

358 An Image of Gold

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was a gifted military leader and the foremost town planner of his day in his overseeing the construction of the splendid city of Babylon. But at times he was also a complete fool.

In Daniel Chapter 3 we read of a colossal “image of gold” which Nebuchadnezzar made and then set up in the plain of Dura (3.1). When the leaders and people heard the music start (vv 5,7,10,15, quite some racket!), they were to fall down and worship the golden image. Anyone not doing this would be promptly cast into a burning fiery furnace (vv 4, 6).

Not surprisingly most people did as they were told but three of the “certain Jews” now “set over the affairs of Babylon” did not, and they were duly reported to the king (vv 8-12). Nebuchadnezzar went berserk, especially when he was confronted with the calm faith in God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (vv 16-18). The three were duly thrown into the 7-fold hotter furnace, but then we read that “the king was astonished” for he saw “four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and the men have no hurt: and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God”. (vv 19-25, KJV).

After the men’s release, untouched by the fire (vv 26-27), the king then announced, “Blessed be the God of (these men)” and decreed severe punishments against any who spoke amiss against Him (vv 28-30).

This wonderful incident, of three of God’s people standing firm in their faith in God when commanded to disobey Him, is becoming steadily more topical for us. We are well aware of the antics of law-makers and opinion-formers who expect us to bow down to their various “images of gold”, each of which is a defiant rival to Almighty God and His Word.

Several such contemporary “images of gold” come to mind, one prime example being the insistence that homosexual behaviour must now be accepted as normal within our society. After “civil partnerships” for homosexual couples were introduced in 2004, the coalition government under Messrs Cameron and Clegg then triumphantly “re-defined marriage” for us all in 2013. Gay Pride marches are now common-place, passing beneath the 6-coloured “gay” rainbow flags fluttering from official flagpoles across our land, and 5-year olds in British state schools are now to be taught about “relationships”, a euphemism for gender identity and homosexual behaviour. Meanwhile our politicians continue

to curry favour in their promotion of “LGBTQ” values, including most recently Mr John Bercow, Speaker of the House of Commons.

A second “image of gold” confronting us is the horrible decree that abortion is just fine, and that those who refuse to bow down before this decree are dreadful extremists who must be silenced by fair means or foul. Consider the vitriol directed against peaceful “pro-life” protesters outside abortion clinics, now backed up by new bye-laws banning them from standing close to these premises. Meanwhile the abortions grimly continue, at over 500 per day in this once God-fearing nation.

It is telling to note how homosexual “marriage” and “abortion rights” have just been foisted on to the people of Northern Ireland by the Westminster government in the absence of the Stormont assembly, and against the policies of the (Bible-based) Democratic Unionist Party.

Truly, as on that Babylonian plain of Dura, we are now all expected to bow down before such modern-day “images of gold”, or else.

Christians are well used to the Bible being wilfully ignored in public life, but now the Bible itself is coming directly into the firing line as being out of date, unhelpful, regressive, and so on. It is significant that Jeremy Corbyn for example (the leader of the Labour Party in Britain) is speaking about legislating directly against aspects of Bible teaching that are now deemed unacceptable in today’s “modern, progressive society”. Those confrontations between the apostles and the Jewish authorities come to mind, culminating in those wonderful replies recorded for us in Acts 4.18-20 and 5.27-29.

As the country enters a probably-ugly election campaign, we must not be surprised over Bible teachings being sneered at and worse, as we, as God’s people, seek to uphold these teachings in the public arena. We do well to question our election candidates on their views about the “images of gold” of our day, be that in local meetings, emails or doorstep conversations. Our votes may be tiny in the wider picture but they are still significant.

Thankfully not for us is a literal fiery furnace, but we are certainly familiar with “the fiery darts of the wicked” in our society, against which the Lord has provided us with “the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6.16). Included in that armour is “the shield of faith” which we can put to good use day by day, as did those three calm, brave Jews in Babylon.

In this way we can join with them, and with those apostles in early Acts when faced with the rejection of Christ, in saying, "If God delivers us, or does not deliver us, no matter - we will not bow down to your God-defying, golden images".

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