

THE MESSAGES OF THE PRAYER OF AZARIAH AND THE SONG OF THE THREE JEWS

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The Prayer of Azariah¹ and the Song of the Three Jews have been inserted between Dan. 3.23 and Dan. 3.24 MT in both the Old Greek and Theodotion. This lengthy addition actually consists of three parts: the prayer of Azariah itself (vv. 2-22; hereafter the title ‘Prayer of Azariah’ will be restricted to these verses);² a prose paragraph about the fiery furnace (vv. 23-27; hereafter, ‘Prose Paragraph’); and the Song of the Three Jews (vv. 1,³ 28-68; hereafter, ‘Song of the Three Jews’). We can never know for sure why additions were made to biblical texts although it is plausible that prayers and songs were added to these texts in the process of the community’s appropriation of the story about the fiery furnace.⁴ We will see that the Prayer of Azariah makes an important, if somewhat unexpected, theological contribution to the story. The sudden transition in the condition of the three men in vv. 23-24 from being thrown bound into the furnace, which had been heated seven times its normal temperature, to walking around, unbound, accompanied by a fourth, mysterious figure, who has the appearance of a god, begs for more information. This lack is supplied by the Prose Paragraph. Finally, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego⁵ came out of the furnace completely

1. In Protestant Bibles these verses are included in the Apocrypha under the name ‘The Prayer of Azariah’. In the New American Bible these verses form vv. 24-90 of Daniel 3, where a footnote in the Catholic Study Bible (1990) reads: ‘These verses are inspired additions to the Aramaic text of Daniel, translated from the Greek form of the book. They were originally composed in Hebrew or Aramaic, which has not been preserved. The church has always regarded them as part of the canonical Scriptures.’

2. Versification according to the NRSV. Greek verse numbers are 23 higher. Verses 2-22 in English, for example, are vv. 25-45 in Greek.

3. The words ‘They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the Lord’ lead directly into the Song of the Three Jews. See J.J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 199.

4. Carolyn Leeb made this important suggestion in a private communication.

5. These Babylonian names are not used in the deuterocanonical material. Azariah appears in v. 1 in Theodotion, but all three names are used in the Old Greek version of

unharmful, but they offer no thanks to God for their deliverance, and they disappear from the book of Daniel without a trace thereafter. This lack of thanksgiving is supplied by the Song of the Three Jews, which once again may express the community's appropriation of this story. Each additional part deserves attention for the messages it inherently conveys, as well as for the modification it offers to the story of the fiery furnace. The Song itself makes important contributions for our understanding of our responsibilities toward the Earth.

*The Prayer of Azariah (vv. 2-22)*⁶

This prayer is similar to other post-exilic penitential prayers such as Ezra 9.6-15; Neh. 1.5-11; 9.5-37; Dan. 9.4-19; Bar. 1.15–3.8; and the Words of the Heavenly Luminaries from Qumran.⁷ At first reading the Prayer of Azariah seems singularly inappropriate for the context of Daniel 3 since Azariah attributes his precarious position in the furnace to sins, to breaking of the law, to grievous sinning in all matters, and to disobedience to God's commandments (vv. 7-8), and not to the heroic refusal of the three Jews to worship the golden statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.⁸ God's justice is praised, exemplified by God's bringing on these men and on Jerusalem a true judgment (vv. 4-5). The historical setting of the poem, based on internal evidence, would seem to be during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, who is identified as an unjust king, the most wicked in all the world (v. 9).⁹ That historical setting is also indicated by v. 15: 'In our day we have no ruler, or prophet,¹⁰ or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, no place to make an offering before you'. If these conclusions about the historical setting are correct, the addition is bringing the story of the fiery furnace, once told about Jews living in a foreign land during the third cen-

this verse. Azariah and his companions are mentioned in v. 26 (Old Greek and Theodotion). The three Jews offered their praise in v. 28 (Old Greek and Theodotion). They call upon themselves by their Israelite names (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah) in v. 66 to Bless the Lord (Old Greek and Theodotion).

6. It was probably originally composed in Hebrew according to Collins, *Daniel*, p. 202.

7. R.A. Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (SBL Early Judaism and its Literature, 13; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998).

