

Dr. David deSilva, Apocrypha: Witness Between the Testament, Session 7, A Closer Look Wisdom of Solomon, Greek Esther, 3 Maccabees Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 7, 4 Maccabees, Ps. 151, Prayer of Manasseh, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. DeSilva's lecture explores several works within the Apocrypha, providing context and analysis. He begins with 4 Maccabees, examining its philosophical arguments about reason and passions alongside its eulogy of Jewish martyrs, and its blending of Jewish and Greek thought. **The lecture then moves to shorter works,** including the Prayer of Manasseh, a penitential prayer attributed to a wicked king, and Psalm 151, an extra-canonical psalm reflecting on David's life. **Finally, DeSilva discusses the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men,** liturgical pieces added to the book of Daniel, that demonstrates the impact of old testament prayers on the worship life of Jewish people and their vital interaction, worship, and piety.

2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 7 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → NT Introduction → Apocrypha).



**deSilva_Apocrypha_
Session07.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 7, 4 Maccabees, Ps. 151, Prayer of Manasseh, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from Dr. DeSilva's lecture on selected books within the Apocrypha:

Briefing Document: Apocrypha Lecture 7 - 4 Maccabees, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men

Overview:

This lecture focuses on five specific texts from the Apocrypha: 4 Maccabees, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, the Prayer of Azariah, and the Song of the Three Young Men. DeSilva explores the historical context, literary features, theological significance, and enduring influence of each work, especially as it relates to Jewish identity, piety, and apologetics during the Second Temple period.

1. 4 Maccabees: Reason, Passion, and Torah Observance

- **Main Theme:** The supremacy of God-centered reason over passions. The book argues that a life of virtue is attainable through disciplined reasoning grounded in knowledge of God and observance of the Torah. "God-centered reasoning is master over the passions."
- **Genre:** Philosophical demonstration and eulogy. It uses the martyrdom stories from 2 Maccabees 6-7 (Eleazar, the seven brothers, and their mother) as examples.
- **Cultural Context:** Demonstrates a blend of Jewish and Greek cultures. The author is deeply committed to Torah observance but also highly educated in Greek philosophy, rhetoric, and drama. DeSilva emphasizes the author's familiarity with Greek philosophical ethics, ideas of the sage, discussions of brotherly and maternal love, and even Greek tragic laments.
- **Apologetic Function:** Defends the Jewish way of life against anti-Jewish prejudice by showing that Torah observance leads to the ethical virtues prized in Greek philosophy (justice, courage, self-control, and piety). The author aims to demonstrate the ethical fruits of the Torah-driven life.

- **Key Arguments:** The Torah is God's "owner's manual for the well-functioning human being."
- God has given humans both reason and passions, and the mind, trained by the Torah, must govern the passions. "When God formed human beings, God planted emotions and character traits inside them. At that time, God also set the mind on the throne in the middle of the senses to function as a holy governor over them all."
- Observing the Torah is feasible and enables individuals to master their desires. "Since the law has told us not to desire, I can prove to you that reason masters the desires."
- **Martyrdom and Atonement:** The martyrs' willingness to die for their faith is presented as a form of vicarious atonement for the sins of the nation, "They exchanged their lives for the nation's sin." Their deaths are even described using the term "hilasterion," suggesting propitiation. This is a significant development in Jewish thought, with parallels to New Testament interpretations of Christ's death.

2. Prayer of Manasseh: Repentance and Forgiveness

- **Context:** This prayer is presented as the penitential prayer of King Manasseh, the king of Judah whose sins were seen as leading to the Babylonian exile. It draws on the account in 2 Chronicles 33, which depicts Manasseh repenting in prison.
- **Theme:** God's boundless mercy and forgiveness, even for the most egregious sinners. The prayer serves to reaffirm the idea that even seemingly unpardonable sins are pardonable. "If God could have mercy on the king whose wickedness made the downfall of Judah inevitable, who indeed is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness?"
- **Significance:** It's a beautiful and heartfelt prayer of confession that has been used in Christian worship for centuries.

