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Azariah, Prayer of

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Prayer of Azariah

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AZARIAH, PRAYER OF

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell

Found in Greek texts of Daniel 3 (between verses 23 and 24) in Codex Chisianus (9 – 10 century A.D.) of the Septuagint and in that of Theodotion (first century A.D.), the prayer (Dan 3:24-25) is a communal confession of Israel's sinfulness, like Daniel 9:4-19; Ezra 9:6-15; Nehemiah 9:6-37; Baruch 1:15-3:8. It is divided into two parts (3:26-37 and 38-45): a contrast between God (3:26-38) and the community (3:29-37) in the first, then a description of the people's needs (3:38) and desire to worship and obey (3:39-41), concluding with a plea for divine help (3:42-45).

The prayer begins with the typical phrase "Blessed are you, God of our fathers" (see 1 Chronicles 29:10, 20); "your Name is glorified forever" celebrates the divine presence as the source of attributes (justice, truth, uprightness) evident through deeds. "all your judgments are true" is an act of faith that the people's present predicament is just (3:28). The formal confession of sins lists three verbs typical of liturgical prayer (Psalm 106:6; 1 Kgs 8:47) and then the people's failure to obey, observe and act to fulfill the commandments (3:29-30). The exile is God's just judgment, deliverance to vicious enemies (3:31-32). Like the prophetic plea, the prayer calls for God to act for the sake of his Name (3:34) and the three great patriarchs, to whom the promise of numerous progeny was given (3:34-36). The present misery comes from "our sins" (3:37); the community lacks leaders and a Temple but asks that contrite and humble prayer may have a sacrificial value (3:38-40). Then they will be able to follow God and seek his face in awe (3:40-41). The appeal for a new beginning depends on divine mercy (3:42) and should bring glory to God's Name (3:43). The persecutors should be punished so that they will know that the Lord is the only God (3:44-45).

Arguments that this was an independent prayer, a national lament like Psalms 44, 74, 79, 80, may be linked to studies that revert the text to Hebrew (Moore p. 60-61). The insertion into Daniel is part of the Greek translator's effort to preserve independent spiritual gems for posterity. The redactor saw that Azariah ("The LORD has helped") manifested the meaning of his name when this prayer was attributed to him. The three youths are witnesses to Israel's fidelity to the commandments (Daniel 1:8-16) but, like the martyrs of 2 Maccabees 6-7, they identify themselves with their compatriot's burden of disobedience and sin. As the entire community prayed in the confession of sins on the Day of Atonement, these youths pleaded for the restoration of Temple worship after God had forgiven Israel's infidelities for the sake of the divine Name and for the patriarchs. This prayer follows the pattern of Daniel 9:4-19 so is not out of place for a tradition of martyrs expressing solidarity with the sinful Israelites and offering themselves as vicarious victims for the entire community.

Bibliography

M. Gilbert, "La prière d'Azarias," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 96 (1974) p. 561-582; Carey A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977) p. 39-61.

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