8. C.A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions* (AB, 44; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 40-41.

9. Antiochus is identified as 'a sinful root' in 1 Macc. 1.10.

10. Does this reflect a time when prophecy in general had ended? See F.E. Greenspahn, 'Why Prophecy Ceased', *JBL* 108 (1989), pp. 37-49.

tury, into the context of the final redaction of the book of Daniel, when the persecution of Antiochus was at its peak.

The judgment about this being an inappropriate prayer is tempered by the presence of this same kind of prayer in Dan. 9.4-19, which also dates to the Antiochan persecution, according to critical scholarship. There Daniel himself confesses: ‘We have not listened to your servants the prophets who spoke in your name’ (v. 6). Daniel continues: ‘All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. . . . So Yhwh kept watch over this calamity until he brought it upon us. Indeed Yhwh our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice’ (Dan. 9.11, 14). While many earlier commentators considered Daniel’s prayer in chap. 9 secondary, scholars more recently see no justification in this judgment even if they admit that Daniel’s prayer may have had a different context before it was incorporated into Daniel 9.¹¹ The prayers of Azariah and Daniel affirm that those who turn to God in repentance will be heard. Anatheia Portier-Young observes that the writers of Daniel have consciously taken up and transposed Deuteronomic penitential theology and liturgical practice within an apocalyptic framework.¹² John Collins notes that the traditional confession of sin and prayer for mercy in Daniel 9 are an appropriate reaction to the prophecy of Jeremiah about the seventy years of devastation of Jerusalem that Daniel had been reading according to Dan. 9.2.¹³ The appeal to God in this prayer is not based not on the wickedness of Antiochus but on the assumption of ongoing divine righteousness, mercy and the will to forgive. Daniel concluded his prayer with these words: ‘We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies. Yhwh, hear; Yhwh, forgive; Yhwh, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people bear your name’ (Dan. 9.18-19)! Daniel Smith-Christopher holds that the formulaic confession of sins in Daniel 9 and in the prayer of Azariah is appropriate as a preparation for calling on God to deliver.¹⁴ When in trouble, the writers urge their readers to pray in this fashion.

To the usual three responses by Jews to the persecution by Antiochus—apostasy from Yhwh and collaboration with the tyrant, the revolutionary violence of the Maccabees against the forces of Antiochus, and the apoca-

11. This judgment applies also to the *Prayer of Azariah*. While the introductory verses connect the prayer to the fiery furnace (‘They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing Yhwh. Then Azariah stood still in he fire’ [vv. 1-2]), the prayer itself makes no mention of this specific occasion.

12. Anatheia Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), p. 251.

13. Collins, *Daniel*, pp. 347-49.

14. D.L. Smith-Christopher, ‘The Additions to Daniel’, *NIB*, VII, p. 160.

lyptic, non-violent resistance advocated by the book of Daniel—we need to add a fourth: repentance and turning to God for help, drawing on the resources of Deuteronomic theology. Werline¹⁵ notes that 2 Maccabees 7 (vv. 18,¹⁶ 32-33¹⁷) and the *Testament of Moses* 9 also deal with martyrs who suffer because of the nation's sins despite the fact that the mother and her sons in 2 Maccabees 7 are obedient to Torah (vv. 2, 8, 11, 14, 16-17, 23, 30). *Testament of Moses* 5.3-6¹⁸ describes the sins of the people that led to the imposition of the wrath of God and his stirring up a king (Antiochus), who will crucify those who confess their circumcision (*T. Mos.* 8.1). Yet Taxo and his ancestors themselves never transgressed the commandments of God, so they are innocent sufferers (*T. Mos.* 9.4).

We may stop for a moment to consider how a retributive theology also has its problems when assessing the events of 587/586 BCE. The Deuteronomistic Historian saw these events as divine punishment for serving other gods and/or failing to maintain allegiance to the central sanctuary. Exegetes have considered this as a theodicy or even a doxology of judgment. Jeremiah and Ezekiel, however, attempt to refute the arguments of those who claim that they are being punished for what their parents have done when they say: 'Our parents ate sour grapes, and our teeth are set on edge' (Jer. 31.29; Ezek. 18.2). One could imagine that faithful families in the sixth century would find the punishment of all for the sins of some unfair. Other social-political understandings of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 are possible. King Zedekiah was foolish to rebel against the Babylonian king who had installed him, and even more foolish in trusting in an Egyptian alliance. Or one could consider the attack of Nebuchadnezzar as an example of brutal, imperial aggression. Still, the common biblical conclusion that the events of 586 are God's acts of judgment reflects the point of view that sins of individuals or sins of large segments of the people bring consequences on all. My family's transgression and my nation's transgression are finally my transgression.

