

W 1. Journal Study Questions

Instructions: Choose one of the following texts to read and answer the questions asked. Each offers insight into the world of the 2nd Temple period, though none is considered part of the canon (the Catholic Bible identifies these as deuterocanonical = 2nd canon or additional canonical writings). Their value is that we see real people of faith trying to make sense of their struggles, just like we do when confronting crises that rock our very foundations. Notice that the setting of the exile is still fresh in the mind of the writer, much like 9/11 is still fresh in the minds of those who experience it.

Option 1: Our writer is a 2nd Temple Jew living under Greek rule. He offers a spiritual explanation and imaginative prayer that is aimed at encouraging the hearer-readers who would read this work. The name Azariah (which means “the LORD has helped”) was changed by the Babylonians to Abednego (“Servant of Nego/Nebo,” a major God in Babylon who oversaw writing and vegetation.) The prayer is important for what it reveals about the beliefs of some Jews regarding God, sin, and deliverance.

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men (Apocrypha)

INTRODUCTION

1:1 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked around in the flames, singing hymns to God, blessing the Lord.

² While standing and praying in the middle of the fire, Azariah spoke like this:

COMMUNAL LAMENT, CONFESSION, AND PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE (3-22)

Address to God (3-4)

³ Blessed are you, Lord God of our ancestors. You deserve to be praised and honored forever!

⁴ Everything you've done to us is fair (just).

All your actions are right, your ways consistent; all your decisions are sound (true).

Confession of Sins (5-9)

⁵ You judged us fairly in all the things you've done to us and to Jerusalem, our ancestors' holy city. You were honest and fair in doing all these things to us because of our sins.

⁶ We sinned and broke the law by turning from you; we sinned in everything we did.

⁷ We didn't obey your commands; we didn't keep them or do as you ordered us, although the orders were for our own good.

⁸ All that you've brought upon us, all that you've done to us, has been fair.

⁹ You handed us over to our enemies, immoral rebels who hate God's laws, and to an unjust king, the most evil one in the whole world.

Petition (10-17): Contrasts Israel's Shame in Exile with God's Glorious Name

Appeal to God's Promise to Abraham to make Israel a great nation through Isaac

Reflection on Israel's current circumstances (no temple, no sacrifices)

¹⁰ Now there's nothing that we can say. Shame and blame cover your servants and those who worship you.

¹¹ For the sake of your own reputation, please don't hand us over permanently! Don't set aside your covenant!

¹² Don't turn your mercy away from us! Hold to it for the sake of Abraham, whom you loved, and Isaac, your servant, and Israel, your holy one.

¹³ You told them you would give them descendants, as many as the stars of the sky and the grains of sand beside the sea.

¹⁴ Look, Lord, we have become smaller than any other nation. We are disgraced now in front of everybody because of our sins.

¹⁵ In this time we have no ruler or prophet or leader, no entirely burned offering or sacrifice, no special gift or incense, no place to bring gifts to you and find mercy.

¹⁶ Accept us, please, with our crushed souls and humble spirits, as if we brought entirely burned offerings of rams and bulls as if we brought tens of thousands of fat lambs.

¹⁷ May this be the kind of offering we make in your presence today, and may we follow you completely,¹ since no shame will come to those who come to terms with you.

Petition (18-22): Prayer for Deliverance

Emphasizes God's abundant mercy and marvelous works

Contrasts Israel's (and God's) shame if God does not intervene and the glory God will accrue if He does act

¹⁸ Now we follow you with our hearts, honor you, and seek your presence.

¹⁹ Don't put us to shame! Instead, deal with us in line with your kindness and great mercy.

²⁰ As you have worked wonders before, so rescue us now! Build up your reputation, Lord!

²¹ Let all who mistreat your servants be humiliated. Let them be put to shame and lose all their authority; may their strength be smashed.

²² Let them know that you alone are the Lord God, more honored than anyone else in the world.

THE SONG OF THE THREE JEWS (23-68)

Narrator ²³ Now the king's aides, who had thrown them into the furnace, were constantly feeding the fire with petroleum, tar, kindling, and dry sticks.

²⁴ Flame shot out of the furnace to a height of more than 70 feet,

²⁵ spreading out and burning the Babylonians who stood near the furnace.

²⁶ But the Lord's angel came down among Azariah and his friends and waved the fiery flames out of the furnace.

²⁷ He made the middle of the furnace seem like a cool breeze was blowing through it.

The fire didn't touch them at all; it didn't hurt or upset them.

