

How to Build a Steadfast Faith:

Ancient Lessons for Modern Times

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Daniel chapter two. I am going to begin reading verse number 26. Do you remember last week we talked about Nebuchadnezzar having a dream? His wise men couldn't interpret the dream. So, in Babylon, they're going through the kingdom and killing all the wise men.

Beginning in verse 26, it says, "The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name was Beltshazzar," 'Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?'"

Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise *men*, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets,

We must cling to the message that there is a God. You may not have the answers. You may not know the future, but there is a God.

Interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Daniel 2:31-35)

Daniel explains the dream in verses 31 to 35. This explanation is important to Nebuchadnezzar. He's slaying all the wise men because nobody could come up with the answer. Now, Daniel will tell them what nobody else knew other than God himself, beginning in verse 31.

And the Bible says,

31 "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor *was* excellent, stood before you; and its form *was* awesome. **32** This image's head *was* of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, **33** its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. **34** You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.

Symbolism of Materials and Strength

First of all, as you move down this great image from the top to the bottom, the quality of the materials decreases. You start out with gold. By the time you get to the bottom, you're talking clay. Secondly, as the quality lessens, the strength of the materials decreases.

The interpretation of the dream is in verses 36 to 45. In verse 36, Daniel says, "This is the dream." By this time, we see Nebuchadnezzar leaning forward, sitting on the edge of his throne. He doesn't understand what this dream meant, and now Daniel says, here's the interpretation.

Relevance to Present Day

Well, you might be saying to yourself, Pastor, that's all good, but how does this image relate to me in 2024? It's relevant because we're about to see that the various parts of the image represent the various world powers and their influence on human history. Earthly kingdoms and worldly governments are in the hands of God.

The head of gold represents Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire. The chest and the arms of silver, as 99% of all Bible scholars agree, refer to the Medo-Persian Empire. The stomach and the thighs of bronze would be the third world's dominant kingdom- the Greek Empire. The legs and feet made of iron symbolized the strength of the fourth world kingdom, the Roman Empire.

It appears that the Roman Empire had two dimensions. The legs were pure iron, and the feet and toes were baked clay and iron. The feet and the toes speak of a revived Roman Empire that will rule in the last days, spearheaded by the Antichrist himself. This is what makes the passage relevant to us today.

Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that a kingdom was coming that was greater than any kingdom that had ever been. At some point, God will intervene in men's affairs and crush all previous world powers. God will set up his kingdom, and of the increase of his government, there will be no end.

The Stone and its Meaning (Daniel 2:44-45)

What about this stone that crushes the statue and verses 44 and 45? It's obvious here that the time of the Gentiles has ended. While the Gentile empires

are of human origin, the kingdom of the stone is of divine origin. While the Gentile empires are all temporary, God's kingdom is eternal. It is a stone cut without human hands, a stone that breaks the feet and crushes the image. We know this stone to be Christ Jesus.

This great breaking of all these kingdoms is Jesus' second coming. Jesus is coming again. In Genesis, it was prophesied that a Messiah, Savior, and Redeemer would come and establish an earthly kingdom. Isaiah 28:16 says, "See, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation." The best is yet to come if you believe in Jesus Christ because he's coming.

Daniel concluded by saying The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure. There it is. With that, Daniel dropped the microphone. Bam! I imagine that everybody in the throne room was probably holding their breath. The silence is deafening.

Then Nebuchadnezzar falls on his face before Daniel and begins to make him an object of worship. In verse 47, he cried out, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets. Since you could reveal this secret." A sigh of relief must have gone throughout the kingdom. God has enabled Daniel to nail the dream and its interpretation. No wise man could ever have told Daniel the king's dream, but God knew.

Nebuchadnezzar's Idolatry (Daniel 3:1-7)

Amazingly, though, his overwhelming arrogance had reasserted itself when we come to chapter three. He wanted to be not only the head of the statue but also the entire image. Think about this for a moment. The Bible says he made a statue of himself. Remember, he was just the head in his dream, but he's the whole image by chapter three.

His personally created image of gold has become nothing more than an extension of his overinflated ego. What we're talking about here is just secular humanism at its best, a man attempting to elevate himself, make himself everything through his own vainglory, and bring himself to a place of becoming a God unto himself, someone worthy and deserving of worship.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted the whole world to fall on its face to worship him.

It's amazing how much an unbelieving world is willing to pay to create an idol. Remember back in Exodus chapter 32, the Israelites came to Aaron and said to him, hey, come on, make us gods who will go before us? We want to be just like the Egyptians. They had gods everywhere back there, and you could see them. They were tangible and touchable. So make us some gods. It was only a short time until they danced around a golden calf.

Whatever your life revolves around, whatever is at the core of your existence, is your God. But listen to me. Images and idols are not worthy of your worship and praise. The latest car comes off the assembly line, and we ooh and ah. We want that. We'll work for that stuff, people, and personalities.

Martin Luther said the human mind is an idol manufacturing machine. We will either worship the true God or make some gods for ourselves. Everyone in the house today is worshiping something or someone. We are. It's just the nature. It's ingrained in our hearts to be worshippers.

