

THIS READING IS FROM THE PROPHET DANIEL

In the eighteenth year of the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, he made an image of gold. Its height was sixty cubits and its width was six cubits. And he set it up in the plain of Dura in the land of Babylon. And he summoned the generals and commanders, the governors, the rulers and overlords, the officers, and all of the authorities of the land to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And the governors, the generals and commanders, the rulers and overlords, the noblemen, the officers, and all of the authorities of the land gathered together and came to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And a proclamation was read for all to hear:

O peoples and nations and languages, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, the flute, the drum, the lyre, the psalter, and a symphony of the music of every nation, you shall bow down and worship the image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not bow down and worship shall be thrown immediately into a burning, fiery furnace.

And so it was that when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the flute, the psalter, and the playing of every nation's music, every people and nation and language bowed down and worshipped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

At that time some Chaldean men who were malicious toward the Jews, went up to Nebuchadnezzar and said, "O King, may you live forever! You have given the command to all men who hear the sound of the trumpet, the flute, the lyre, the psalter, and the music of every nation, that whoever does not worship the golden image be thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. Now, there are here some Jewish men, whom you appointed over the affairs of the land of Babylon, Sedrak, Misak and Abednago, who have not obeyed your order, O King. They do not serve your gods, and they do not worship the golden image that you set up."

Immediately Nebuchadnezzar, in anger and rage, ordered them to summon Sedrak, Misak and Abednago. And they brought them to the king.

Nebuchadnezzar responded to them and said, "Is it true, Sedrak, Misak and Abednago, that you do not serve my gods, and that you do not worship the golden image that I set up? Yet when you hear the sound of the trumpet and the flute and the drum and the lyre and the symphony of the music of all nations, if you are ready to bow down and worship the image that I made, [well and good]. But if you do not worship it, then you shall immediately be thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. And what god will save you from my hands?"

Sedrak, Misak and Abednago said to King Nebuchadnezzar:

"We do not need to answer your question. For it is our God in heaven whom we worship. He is able to save us from the burning, fiery furnace. But even if He does not, let this be known to you, O King: We will not worship your gods, nor the golden image that you have set up."

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the color of his face changed because of Sedrak, Misak and Abednago. And he said, "Heat up the furnace seven times hotter so that they will burn to death." And five strong men tied up Sedrak, Misak and Abednago tightly and threw them into the burning, fiery furnace. Then those men were tied up with their robes, their pants, their tunics and stockings and they were hurled into the middle of the burning, fiery furnace, for the king's order had become more harsh and the furnace was burning seven times hotter than before.

And the three, Sedrak, Misak and Abednago, fell, tied up, into the midst of the furnace. But walking in the middle of the fire, they began singing and praising the Lord God! And in this way, Azariah rose up and began to pray. He opened his mouth in the middle of the furnace and said:

“Blessed are you, Lord, God of our fathers. Praised and glorified is your name forever. For you are fair in everything that you have done to us, and all of your deeds are true.

Your paths are straight and your judgments are true.

For every situation you have made laws preserving the truth. You have made them for us and for the holy city of our fathers, Jerusalem.

For you have done all of this truly and lawfully because of our sins.

For we have sinned and broken the law, rebelling from you. Even more have we sinned in every way.

And we have not obeyed your commandments. We have not kept them or observed them as you commanded us for our own good.

And everything you did to us and everything you made for us you did rightly and fairly.

You abandoned us into the hands of our enemies, criminals, brutes and rebels; into the hands of a bigoted king, more evil than any other.

And now we have no right to open our mouths for we have become a disgrace and an offense to your servants and worshippers.

But for the sake of your name, do not entirely abandon us. Do not violate your covenant and do not take away your mercy from us.

For the sake of Abraham your beloved and for Isaac your servant and for Israel your holy one.

To whom you promised to multiply their children like the stars in the sky, and like the sands of the seashore.

And now, Lord, we have been reduced to the least of the nations and we are tormented today in every land because of our sin.

At this moment there is no prince, no prophet, and no leader. There is no burnt offering or sacrifice, no oblation and no incense. Nor are there first-fruits to offer you in atonement so that we might receive mercy from you.

But with our broken souls and tormented spirits let us be as acceptable to you as burnt offerings of rams and bullocks, and as tens of thousands of fattened lambs.

Such may our offering today be considered by you so that we may follow you perfectly. For there is no shame for those who hope in you.

And now, we turn to you with all our hearts and we revere you and we seek your face.

Do not disgrace us but treat us gently and mercifully.

And save us in consideration of your miracles and glorify your name, O Lord.

Let all who do evil to your servants be disgraced. Let them be humiliated every time they make an assault. And may their power be crushed.

Then they will know that you are the only Lord God, and you are glorified over the whole universe.”

And the servants of the king, who threw them into the fiery furnace did not cease to fuel the fire with naphtha and oil, and with flax and vines. The flames climbed up and reached more than forty-nine cubits above the furnace. And they swarmed around and surrounded the furnace so that they burned the Chaldeans who were standing there.

And an angel of God descended and came to Azariah and his companions in the furnace, and he touched the flame of fire from the furnace. The angel created something like a wind in the furnace that blew a cool breeze. And the fire could in no way get near the youths. It did not afflict them or trouble them.

Then the three, as if with one mouth, blessed and praised and glorified God, saying:

“Blessed are you, Lord God of our fathers, praised and highly exalted forever.

And blessed is the holy name of your glory, praised and highly exalted forever.

Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praised and highly exalted forever.

Blessed are you, for you look down into the abyss but are enthroned among the Cherubim, praised and highly exalted forever.

Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, praised and highly exalted forever.

Blessed are you on the firmament of heaven, praised and highly exalted forever.

Refrain:

Bless, praise and exalt him forever!

“Bless the Lord all creatures of the Lord. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O heavens. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O angel of the Lord. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all waters beyond the heavens. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all powers. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O sun and moon. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O stars of the sky. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all rain and dew. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all winds. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, fire and heat. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, cold and hot. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, frost and snow. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, ice and frigid cold. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, cold and snow. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, days and nights. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, light and dark. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, clouds and lightning. Bless and exalt him forever.

May the earth bless the Lord. May it bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, mountains and summits. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all plants of the earth. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, all springs. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, oceans and rivers. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, whales and fish of the sea. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O birds of the sky. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord all creatures and beasts. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O sons of mankind, Bless and exalt him forever.

May Israel bless the Lord. May he bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O priests. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O servants of the Lord. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O souls and spirits of the righteous. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, O pure and humble in spirit. Bless and exalt him forever.

Bless the Lord, Anania, Azariah and Misael. Bless and exalt him forever.

For he has saved us from hell and has rescued us from the grips of death, from the furnace, and from the midst of the burning flames, and from the midst of the fire.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good! For his mercy endures forever.

Bless the God of gods, all servants of the Lord. Bless him and give thanks to him, for his mercy endures forever.