The Prayer of Azariah includes a confession of sins in vv. 5-10 and an appeal to God's mercy to reinstate the covenant in vv. 11-22. Azariah pro-

15. Werline, *Penitential Prayer*, pp. 176-78.

16. 'For we [the sixth son speaks as a member of Israel] are suffering these things on our own account, because of our sins against our own God'.

17. 'For we [the seventh son speaks as a member of Israel] are suffering because of our own sins. And if our living Lord is angry for a little while, to rebuke and discipline us, he will again be reconciled with his own servants.'

18. 'They will pollute the house of their worship with the customs of the nations; and they will play the harlot after foreign gods. For they will not follow the truth of God, but certain of them will pollute the high altar by . . . the offerings which they place before the Lord . . . For they will have in their midst judges who will act with impiety toward the Lord and will judge just as they please.'

vides a number of reasons that should lead God to act: the Lord is the God of our ancestors (v. 3); the Lord needs to defend God's name (v. 11); the Lord's long-term relationship to Abraham his beloved,¹⁹ his servant Isaac²⁰ and Jacob his holy one puts an obligation on God (v. 12). Note also Azariah's appeal to God's patience and abundant mercy (v. 19), and God's reputation for doing marvelous works (v. 20). While God had promised to the matriarchs and patriarchs descendants as numerous as the stars or the sand of the seashore,²¹ the Prayer of Azariah calls attention to the fact that the people are now fewer than any other nation (vv. 13-14).²² Does not God need to resolve the conflict between this promise of many descendants and present reality? The Prayer of Azariah assures us that God's action on behalf of his oppressed people would demonstrate to their oppressors that the Lord alone is God, glorious over the whole world (v. 22). The Prayer of Azariah includes the following specific negative petitions: 'Do not give us up forever, and do not annul your covenant' (v. 11). 'Do not withdraw your mercy from us' (v. 12). 'Do not put us to shame' (v. 19). Azariah also utters an imprecation: 'Let all who do harm to your servants be put to shame; let them be disgraced and deprived of all power, and let their strength be broken' (v. 21).

Because of the impossibility of sacrifices, due to the Antiochan violation of the Temple, the Prayer of Azariah volunteers that the people can offer a contrite heart and a humble spirit and that this attitude would be the equivalent of offerings of rams, bulls and fat lambs (vv. 16-17). One is reminded of Ps. 51.17: 'The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise'.²³ Thomas Hieke²⁴ suggests that these words of humility and self-sacrifice are an interpretation of the willingness of Azariah and his followers to undergo martyrdom. The readiness of human beings to sacrifice their own lives for others is equivalent to their actual death and to the sacrifices at the Temple. Yet this penchant for martyrdom is not all that clear. Verses 16-17 could just as well mean 'as if we came with burnt

19. Isa. 41.8; 2 Chron. 20.7; Jas. 2.23. An appeal to God's relationship to the patriarchs and matriarchs as a reason for God to forgive is also found in Exod. 32.13; Lev. 26.40-42; and Mic. 7.20.

20. Jacob is also called Yhwh's servant (Isa. 41.8; 44.1, 2, 21).

21. See Gen. 15.5; 22.17; cf. Gen. 32.12.

22. According to Deut. 28.62, diminution of population is one of the curses of the covenant: 'Although once you were as numerous as the stars in heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey Yhwh your God'.

23. Compare Ps. 141.2: 'Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice'.

24. T. Hieke, 'Atonement in the Prayer of Azariah (Dan 3.40)', in *Deuterocanonical Additions of the Old Testament Books* (ed. G.G. Xeravits and J. Zsengellér; Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies, 5; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), p. 50.

offerings' rather than 'as if we were burnt offerings'. This spiritualization of the cult was necessitated by the fact that because of Antiochus's desecration of the Temple, there was no available place for animal sacrifice.