3. Psalm 151: Divine Choice and Deliverance

- **Context:** This psalm is not part of the canonical 150 Psalms but was found in various ancient texts, including those from Qumran.
- **Theme:** It consists of two originally separate psalms reflecting on key events in David's life: his selection over his brothers and his defeat of Goliath.

- **Significance:** The psalm may reflect the realization that Israel is now smaller and less important than neighboring nations. But God still values its heart that honors God. Also, it might be that the author of the second psalm here is aware that Israel is once again up against giants. But there is precedent for Israel's success against giants, not by military might, but by God's empowering.

4. Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men: Faithfulness in the Face of Persecution

- **Context:** These liturgical pieces are additions to the Book of Daniel, specifically Daniel 3, which recounts the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol.
- **Prayer of Azariah Theme:** National repentance, plea for restoration, and reliance on God's promises to the patriarchs. This prayer acknowledges Israel's faithlessness and seeks God's reconciliation. The author proposes that heartfelt repentance can have the force of thousands of atonement offerings.
- **Song of the Three Young Men Theme:** Praise and thanksgiving to God for deliverance. It calls upon all creation to bless and glorify God. The first part celebrates God's rule of the cosmos from God's throne in heaven, surrounded by his angelic court.
- **Historical Context:** The Prayer of Azariah may reflect the Hellenization crisis of 175-167 BC, referencing "apostates" (Jewish rebels) as part of the problem.
- **Liturgical Significance:** These texts demonstrate the ongoing creation and adaptation of liturgical pieces inspired by significant events in Jewish history.

Overall Significance:

Dr. DeSilva concludes by emphasizing that the prayers in the Apocrypha demonstrate the vital prayer and worship life of Jews during the Second Temple period, revealing the impact of Old Testament scriptures on their piety. The continuing use of these texts in Christian worship underscores their enduring theological and spiritual value.

4. Study Guide: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 7, 4 Maccabees, Ps. 151, Prayer of Manasseh, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men

Apocrypha: 4 Maccabees, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, Prayer of Azariah, and the Song of the Three Young Men - Study Guide

I. 4 Maccabees

A. Key Concepts

- **Supremacy of Reason:** Understanding the central argument that God-centered reasoning can and should be in control over one's passions, emotions, urges, and sensations.
- **Philosophical Demonstration and Eulogy:** Recognize the dual nature of the text as both a philosophical argument and a tribute to the Jewish martyrs.
- **Hellenistic Jewish Identity:** The author's ability to synthesize Jewish faith and practice with Greek thought and rhetoric. The use of Greek philosophy to interpret the Torah-centered life.
- **Anti-Jewish Prejudice and Apologetics:** Awareness of the work's role in defending Jewish practices and beliefs against criticisms from outsiders. The author's responses to anti-Jewish sentiments and prejudices in his writing.
- **Torah as God's Owner's Manual:** Grasp the idea that the Torah provides guidance for ethical living and self-mastery, which brings us to a proper understanding of the well-functioning human being.
- **Vicarious Atonement:** How the author uses obedience unto death as an act of atonement.

B. Significant Figures

- **Eleazar:** The aged priest and first martyr, whose defense of Jewish law is highlighted in the text.
- **The Seven Brothers:** Their collective martyrdom and unwavering commitment to their faith.
- **The Mother of the Seven Brothers:** Her role in encouraging her sons to remain steadfast.

- **Antiochus:** The tyrant whose attempts to force Jews to abandon their practices provides the context for the martyrs' actions.

C. Key Passages

- **Antiochus's Argument (Chapter 5):** His reasoning for why Eleazar should eat pork and abandon Jewish dietary laws.
- **Eleazar's Response:** His defense of the Torah-driven life and its ethical benefits.
- **Martyrs' Reasoning:** Their emphasis on debt to God, eternal advantage over temporary gain.
- **Author's Interpretation of Martyr's Death:** Atoning for the sin of a nation, Divine providence delivering Israel from former abuses, and the life of the martyr as a sacrifice to find mercy from God.

