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NT504: The Greek Bible & The Western Mediterranean World: OB

Written Assignment #1

In this paper I will be discussing the three additions made to the twelve original Hebrew and Aramaic chapters. Those additions are “The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews,” “Susanna,” and “Bel and the Dragon.” Although there is no other versions of these stories, not even in the Dead Sea Scrolls, all three of these stories remain undisputed in the Talmud. It is possible; however, that these stories were written before the Maccabean revolt in the mid-second century BCE, but possibly written as early as the Persian period which is the fifth and fourth century BCE. Often times many additions were circulated independently, but around 100 BCE, when the book of Daniel was translated into Greek, these additions were attached to the book of Daniel.<sup>1</sup>

There are two key theological questions and themes that I attempt to answer that is reflected between the exile and the rule of the Greeks. These questions are, what relationship do the aforementioned stories have with the book of Daniel? What was the effects of the Hellenistic influence?

The first question I will attempt to answer is “what is the relationship of the book of Daniel and the additions of “The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews,” “Susanna” and “Bel and the Dragon?” The purpose of the additions was to enhance and enrich the story of Daniel and his friends, better known as the three Hebrew Boys, Shadrach, Meshach and

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<sup>1</sup> The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha.

Abedego. All of three of these additions serve to highlight life of the Jewish people in the Diaspora.<sup>2</sup>

Susanna is a short story of a moral purpose. In this story, an innocent victim is accused of a crime. Daniel challenges the guilty verdict by cross-examining the actual villains and then the verdict is overturned and she is pronounced innocent. Some scholars believe that Susanna is a story of the demise of two false prophets, Ahab and Zedekiah, who both committed adultery in the days of Jeremiah. Helyer states that Susanna is a story to teach of Jewish piety of how judgment is will come to those who commit such offenses and that it encourages people to be obedient to God when they are faced with “temptations and pressures” (Helyer 47). Like Daniel, the author also sets the story of Susanna in Babylon. The story in this book reflects the life of the Jews in exile.

Bel and the Dragon, like the story of Susanna, was mystery that takes place during the time of Daniel. The purpose of this tale is the response of the Jews to denounce the sin of idolatry in the Second Temple period. In this story, Daniel outwits the pagan priests of the god Bel. The moral of the story is that those who remained loyal to the God of Israel will be protected (Helyer 49).

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews is relevant to the plot of Masoretic Text Daniel. It consists of a prayer and a hymn. Due to the fact that the prayer and the hymn has absolutely nothing to do with the book of Daniel, it is believed that it was inserted at a later date by an editor. The prayer does not seek God for deliverance, but speaks of how God dealt with Israel when they erred. The hymn is an ode to Psalms 136 and 148 (Helyer 51). Although, there

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<sup>2</sup> Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 46.

is no known connection of how this prayer and hymn fits into the book of Daniel, it does serve a purpose to exhort the believer to being faithful to God (Heyler 52).

The book of Daniel is a unique book in that scholars usually classify this book an apocalyptic writing. In fact, the Hebrew Bible places this book in the Writings (which is known as the Ketuvim), while in the Christian Bible it is placed with the Major Prophets. It is important to point out that the book of Daniel is divided between what is known as “two tales” of chapters 1-6 and the apocalyptic visions of 7-12. Part 1: the tales includes, in chapter 1 the introduction where the scene is set in Babylon, Chapter 2 speaks of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the four kingdoms, chapter 3 tells of the story of the three Hebrew boys being thrown into the fiery furnace, chapter 4 describes Nebuchadnezzar’s second dream of him going mad and of his humility, chapter 5 describes Belshazzar’s feast and chapter 6 describes Daniel being thrown into the lion’s den for refusing to stop praying to his God.<sup>3</sup> So, when inserting these additions to the book of Daniel, it stays in line with the message of Daniel.

The second question I will attempt to answer is “what was the effects of the Hellenistic influence? Both individual and as a community, Jews were faced decisions of who would exercise authority and control within their own community and the Hellenistic rulers often chose those who were more open to Hellenism.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the apocalyptic message in Daniel usually concludes with the message of exhortation for the believer to be steadfast, faithful, to watch as well as pray, look for the signs of the end and to wait with confidence and hope for the salvation that is promised by God to them.

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<sup>3</sup> **Alex Varughese ed**, *Discovering the Old Testament Story and Faith* (**Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2003**), 330.

<sup>4</sup> **Anthony R. Ceresko**, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (**New York: Orbis Books, 2007**), 333.

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