*A Prose Paragraph about the Fiery Furnace (vv. 23-27)*²⁵

In distinction to the Prayer of Azariah (vv. 2-22) and the Song of the Three Jews (vv. 1, 28-68), this Prose Paragraph is clearly composed originally for this context, even if we now consider it a secondary attempt to fill a gap in the canonical narrative. While Dan. 3.22 states that the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace were killed by the excessive heat, this information is lacking in Theodotion's rendering of Daniel 3 and presumably in the Hebrew text lying behind this translation.²⁶ The Prose Paragraph magnifies the threat to the three Jews by having the king's servants, who are still alive, keep pitching in naphtha, pitch, tow and brushwood. The flames reached the astounding height of forty-nine cubits (about seventy-three and one-half feet).²⁷ These gigantic flames then killed the Chaldeans who were standing nearby. Instead of a fourth man in the furnace, who had the appearance of a son of the gods (Dan. 3.25), the Prose Paragraph identifies this figure with 'the angel of the Lord'. This angel appears numerous times in the Bible, but the reference to this angel in the battle against Sennacherib presents a likely background to v. 26: 'That very night the angel of Yhwh set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians' (2 Kgs 19.35//Isa. 37.36). The angel in the Prose Paragraph drove the fiery flame out of the furnace. The inside of the furnace became as if a 'wind of dew' (NRSV 'moist wind') were whistling through it. Because of this angelic intervention, the fire did not touch the three men or cause them any pain or distress (v. 27).

*The Song of the Three Jews (vv. 1, 28-68)*²⁸

As with the Prayer of Azariah, this song may well have had a different original setting in life. It is only in v. 66 that Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael mention their deliverance from the fiery furnace and their presence in the

25. Collins, *Daniel*, p. 204, concludes that these verses were originally composed in Greek.

26. The Old Greek translation, however, contains this notice.

27. In Dan. 3.19 Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace heated seven times its usual heat. The prose paragraph came up with forty-nine cubits by multiplying seven times seven.

28. This song was composed in Hebrew, and Curt Kuhl (*Die drei Männer im Feuer* [BZAW, 55; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1930]) successfully and convincingly translated the whole Greek text into Hebrew.

midst of the fire.²⁹ Flames and the furnace are also mentioned incidentally in the introductory verse to this chapter ('They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God', v. 1) and in the first verse of the hymn itself ('Then the three with one voice praised and glorified and blessed god in the furnace', v. 28). The Song's celebration of God and of creation, however, does not deal extensively with the miraculous deliverance of the three Jews from the fiery furnace despite the fact that thanksgiving for this deliverance was surely a motivating factor in this Song being added to the canonical text. Because the Temple seems to be functioning and there is no evidence of persecution, the Song may have been composed originally in the third century BCE.³⁰ Since it is inserted before Dan. 3.24 MT the three Jews offered their praise after the angel had cooled the furnace but before they had actually left the furnace.³¹ The Song can easily be divided formally into vv. 28-34 and vv. 35-68, but this does not necessarily lead us to conclude that these are separate songs.

In vv. 28-34 the three Jews offer their own praise³² and declare God to be blessed because of a number of attributes dealing with God himself: God as the God of our ancestors (v. 29); God's glorious and holy name (v. 30); God's presence in the temple of his holy glory (v. 31); God's looking into the depths from his throne on the cherubim (v. 32); God's sitting on the throne of his kingdom (v. 33); and God's presence in the firmament of heaven (v. 34). Keller³³ notes that calling Yhwh blessed is a joyous exclamation of thanksgiving and admiration. Such an exclamation forces itself to the worshiper's lips whenever individuals find themselves before a demonstration of the benevolent might of God. This part of the song is provided with redactional links to other parts of the apocryphal book. The Lord is also identified in v. 3 as the God of our ancestors, and Jerusalem is called in v. 5 the holy city of our ancestors (both are in the Prayer of Azariah itself). God's name is mentioned in v. 3 (the Prayer of Azariah) and v. 20 (the Prose Paragraph about the fiery furnace). A close parallel to the affirmation about God's looking into the depths in v. 32 is provided in Ps. 113.5-6: 'Who is like Yhwh our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?' The speakers of

29. The three Jews call upon themselves to praise the Lord: 'Bless the Lord, Haniah, Azariah, and Mishael. . . . For he has rescued us from Hades and saved us from the power of death, and delivered us from the midst of the burning fiery furnace; from the midst of the fire he has delivered us.'