II. Prayer of Manasseh

A. Key Concepts

- **Penitential Prayer:** The nature of the prayer as an expression of remorse and seeking forgiveness.
- **Manasseh's Repentance:** The significance of Manasseh's story as a demonstration of God's boundless mercy, especially given his infamous wickedness.
- **God's Grace:** Recognizing the prayer's emphasis on God's willingness to forgive those who sincerely repent.
- **Christian Usage:** The historical use of this prayer in Christian churches and worship.

B. Key Themes

- **Confession of Sin:** Acknowledging the extent of one's wrongdoing.
- **Seeking Forgiveness:** Begging for God's mercy and pardon.
- **God's Mercy:** Trusting in God's willingness to forgive and save.

III. Psalm 151

A. Key Concepts

- **Extra-Canonical Psalm:** Understanding its status as an addition to the standard 150 psalms.
- **Davidic Authorship:** The psalm is written as if from David's perspective.
- **Historical Context:** The psalm's reflection on key events in David's life, such as his selection and his victory over Goliath.

B. Significance

- **Choice of David:** Reflecting on God's choice of David despite his lack of physical stature.
- **Defeat of Goliath:** Serving as a reminder of God's power to deliver Israel from seemingly insurmountable challenges.

IV. Prayer of Azariah and Song of the Three Young Men

A. Key Concepts

- **Additions to Daniel 3:** These texts expand upon the story of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in the fiery furnace.
- **Liturgical Pieces:** These were either inspired by events in Jewish history or existing liturgical pieces woven into the narrative of Daniel.
- **Themes of Deliverance and Praise:** Recognizing the prayer's plea for rescue and the song's celebration of God's power and glory.
- **Hellenization Crisis Reflection:** Identifying the potential reference to the Hellenization crisis in the Prayer of Azariah.
- **National Repentance:** The Prayer of Azariah's focus on the nation's sins and need for restoration.

B. Key Themes

- **Prayer of Azariah:** Confession of national sin, plea for mercy, appeal to God's promises and reputation.
- **Song of the Three Young Men:** Praise of God's rule over the cosmos, call for all creation to bless the Lord.

V. General Themes Across the Texts

A. Torah Observance and Identity

- The importance of adhering to Jewish law as a way of life and maintaining religious identity.

B. Divine Justice and Mercy

- God's justice in punishing sin and his willingness to show mercy to those who repent.

C. Faith Under Persecution

- Remaining steadfast in one's faith despite facing threats and challenges.

D. Liturgical Expressions of Faith

- The role of prayer and hymns in expressing devotion and seeking God's favor.

Quiz (Short Answer)

1. What is the central philosophical argument of 4 Maccabees?
2. How does the author of 4 Maccabees blend Jewish tradition with Greek philosophy?
3. In 4 Maccabees, how is the Torah presented as a tool for ethical development?
4. Explain the significance of Manasseh's story in relation to the Prayer of Manasseh.
5. What is the main theme or purpose of the Prayer of Manasseh?
6. Why was Psalm 151 created?
7. What is the historical significance of Psalm 151, referencing David's life?
8. What events from Daniel 3 inspired the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men?
9. How does the Prayer of Azariah reflect on the Hellenization crisis?
10. What are the two parts of the Song of the Three Young Men, and what does each part focus on?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The central argument of 4 Maccabees is that God-centered reason is the master of the passions, meaning that through knowledge of God and practice of God's law, one can control their emotions, desires, and sensations. This allows a person to live a life of virtue.

