

It ends with the men praising God and thanking him for saving them from the flames of the furnace. (3:88-90).

“Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael bless the Lord .. for he has rescued us from the underworld, he has saved us from the hands of death, he has snatched us from the fiery furnace .. give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his love is everlasting”

The very great beauty of the main body of praise is best seen in the English translation given in the Divine Office. This has a rhythmic moving appeal not matched by other translations. Compare below:

Divine Office

O all you works of the Lord,
O bless the Lord
To him be Highest Glory and
Praise for ever
And you sun and moon,
O bless the Lord
And you stars of the heavens,
O bless the Lord,
And you showers and rain,
O bless the Lord
To him be highest glory and
praise for ever

Jerusalem Bible

Bless the Lord all the Lord's creation
Praise and glorify him for ever
Bless the Lord sun and moon,
Praise and glorify him for ever
Bless the Lord stars of heaven,
Praise and glorify him for ever
Bless the Lord rain and dew,
Praise and glorify him for ever

This great prayer first praises God for **Himself**, and then as **Creator**, within a systematic listing of creation - angels, the universe, non-living matter, night and day, living matter: - fish, animals, humanity, then specific mention of Israel, priests, servants of God, the dead and the humble of heart, and finally the three men themselves.



For the writer, as for us, God is ONE and RULER OF ALL.

Our Catholic Faith Prayer and Spirituality 2010-2011

6. The Magnificent Prayers of the Men in the Furnace in the Book of Daniel



1. What is the primary concern of the story about the three men and does it have any concern for us today?
2. What covenants are referred to in the prayer of Azariah and do they have any significance for us now?
3. Does perfect prayer consist only in pure praise of God as in the prayer of the three men in the furnace?

The Book of Daniel

The Structure and style of the Book of Daniel is complex. It has parts written in Hebrew and parts in Aramaic; sometimes it is written from a personal viewpoint using 'I' but at other times it describes the actions of others; the first chapters (1-6) are stories but then a series of visions follow. The great Prayer of Praise of the three devout Jews is written in Aramaic and appears in chapter 3 as part of a story that which makes no mention of Daniel at all, not even under his 'Babylonian' name of Belteshazzar.

The Story of the Three Devout Jews

Similar to the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den in opposing idolatry, a command of King Nebuchadnezzar for everyone to worship a golden statue is disobeyed by three Jews holding high office at Babylon. The Jews are named in the narrative sections under their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, but given their Jewish names of Azariah, Hananiah (or Ananias) and Mishael in the Prayer sections.



For their disobedience they are thrown into a furnace but survive thanks to the intervention of an angel. The King is so impressed by God's power that he not only pardons them but decrees death for anyone who shows disrespect to their God.

A Powerful Preliminary Prayer

Before the great Prayer, a powerful Prayer of praise, humility, guilt, and petition is made by Azariah (3:26ff). This prayer is said in the usual context of Old Testament spirituality with its reference to the covenant and the Patriarchs but, importantly, with a recognition of the importance of a new relationship with God based on the heart (as in Jer.31).

Praise

"May you be Blessed and revered, Lord God of our ancestors"

Humility

"You have treated us rightly and truly as our sins deserve"

National Guilt

"We have sinned and committed a crime by deserting you,
We have not listened to your commandments"

Petition Based on Previous Covenants

"Do not abandon for ever, do not repudiate your covenant ..
For the sake of Abraham .. Isaac .. Jacob
Rescue us in accordance with your wonderful deeds"

Covenant of the Heart

"We have no place to make offerings to you ..
but may the contrite soul, the humbled spirit
be as acceptable to you, and now we put our
whole heart into following you"



The Great Prayer of Praise

The three men pray together in unison. The Prayer must, therefore, either have been a common prayer, or the writer wrote expressly for the Book of Daniel as a reflection of his own praise for God.

The main part of the Prayer itself is a beautiful series of paired phrases, the first part of each asking part of God's creation to bless him, and the second part giving glorification to God (over).

However, it is preceded with a shorter series of paired phrases that, in turn, recognise the historical relationship of God to the Jews,

"May you be blessed, God of our ancestors" and that recognise his Name, his presence in the Temple, and his universal Kingship - from the depths of the abyss to the highest heavens (3:52-56).