30. Collins, *Daniel*, p. 207.

31. In Acts 16.25 Paul and Silas sang hymns while they were still in prison.

32. 'Then the three with one voice praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace' (v. 28).

33. C.A. Keller and G. Wehmeier, 'brk to bless', in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann; trans. M.E. Biddle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), pp. 269-70.

the Song in vv. 28-34 recognize the blessed condition of God. Similar praise for the rulership of God can be found in Psalms 96 and 98. Having finished their own praise, they appeal to others to join their chorus.

From our point of view, vv. 35-67 present a much more exciting Song, commonly known in the church as the *Benedicite*. Here the Song appeals to multiple elements of creation to bless the Lord, and it follows each mention of an element of creation with the words ‘sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever’. The identical repetition of this refrain more than thirty times recalls the structure of Psalm 136, where every verse ends with the refrain ‘for his steadfast love endures forever’ and therefore may show dependence on Psalm 136.³⁴ The song may be divided into the following sections: cosmological elements and angels (vv. 35-41); atmospheric elements (vv. 42-51); terrestrial elements, that is, Earth and its creatures (vv. 52-59); and human beings/worshippers (vv. 60-68).

Personifications of nature are also common in Psalm 148, which is very similar to the Song in the use of personifications/apostrophes, as we shall see. This Psalm may be translated as follows:³⁵

Praise that comes from the heavens

Praise Yhwh!
 Praise Yhwh from the heavens;
 Praise Yhwh³⁶ in the heights! (1)
 Praise Yhwh, all his angels;
 Praise Yhwh, all his hosts! (2)
 Praise Yhwh, sun and moon,
 praise Yhwh, all bright stars! (3)
 Praise Yhwh, highest heavens,
 And waters above the heavens! (4)
 Let them praise the name of Yhwh,
 For Yhwh gave orders, and they were created. (5)³⁷
 Yhwh made them stand forever and ever;
 Yhwh fixed a boundary, which cannot be passed. (6)

Praise that comes from the Earth

Praise Yhwh from the Earth,
 dragons and all deeps! (7)
 Fire and hail, snow and frost,
 Storm wind, carrying out his command; (8)³⁸

34. This refrain appears in the last two verses of our Song (vv. 67-68).

35. Translation by Ralph W. Klein.

36. The pronouns ‘him’ and ‘he’ have been replaced throughout this Psalm for reasons of inclusivity. I retained the possessive pronoun ‘his’.

37. This creation by word or speech reminds us of Genesis 1.

38. Not only does the psalmist ascribe animate behavior to this addressee by calling on the storm wind to praise, but the psalmist acts as if this wind can actually respond

Mountains and all hills,
 Fruit trees and all cedars, (9)³⁹
 Wild animals and all domestic animals,
 Reptiles and winged birds, (10)
 Kings of the Earth and all peoples,
 Leaders and all rulers of the Earth, (11)
 Young men and young women too,
 Old and young together—(12)
 Let them praise the name of Yhwh
 For his name alone is exalted;
 His splendor is over Earth and heaven! (13)
 May Yhwh raise up⁴⁰ a horn for his people
 Praise for all his loyal ones,
 For the people of Israel who are close to Yhwh.
 Praise Yhwh! (14)

This Psalm begins and ends with ‘Hallelujahs’, translated here as ‘Praise Yhwh’. Verses 1-6 describe and give reasons for the praise that comes ‘from the heavens’ while vv. 7-13 describe and give reasons for the praise that comes ‘from the Earth’. Seven imperatives of the word ‘praise’ occur in the first section, but only one imperative of the word ‘praise’ is used in the second section. Seven addressees of the imperatives are listed in the first section and 23 in the second section, and all 23 of these depend on a single imperative in v. 7. Both sections of the Psalm conclude with jussives, ‘Let them praise’, in vv. 5 and 13. The sequence heaven and Earth is reversed in v. 13: ‘his splendor is over Earth and heaven’. The only other time when these two nouns appear in this sequence is in Gen. 2.4b: ‘In the day that Yhwh God made the Earth and the heavens’.