Something equally remarkable is how much pressure an unbelieving world will put on others to bow down and worship their created images.

Command for Worship

Once Nebuchadnezzar had his image set up, he called his leadership team, and the command to worship went out.

In chapter three, verses four and five,

4 Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, **5** *that* at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up;

This act of worship may have been a litmus test of loyalty for his cabinet members. Would they pledge their allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar as king? So when you hear the band and the music fall down and worship, it's worshiping him. If you refuse to bow, there's no question about where you stand.

Yeah, this is a test. Listen, whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. So when the band strikes up, you go down. It was either bow or burn. You only had two options.

The Faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:16-18)

While the whole world was bowing down and worshiping, disturbing news reached the ears of the king. There were certain Hebrews who disregarded his decree. They're neither serving his gods nor worshiping his image. Well, Nebuchadnezzar is furious. He wanted them brought before him to give them one more opportunity to comply. You will bow, or you will burn. These Hebrews' responses in verses 16 through 18 of chapter three teach us that when facing the heat of peer pressure, you can never compromise on your biblical convictions.

I was a youth pastor for ten years and taught many messages on peer pressure. I pounded the subject of peer pressure, of not conforming, blending in, or camouflaging your Christianity. But, you know, peer pressure affects us all, just not teenagers. What our friends, families, and those people around us say affects us.

Trust in God's Deliverance

The three Hebrews stood before him and said, "Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter." You're dealing with a man who's insane already with anger, and they say to him, "We don't even have to defend ourselves by answering your question." These guys not only refuse to bow down, but they won't bend even a little bit.

It would have been easy to rationalize making excuses for yielding to cultural pressures. The world we live in today is bowing down. It's the "in thing" to do, and it always has been. To stand out in a crowd, you must not bow down. But when we bow, we blend in, losing our witness and influence in the world. A lot of Christians are bowing down and compromising and selling out.

It takes courage to stand on your feet and stand up in faith for the Lord and His Word, believing that God will stand alongside you. Verse 17. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us from your hand, O King." Oh, what a tremendous statement of faith!

But to me, verse number 18 is an even greater statement of their uncompromising faith in God. "But if not, if he doesn't deliver us. Let it be known to you, sir, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image."

If God delivers us, great. If he doesn't deliver us, great. Either way, he is still God, and our lives will still be in his hands at the end of the day.

Sometimes, the deliverance you're praying for may not come in the form or fashion you expect. But let me tell you what. As a child of God, deliverance will always come when you stand for God and refuse to compromise.

The Fiery Furnace Experience (Daniel 3:19-30)

By this time, Nebuchadnezzar has a real anger management problem. He's mad in about every chapter of the book. So he orders the men to heat the furnace seven times hotter than ever, reflecting his emotional state. The man is hot.

He commands his mighty men to tie these boys up. That raises an interesting question. Why bind them up when they are only going to burn? Where are they going to go? The fire was so hot that when his mighty men cast them into the furnace, they melted.

When you lose your temper, your anger can spill over and affect the people closest to you. These men were probably the most loyal soldiers in his army, and he just incinerated them. A moment after he destroyed some of his mightiest men, he goes up and looks into the furnace.

Divine Encounter: Presence of the Fourth Man

The heat on the platform leading to that furnace was incredible, but he did his best. He looks inside, turns around, and looks again. Then he asks those with him, "Didn't we cast three men bound into the fire? Look, I see four men loose and walking in the fire, and they are not hurt. And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

He called to the Hebrews, "Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out." They're in there and not being consumed, and now they're just going to walk out of the fiery furnace?

I can't say that God will always deliver you from the fiery furnace, but His Word offers you this guarantee. Isaiah 43:2 says, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be. You shall not be burned. Nor shall the flames scorch you."

Liberation through the Fire: God's Deliverance and Victory

Are you passing through the waters? Are you walking through the fire? This story is telling us--fear not. The fire has no power over you as a child of God.

I don't know what some of you are going through today. God does not design the fire to burn you. He designs it to burn away that which binds you.

Why tie the Hebrews up? So that God could make a statement to generation after generation of believers. The world cannot bind you. You shall not be in bondage no matter what you're going through. He will use those flames to set you free. There is liberating power in those flames because of the fourth man in the furnace. You're not alone. God is there. You are coming out victorious because, as Nebuchadnezzar put it in verse 29, no other God can deliver like this.

I don't know what was going on in the minds of these three Hebrew boys. All I know is that they made up their mind. They wouldn't compromise or bow down. God was with them outside the furnace, but they saw him when they landed in the fire. Sometimes, God will turn up the heat or allow the heat to be turned up.

You'll go through something, and the devil will whisper, Your God doesn't love you. What kind of a loving God would allow his child to go through this? Let me tell you something. Whatever God allows you to go through, you won't go through it alone. The safest place to have been for those three Hebrew boys at that moment was in the fiery furnace. So, thank God for the fourth man in the fire. Sometimes, it's only in the fire where you have that divine encounter with an Almighty God.