



## **STATUES AND FURNACES**

The Colossus of Rhodes; the Great Sphinx; the Buddha of Leshan; the Mo'ai of Rapa Nui; the Statue of Liberty.

People love their statues. But why? The answer goes like this: look at how amazing *they* are! Or by association, *we* are! Or even, *I* am. Now a statue is just a statue: the problems come when people start demanding that everyone has to worship that statue, or what it represents. That everyone has to think, speak, and act like *them*.

Which is where Daniel's friends find themselves today:

### **Daniel 3**

18 years have passed since Daniel 2. And Nebuchadnezzar is dealing with another statue – one he's built himself.

What is this a statue of? One of the Babylonian gods? Babylon itself? Or Nebuchadnezzar? We don't know. But it probably all boils down to the same thing anyway. You can see it in the measurements: 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide, or 60 cubits / 6 cubits. In the Bible, 6 is the number for man (as we were made on day 6), 10 is the number for supremacy. I.e. this statue represents the greatness of human beings.

You can also see it in the language. The word for 'image' is *tselem*, the same word used in Genesis 1:26: "Let Us make man in Our image." I.e. we reflect God's greatness; idols reflect ours.

So, this statue is really about self-worship. And where is it? In the plain of Dura – a wasteland, both geologically, and spiritually. Because self-worship is a barren place to be.

Anyway, Nebuchadnezzar builds his statue, then calls his people to the dedication. And it is a very, very long list – as is the list of instruments! And it's all repeated several times over – the point being, everyone and everything is dedicated to this. And if you refuse to bow, there's a nice big brick kiln nearby for you to be thrown into! So, everyone turns up, with the exception of 3: Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego. A few wise men whose noses have been put out of joint blow the whistle on them, King Nebuchadnezzar summons them, and he orders them to worship his statue (and then come the instruments again!). How do they respond? With vs16-18.

Now not only is this a resounding "No," it's also an ethos statement – theirs, and ours. What does it tell us about how to resist the idols of this world? These 3 things:

**1) We know our King.** "We don't have to defend ourselves to you, Nebuchadnezzar, because what we're doing is right" (vs16). Notice they address him by name, not by title – a bit like saying, "You've lost the respect you're supposed to deserve." But I think they're also saying, "You might be a king ... but you're not *the* King."

Who has the greatest authority in your life? Whose lead do you follow? Spouse, parents, boyfriend / girlfriend, friends, the culture we live in, that singer you like or that YouTuber you follow? Who is your #1 influencer? Too many of us see Jesus as Saviour, but not as King. Increasingly, people even struggle to see Him as Saviour (because that would make us sinners). And for some people, when they're not using Jesus as a swear word, they're using Him to support their latest personal worldview.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego know who the King of Kings is. And it's not Nebuchadnezzar. Or us.

**2) We know His power.** "If we are thrown into the furnace, the God we serve is able to save us ..." (vs17). Do you understand – and believe – what God is capable of? It's an important question. Because the thing that is most likely to cause us to give in to the world's demands is a failure to recognise that God can look after us – even save us from death (if that's His will for us). And even if He doesn't, we still have a future the world does not have.

Jesus put it this way, in Matthew 10:28: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body, in Hell." Which might sound threatening, until you realise this is a warning to those who persecute us (vs29-31).

The point is: God *alone* is all-powerful. He created us. He sustains us. And even when our lives are over, He can and will restore us.

Now that's what you *call* power!

**3) We know His Word.** "But even if He doesn't, we will not serve your gods ..." (vs18). Why not just bow down to this thing? What harm would it

do? They might have thought, "It'll damage our witness." Or, "It'll place our lives above God's honour." But mostly, this: "God says don't."

For some of us, our relationship with God is based on a steady diet of worship songs, self-help books, maybe a bit of God TV. But are we reading the Bible, allowing God to teach us through it, reminding ourselves of the kind of God He is and the life He calls us to live? We're not talking salvation-by-works here: we're definitely saved by faith. What we're talking about is *love*. If you love your spouse, you'll care about what they think. If you love your God, you'll care about what *He* thinks. And it'll show.

When the pressure is on, to adopt the values and beliefs and attitudes of this world, you need to remember who loves you. Enough to die for you. And love Him back.

### **Bad News, And Good**

How does the king respond? Vs19: "The image (*tselem*) of his face changed towards them." The real Nebuchadnezzar rises to the surface, and he explodes (the point being: you know what a person worships by how emotional they get about it). The kiln is then fired to 7x its usual fuel-level ... and into the flames they go! But unlike Nebuchadnezzar, who if he were to lose the world would have nothing, they still have the most important thing there is. Which is the reason Someone stands in the fire with them. And saves them (i.e. you stand with Jesus, He will stand with you).

And Nebuchadnezzar's eyes begin to open.

A final thought. Idolatry was one of the main causes of the Babylonian exile. So, this test was crucial – as it is for us. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has no shortage of idols, things that vie for the #1 slot: passions, pleasures, possessions, professions, power, prestige, popularity, people. Take God out of the picture, we'll find something else to worship – usually ourselves. Which is bad news for everyone! (Note: some of the gold on Nebuchadnezzar's statue would have come from the recently destroyed temple in Jerusalem. The point being: you either surrender your idols to God, or vice versa.)

But here's the good news: Philippians 2:5-11 tells us that one day, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Our job, in the here and now, is to live as though that event has already happened. To let everyone know who our God *really* is.

May we resolve to live that way, this week.