Erich Zenger sums up well the meaning of Psalm 148:

The praise of God that unites the various powers and forces, institutions and groups, animals and humans is presented in Psalm 148 as the cooperation of creatures in binding chaos and keeping the cosmos working. The concept of the Psalm, according to which the entire creation is called to praise Yhwh because of the world order he has bestowed, and whereby cosmic as well as social antagonisms are dissipated, ultimately means that the individual elements of creation should, through their praise of God, accept and acknowledge the place assigned to them by God. Praise of God creates community, advances harmony, and leads to the perfection of

obediently to the great command of Yhwh.

39. The fruit trees were presumably under cultivation by farmers, but the cedars grow wild.

40. This verb is parsed as jussive, with the Old Greek (cf. BHS). MT reads imperfect with *waw* consecutive: ‘and Yhwh raised up’.

creation and history. In this, as the conclusion of the psalm emphasizes, a special task is given to Israel.⁴¹

It is instructive to see the similar ways in which the Song of the Three Jews and Psalm 148 construct their picture of all creation.⁴²

	<i>Song of the Three Jews</i>	<i>Psalm 148</i>
Heavenly regions	v. 36 Bless the Lord, you heavens. v. 37 Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord. v. 38 Bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens. ⁴³ v. 39 Bless the Lord, all you powers of the Lord.	1 Bless Yhwh from the heavens; praise him from the heights. 2 Praise Yhwh, all his angels; praise Yhwh all his hosts. 4 Praise Yhwh, highest heavens, and waters above the heavens
Meteorological phenomena	v. 42 Bless the Lord, all rain and dew. v. 43 Bless the Lord, all you winds. v. 44 Bless the Lord, fire and heat. v. 45 Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat. v. 46 Bless the Lord, dews ⁴⁴ and falling snow. v. 47 Bless the Lord, nights and days. v. 48 Bless the Lord, light and darkness. v. 49 Bless the Lord, ice and cold. v. 50 Bless the Lord, frosts and snows. v. 51 Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds.	8 Fire and hail, snow and frost, Storm wind obeying his command.

41. F-L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), p. 640.

42. See also Job 38.22-30: storehouses of snow and hail; the place where light is distributed; the east wind is scattered; a channel for the torrents of rain; a way for the thunderbolt; rain; grass; drops of dew; ice; hoarfrost of heaven; and the face of the deep. There is also a hymn to the Lord and his creation in Sir. 42.15–43.33.

43. See Gen. 1.7: ‘So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome’.

44. It was a wind of dew that cooled the furnace, according to v. 27.

Earth and terrestrial elements	<p>v. 52 Let the Earth bless the Lord.</p> <p>v. 53 Bless the Lord, mountains and hills.</p> <p>v. 54 Bless the Lord, all that grows in the ground.</p> <p>v. 55 Bless the Lord, seas and rivers.</p> <p>v. 56 Bless the Lord, you springs.</p> <p>v. 57 Bless the Lord, you whales and all that swim in the waters.</p> <p>v. 58 Bless the Lord, all birds of the air.</p> <p>v. 59 Bless the Lord, all wild animals and cattle.</p>	<p>7 Praise Yhwh from the Earth, dragons⁴⁵ and deeps.</p> <p>9 Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars.</p> <p>10 Wild animals and all domestic animals, reptiles and winged birds.⁴⁶</p>
Humanity	<p>v. 60 Bless the Lord, all people on Earth.</p> <p>v. 61 Bless the Lord, O Israel.</p> <p>v. 62 Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord.⁴⁷</p> <p>v. 63 Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord.⁴⁸</p> <p>v. 64 Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous.</p> <p>v. 65 Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart.</p>	<p>11 Kings of the Earth and all peoples, Leaders and all rulers of the Earth.</p> <p>12 Young men and young women too, Old and young together.</p> <p>13 Let them praise the name of Yhwh For his name alone is exalted; His splendor is over earth and heaven!</p> <p>14 May Yhwh raise up a horn for his people, Praise for all his loyal ones, For the people of Israel who are close to him.</p>

In both Psalm 148 and the Song of the Three Jews there is clearly an attempt to describe creation comprehensively and whole. The structure of Psalm 148 divides creation into the two realms of heaven and Earth, and then ties those realms together in v. 13 where Yhwh's splendor is over Earth

45. See Gen. 1.21; Isa. 27.1; 51.9. Kuhl, *Die drei Männer*, p. 130, uses this Hebrew noun to translate 'whales' in the Song of the Three Jews (v. 57).