2. The author blends Jewish tradition with Greek philosophy by using Greek rhetorical and philosophical techniques to defend and interpret the Torah-centered life. The author frames Torah observance as a means to achieve the same goals of self-mastery and virtue that Greek ethicists valued.
3. In 4 Maccabees, the Torah is presented as God's "owner's manual" for the well-functioning human being, providing a training program through which individuals can master their desires and choose the path of virtue. The constant practice of acting in line with virtue becomes second nature through the guidance of the Torah.
4. Manasseh's story is significant because he was considered one of the most wicked kings of Judah, whose sins led to the downfall of the kingdom. His repentance, as described in 2 Chronicles, becomes the basis for the Prayer of Manasseh, illustrating that even the most grievous sinners can find forgiveness through sincere repentance.
5. The main theme and purpose of the Prayer of Manasseh is to express profound repentance for sins and to seek God's forgiveness, emphasizing God's limitless mercy and willingness to pardon those who turn to Him. It reinforces the idea that no one is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness.
6. Psalm 151 was created to celebrate and reflect on significant events in David's life, such as his choice over his brothers and his defeat of Goliath. These events were not covered in the canonical psalms, and the new psalms were written as if by David, providing liturgical reflections on these pivotal moments.
7. Psalm 151 reflects on the significance of God choosing David, who was smaller and less impressive than his brothers, symbolizing that God values a heart that honors Him over outward appearances. The defeat of Goliath represents God's power to empower Israel against seemingly insurmountable challenges, offering hope during times when Israel faced powerful adversaries.
8. The narrative of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol and being thrown into the fiery furnace inspired both the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men. The prayer addresses deliverance from the fiery furnace, while the song expresses praise and thanksgiving for the miraculous preservation of the three men.
9. The Prayer of Azariah reflects on the Hellenization crisis by referring to "immoral rebels who hate God's law" and "an unjust king," which alludes to the apostate

Jews and the Seleucid rulers who persecuted those faithful to Jewish traditions during that period. This reflects that the unjust King wasn't the sole problem, but that apostate Jews also contributed to the problem.

10. The Song of the Three Young Men consists of two parts: the first part celebrates God's rule of the cosmos from His heavenly throne, with the refrain "You are worthy of praise and raised high above all others forever"; the second part calls upon all aspects of creation to bless the Lord, with the refrain "Sing hymns and lift God high above all others forever."

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the blend of Jewish and Greek thought in 4 Maccabees. How does the author use Greek philosophical concepts to support and explain Jewish ethics and religious observance?
2. Analyze the theme of vicarious atonement in 4 Maccabees. How does the text portray the deaths of the martyrs as a means of atoning for the sins of the nation?
3. Explore the significance of Manasseh's repentance in the context of the Prayer of Manasseh. How does this prayer challenge traditional views of divine forgiveness and redemption?
4. Compare and contrast the themes and purposes of the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men. How do these texts reflect the challenges and hopes of the Jewish people during the Second Temple period?
5. Evaluate the role and significance of the Apocrypha in understanding Jewish identity and religious expression during the Second Temple period. How do the texts discussed in this study guide contribute to our knowledge of this era?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocrypha:** Books included in the Septuagint and Vulgate that are considered canonical by Catholics and Orthodox Christians, but not by Protestants and Jews.
- **4 Maccabees:** A philosophical treatise and eulogy that argues for the supremacy of reason over passions through the example of Jewish martyrs.
- **Reason:** In 4 Maccabees, the rational faculty, particularly when guided by knowledge of God and Torah, that can master the passions.
- **Passions:** Emotions, desires, and sensations that can lead a person away from virtuous behavior if not controlled by reason.
- **Martyr:** A person who is killed because of their religious beliefs.
- **Prayer of Manasseh:** A penitential prayer attributed to King Manasseh of Judah, expressing remorse and seeking forgiveness for his sins.
- **Penitential Prayer:** A prayer expressing sorrow or regret for sins or offenses.
- **Psalms 151:** An extra-canonical psalm celebrating God's choice of David and his victory over Goliath.
- **Prayer of Azariah:** A prayer for deliverance recited by Azariah (Abednego) in the fiery furnace.
- **Song of the Three Young Men:** A hymn of praise sung by Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) in the fiery furnace.
- **Hellenization:** The spread of Greek culture and language, often influencing Jewish life and thought during the Second Temple period.
- **Vicarious Atonement:** The idea that one person's suffering or death can atone for the sins of others.
- **Liturgical:** Relating to public worship.
- **Covenant:** An agreement or promise between God and humanity.
- **Propitiation:** Appeasing or making well-disposed a deity, thus incurring divine favor or avoiding divine retribution.

