth relying on my own understanding and intellect to light the way before me."

I don't know this young man's heart, but I couldn't help but feel terribly sorry for him. How easily he rejected the gifts the Lord was offering him. This young man had unplugged the spotlight and then seemed self-satisfied in his clever observation that there was no light.

Unfortunately, this seems to be quite a popular attitude today. If we can put the burden of proof on God, we think we can excuse ourselves from taking God's commandments seriously and from taking responsibility for our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Brethren, let me be clear: there is nothing noble or impressive about being cynical. Skepticism is easy—anyone can do it. It is the faithful life that requires moral strength, dedication, and courage. Those who hold fast to faith are far more impressive than those who give in to doubt when mysterious questions or concerns arise.

But it should not surprise us that faith is not valued by society. The world has a long history of rejecting that which it does not understand. And it has particular trouble understanding

things it cannot see. But just because we cannot see something with our physical eyes does not mean it doesn't exist. Indeed, "there are more things in heaven and earth ... than are dreamt of" in our textbooks, scientific journals, and worldly philosophies.⁸ The universe is filled with wonders profound and astonishing—things that can be comprehended only through spiritual eyes.

The Promise of Belief

When we choose to believe, exercise faith unto repentance, and follow our Savior, Jesus Christ, we open our spiritual eyes to splendors we can scarcely imagine. Thus our belief and faith will grow stronger, and we will see even more.⁹

Brethren, I testify that even in the toughest of times, the Savior will say to you as He said to an anxious father on a crowded street in Galilee, "Be not afraid, only believe."¹⁰

We can choose to believe.

For in belief, we discover the dawn of light.

We will discover truth.¹¹

We will find peace.¹²

Because of our belief, we will never hunger, never thirst.¹³ The gifts of God's grace will enable us to be true to our faith and will fill our soul like "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."¹⁴ We will experience true and lasting joy.¹⁵

Therefore, my dear friends, my beloved brethren in the priesthood of God:

Have courage to believe.

Be not afraid, only believe.

Stand with Daniel.

I pray that each one of us—young and old—will find renewed strength, courage, and desire to believe. In the name of our Master, Jesus Christ, amen.

1. Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*, trans. George Rawlinson, 4 vols. (1875), 1:244.

2. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were cast into a flaming furnace (see Daniel 3).

3. Daniel 2:19.
4. See Daniel 2.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 52:40.
6. See Acts 10:34–35.
7. Alma 32:27.
8. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 5, lines 167–68.
9. See Doctrine and Covenants 50:24.
10. Mark 5:36.
11. See Moroni 10:3–5.
12. See Isaiah 26:3.
13. See John 6:35.
14. John 4:14.
15. See 2 Nephi 2:25.