46. Cf. Gen. 1.21-25.

47. For the transition between Israel and priests in vv. 61-62, see Pss. 11.9-10; 118.2-3; 135.19.

48. This probably refers to cultic officials. Cf. Pss. 134.1; 135.1-2.

and heaven. The division in the Song of the Three Jews is threefold: heavens and heavenly bodies, meteorological elements, and Earth and Earthly bodies. In both poems the final section deals with humanity and/or worshippers. In Psalm 148 the view of humanity is inclusive: kings of the Earth and all peoples, young men and young women, old men and youths. For the author of Psalm 148 God is active in both creation and in Israelite history. In the Song of the Three Jews, the section dealing with humanity begins with all people on Earth, but then makes a transition to various elements within Israel: priests, servants of the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous and those who are holy and humble of heart.

What is the literary or religious background of Psalm 148 and the Song of the Three Jews in which the whole creation is called to praise Yhwh? One proposal is the 'science of lists', which were common in Egyptian wisdom.⁴⁹ As Delbert Hillers pointed out, however, this similarity is far from exact.⁵⁰ Psalm 148 and the Song are brief, and the Egyptian lists are long and elaborate. Also, there is very little resemblance between the order of elements in the biblical compositions and the Egyptian data, let alone in the details. Hillers suggested that the literary antecedents are more likely to be found in the imperatives that are common in biblical hymns, frequently toward the beginning of the psalms, and often directed toward aspects of the created order we would consider inanimate.

Here is a partial list of personifications of elements of creation and/or invitations to them to join in praise of God in other parts of Scripture, particularly in Second Isaiah and the Psalter:

'Sing, you heavens, for Yhwh has done it;
shout, you depths of the Earth;
break forth into singing, you mountains,
O forest, and every tree in it' (Isa. 44.23).

'Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O Earth;
Break forth, O mountains, into singing!' (Isa. 49.13).

'The mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands' (Isa. 55.12b).

'Make a joyful noise to God, all the Earth' (Ps. 66.1).

'Let heaven and Earth praise him,
The seas and everything that moves in them' (Ps. 69.35 [34]).

49. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, p. 632; and G. von Rad, 'Job xxxviii and Ancient Egyptian Wisdom', in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), pp. 281-91.

50. Delbert R. Hillers, 'A Study of Psalm 148', *CBQ* 40 (1978), pp. 329-31.

‘Let the heavens praise your wonders, Yhwh,
 Your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. . . .
 The north and the south—you created them;
 Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name’ (Ps. 89.6, 13 [5, 12]).

‘Let the heavens be glad, and let the Earth rejoice;
 let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
 let the field exult, and everything in it.
 Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy’
 (Ps. 96.11-12a//1 Chr. 16.31-33a)

‘Let the Earth rejoice;
 let the many coastlands be glad!’ (Ps. 97.1).

‘Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
 The world and those who live in it.
 Let the floods clap their hands;
 Let the hills sing together for joy’ (Ps. 98.7-8).

‘Bless Yhwh, O you his angels,
 you mighty ones who do his bidding,
 obedient to his spoken word.
 Bless Yhwh, all his hosts,
 his ministers that do his will.
 Bless Yhwh, all his works,
 In all places of his dominion.’ (Ps. 103.20-22).⁵¹

‘Praise Yhwh, you nations!
 Extol him, all you peoples!’ (Ps. 117.1)

Hymns often deal with God’s greatness in creation (e.g. Psalms 8, 29 and 104), and the examples listed above show a common practice of addressing imperatives to God’s creation or elements of it.