²⁸ Then with one voice the three began singing hymns, praising and blessing God right there in the furnace. They said:

3 Jews ²⁹ Blessed are you, Lord God of our ancestors. You are worthy of praise and raised high above all others forever. Blessed is your glorious and holy reputation, worthy of praise and raised high above all others forever.

³⁰ Blessed are you in your glorious, holy temple, worthy of hymns and honored above all others forever.

³¹ Blessed are you, sitting on the winged creatures, looking down into the farthest depths, worthy of praise and raised high above all others forever.

³² Blessed are you on your royal throne, worthy of hymns and raised high above all others forever.

³³ Blessed are you in the dome of the sky, worthy of hymns and honored forever.

³⁴ All works of the Lord, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁵ Heavens, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁶ Angels serving the Lord, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁷ All you waters above the sky, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁸ All you heavenly powers, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

³⁹ Sun and moon, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁰ Stars of the sky, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴¹ Rainstorms and dew, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴² All you winds, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴³ Fire and burning, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁴ Cold and heat, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁵ Dewdrops and falling snow, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁶ Nights and days, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁷ Light and darkness, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁸ Ice and winter, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁴⁹ Frost and snow, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁰ Lightning and clouds, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵¹ Let the earth bless the Lord. Let it sing hymns and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵² Mountains and hills, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵³ All you things that grow in the earth, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁴ Oceans and rivers, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁵ Running waters, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁶ Sea monsters and all you things that swarm in the water, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁷ All birds of the sky, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁸ Wild and tame animals, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁵⁹ You human beings, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶⁰ Israel, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶¹ Priests, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶² You who serve the Lord, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶³ Spirits and souls of good people, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶⁴ You people who are holy and have humble hearts, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever.

⁶⁵ Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, bless the Lord, sing hymns, and lift God high above all others forever, because he rescued us from the grave, and saved us from death. God pulled us out of the middle of the scorching furnace and pulled us out of the middle of the fire.

⁶⁶ Tell people that the Lord is good because his mercy lasts forever.

⁶⁷ All you who worship the Lord, the God of gods, bless him, sing hymns, and tell people that God's mercy lasts forever!

Questions:

1. What ideas from this document reflected some of the beliefs about God that you have?
2. What ideas from this document reflected some of the beliefs you hold about sin and its consequences?
3. Do you think this document would have been encouraging to people who lived under the rule of the Greeks? Why?
4. Do you think these sentiments would be encouraging to people today as they struggle with the uncertainties of our day?

Option 2: The writer of this delightful little story expresses Jewish attitudes toward God and the gods of the nations. It is considered the first detective story ever written and reminds me of the popular stories of Sherlock Holmes. Once again, the setting recalls the trauma of exile but puts a positive spin on God's care for the Jews during this time. The story involves Daniel and his keen wisdom over the gods of Babylon and their priestly representatives.

Bel and the Dragon (Apocrypha)

Daniel and the Priests of Bel

Narrator When King Astyages was laid to rest with his ancestors, Cyrus the Persian succeeded to his kingdom.

² Daniel was a companion of the king and was the most honored of all his friends.

³ Now the Babylonians had an idol called Bel,

and every day they provided for it 12 bushels of choice flour and 40 sheep and 6 measures of wine.

⁴ The king revered it and went every day to worship it.
But Daniel worshiped his own God.
So, the king said to him,

King Cyrus "Why do you not worship Bel?"

Daniel ⁵ He answered,
"Because I do not revere idols made with hands, but the living God,
who created heaven and earth and has dominion over all living creatures."

Narrator ⁶ The king said to him,

King Cyrus "Do you not think that Bel is a living god?
Do you not see how much he eats and drinks every day?"

Narrator ⁷ And Daniel laughed, and said,

Daniel "Do not be deceived, O king, for this thing is only clay inside and bronze outside,
and it never ate or drank anything."

Narrator ⁸ Then the king was angry and called the priests of Bel and said to them,

King Cyrus "If you do not tell me who is eating these provisions, you shall die.
⁹ But if you prove that Bel is eating them, Daniel shall die,
because he has spoken blasphemy against Bel."

Daniel Daniel said to the king,
"Let it be done as you have said."

Narrator ¹⁰ Now there were 70 priests of Bel, besides their wives and children.
So the king went with Daniel into the temple of Bel.
¹¹ The priests of Bel said,

Priests "See, we are now going outside.
You yourself, O king, set out the food and prepare the wine,
and shut the door and seal it with your signet.
¹² When you return in the morning, if you do not find that Bel has eaten it all, we will die; otherwise,
Daniel will, who is telling lies about us."