But these personifications of elements of creation and the apostrophes directed to them suggest links to a tradition in which elements of creation are deified. Hossfeld and Zenger call attention to Babylonian-Assyrian and Egyptian prayers in which individual deities or living things of the world are called to praise the creator god. They cite a prayer to Amun-Re from the Amarna period:⁵²

You are the One who created all beings,
 The One Alone, who created what is. . . .
 ‘Greetings to you’, cry all the wild beasts,
 ‘Jubilation’ cries every foreign land. . . .
 The gods bow down before your majesty

51. These verses are very similar to the *Song of the Three Jews*, vv. 35-68, except that the verb ‘Bless’ is used instead of ‘Praise’.

52. Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms 3*, p. 633.

And exalt the power of their creator,
Rejoicing as they draw near to the one who made them. . . .

Hillers⁵³ cites similar ideas from a prayer to Ishtar: ‘At the thought of your name heaven and Earth tremble, the gods grow dizzy, the Anunnaki tremble. Humankind praises your awesome name.’ Hillers notes that Gunkel observed that the concept of nature as animate was lodged in human consciousness throughout the Israelite period.

The pre-history of the appeal to elements of creation in polytheism is convincing to me even if in later parts of the Old Testament, such as Psalm 148 and the Song of the Three Jews, monotheism clearly prevails. Even at this stage, however, the use of personification and apostrophes implies a kinship of the worshiper with all of creation. The wholeness of creation and human kinship with creation have important implications for the ecological challenges of our era, to which Norman C. Habel has made many contributions, not least in the Earth Bible.⁵⁴ Humans are dependent on brother/sister Earth, as Earth is dependent in turn on the behavior of humanity. When I was nearly finished with this essay I ran across a defense of the Earth Bible project, which ends as follows:

The metaphor of voice [for Earth] is more than a rhetorical device; exploring this metaphor becomes another hermeneutical tool to enable us to move beyond the dualisms that we as a team have inherited as Western thinkers, and to begin relating to Earth as kin rather than commodity, as partner and co-creator rather than property.⁵⁵

All Creatures of our God and King

The hymn ‘All Creatures of our God and King’, attributed to St Francis (1182–1226), and perhaps inspired by Psalm 148 and the *Benedicite*, shows that the personification of elements of creation and the kinship between (Christian) worshippers and the natural world persisted well into the second millennium of the Common Era. Note the addressees:

Stanza 1. all creatures; burning sun

Stanza 2. rushing wind and breezes soft; clouds that ride the winds aloft;
rising morn; lights of evening

53. Hillers, ‘Psalm 148’, p. 332.

54. As one of my most important and influential professors in seminary, Norman Habel stimulated me to pursue a career in biblical studies. We later served together on the faculty of Concordia Seminary, which we both left at the end of the purge that led to Christ Seminary-Seminex.

55. The Earth Bible Team, ‘The Voice of Earth: More than Metaphor’, in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets* (ed. Norman C. Habel; The Earth Bible, 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), p. 28.

Stanza 3. flowing waters; fire

Stanza 4. mother Earth; fruits and flowers

Stanza 6. an apostrophe to death itself, which transforms this age-old enemy into the vehicle that conveys the dying Christian into the presence of Christ. Death is now 'kind and gentle'.

Stanza 5. an appeal to fellow believers, and

Stanza 7. a summative exhortation to all created things. The hymn 'Holy, Holy, Holy', based primarily on the call of Isaiah in Isaiah 6, has this line that is similar in Psalm 148 and the Song of the Three Jews in stanza 4: 'All thy works shall praise thy name in Earth and sky and sea'.

All who sing the hymn of St Francis, which invokes all elements of creation to praise God, need to listen to these creaturely voices as well.

Conclusion

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, although probably originally composed for other contexts, were inserted into Daniel 3 in the Hebrew text lying behind the Old Greek and Theodotion, and then, together with the Prose Paragraph, were eventually put together, at least in Protestant Bibles, as their own apocryphal book. The Prayer is a good example of the postexilic penitential prayer and of the continuing vitality of the Deuteronomistic movement. The Song of the Three Jews has been a popular canticle in the church, and its lively use of personifications and apostrophes, its wholistic understanding of creation, and the kinship it presupposes between human worshippers and creation in all its parts give it new life and urgency for all who value creation and seek to defend it.