Narrator ¹³ They were unconcerned, for beneath the table they had made a hidden entrance, through which
they used to go in regularly and consume the provisions.
¹⁴ After they had gone out, the king set out the food for Bel.
Then Daniel ordered his servants to bring ashes,
and they scattered them throughout the whole temple in the presence of the king alone.
Then they went out, shut the door, sealed it with the king's signet, and departed.
¹⁵ During the night the priests came as usual, with their wives and children,
and they ate and drank everything.
¹⁶ Early in the morning the king rose and came, and Daniel with him.
¹⁷ The king said,

King Cyrus "Are the seals unbroken, Daniel?"

Narrator He answered,

Daniel "They are unbroken, O king."

Narrator ¹⁸ As soon as the doors were opened, the king looked at the table,

King Cyrus and shouted in a loud voice,
"You are great, O Bel, and in you, there is no deceit at all!"

Narrator ¹⁹ But Daniel laughed and restrained the king from going in.

Daniel "Look at the floor," he said,
"and notice whose footprints these are."

Narrator ²⁰ The king said,

King Cyrus "I see the footprints of men and women and children."

Narrator ²¹ Then the king was enraged, and he arrested the priests and their wives and children.
They showed him the secret doors through which they used to enter to consume what was on the table.
²² Therefore the king put them to death,
and gave Bel over to Daniel,
who destroyed it and its temple.

Daniel Kills the Dragon

²³ Now in that place there was a great dragon, which the Babylonians revered.
²⁴ The king said to Daniel,

King Cyrus "You cannot deny that this is a living god; so, worship him."

Daniel ²⁵ Daniel said,
"I worship the Lord, my God, for he is the living God.
²⁶ But give me permission, O king, and I will kill the dragon without sword or club."

King Cyrus The king said,
"I give you permission."

Narrator ²⁷ Then Daniel took pitch, fat, and hair, and boiled them together and made cakes,
which he fed to the dragon.
The dragon ate them and burst open.
Then Daniel said,

Daniel "See what you have been worshiping!"

Narrator ²⁸ When the Babylonians heard about it, they were very indignant
and conspired against the king, saying,

People "The king has become a Jew.
He has destroyed Bel,
and killed the dragon,
and slaughtered the priests."

Narrator ²⁹ Going to the king, they said,

People "Hand Daniel over to us, or else we will kill you and your household."

Narrator ³⁰ The king saw that they were pressing him hard,
and under compulsion, he handed Daniel over to them.

Daniel and the Lion's Den

³¹ They threw Daniel into the lions' den, and he was there for 6 days.
³² There were 7 lions in the den,

and every day they had been given 2 human bodies and 2 sheep.
But now they were given nothing so that they would devour Daniel.

³³ Now the prophet Habakkuk was in Judea.

He had made a stew and had broken bread into a bowl,
and was going into the field to take it to the reapers.

³⁴ But the angel of the Lord said to Habakkuk,

Angel "Take the food that you have to Babylon, to Daniel, in the lions' den."

Habakkuk ³⁵ Habakkuk said,
"Sir, I have never seen Babylon, and I know nothing about the den."

Narrator ³⁶ Then the angel of the Lord took him by the crown of his head
and carried him by his hair.
With the speed of the wind, he set him down in Babylon, right over the den.
³⁷ Then Habakkuk shouted,

Habakkuk "Daniel, Daniel! Take the food that God has sent you."

Daniel ³⁸ Daniel said,
"You have remembered me, O God, and have not forsaken those who love you."

Narrator ³⁹ So Daniel got up and ate.
And the angel of God immediately returned Habakkuk to his own place.
⁴⁰ On the 7th day the king came to mourn Daniel.
When he came to the den he looked in, and there sat Daniel!
⁴¹ The king shouted with a loud voice,

King Cyrus "You are great, O Lord, the God of Daniel, and there is no other besides you!"

Narrator ⁴² Then he pulled Daniel out,
and threw into the den those who had attempted his destruction,
and they were instantly eaten before his eyes.

Questions:

1. What surprised or delighted you most about these little stories? Did you have any concerns about what you read or how the author expressed himself?
2. What beliefs about God and the nations' gods do you think would have been encouraging to Jews living under the rule of the Gentiles? Why?
3. What can we learn about this time from the themes or ideas presented in these little stories?
4. Do you think any of these sentiments would be encouraging to people today as they struggle with the uncertainties of our day?

#1 I love Daniel's boldness and his confidence in God. No concerns about the story. It was written beautifully. made God's word come alive.

#2 That the Jews God is more powerful than pagan gods. God never lost a challenge to the pagan gods.

#3 The Jews were oppressed-but never lost sight that they are God's chosen people. Theyknew who they were in all circumstances.

#4 This should encourage God's people to endure until death in present times and times to come.