5. FAQs on deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 7, 4 Maccabees, Ps. 151, Prayer of Manasseh, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided text:

FAQ on 4 Maccabees, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men

1. What is the central theme of 4 Maccabees and how does it present this theme?

4 Maccabees argues that God-centered reason is master over the passions. It presents this through a philosophical demonstration combined with a eulogy of the nine martyrs from 2 Maccabees 6 and 7. It uses Greek philosophical concepts but gives them a Torah-centric twist, arguing that Torah observance and knowledge of God empower individuals to control their desires and emotions, allowing them to live a virtuous life, even in the face of extreme torture.

2. How does 4 Maccabees reflect the blending of Jewish and Greek cultures?

4 Maccabees demonstrates a strong understanding of both Jewish and Greek cultures. The author is deeply committed to Torah observance while also being well-versed in Greek language, rhetoric, culture, and philosophy. The author utilizes Greek philosophical concepts like the mastery of reason over passions, the ideal of the sage, and themes of brotherly and maternal love, but interprets them through the lens of Torah-centered living. The author also seems to have been inspired by Greek drama.

3. What is the apologetic function of 4 Maccabees, and what criticisms of Jewish life does it address?

4 Maccabees defends the Jewish way of life against common criticisms leveled by outsiders. It addresses the perception that Jewish practices, such as dietary laws, are irrational or that Jews lack a mature understanding of the world. The author argues that Torah observance is not senseless but a divinely ordained program for mastering passions and achieving virtue, making it superior to Greek ethical philosophies.

4. What is the significance of the martyrs in 4 Maccabees, and how does the book portray their deaths?

The martyrs are presented as supreme examples of how the Torah-trained mind can master any passion. Their willingness to endure torture and death rather than compromise their faith demonstrates the power of God-centered reason. The author goes further than 2 Maccabees by suggesting that their deaths have a vicarious atoning effect, offering reconciliation between God and the Jewish people.

5. What is the Prayer of Manasseh and what is its purpose?

The Prayer of Manasseh is a penitential prayer attributed to King Manasseh, known as one of the most wicked kings of Judah. Its purpose is to reaffirm that no one is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness. It draws on the account in 2 Chronicles where Manasseh repents in prison and is restored to his rule. The prayer emphasizes God's mercy and willingness to forgive even the most grievous sins.

6. How do Psalm 151 and the additions to Daniel reflect the historical context of the Second Temple Period?

Psalm 151 reflects the challenges faced by Israel during the Second Temple period. The psalm emphasizes God's choice of David over his more impressive brothers and may reflect the realization that Israel is now smaller and less important than neighboring nations, thus emphasizing God valuing the heart that honors God over external appearance. Also, the author may be aware of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms, and refers to Israel succeeding against giants because of God's empowerment. The additions to Daniel, including the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men, are inspired by the story of Daniel 3 and were likely composed in Hebrew within the land of Palestine. The Prayer of Azariah may reflect the Hellenization crisis of 175-167 BC, criticizing both unjust rulers and apostate Jews.

7. What is the significance of the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men in the context of the story of Daniel 3?

The Prayer of Azariah provides a prayer for deliverance as the three young men are thrown into the fiery furnace, while the Song of the Three Young Men offers psalms of praise and thanksgiving for not being burned. The Prayer of Azariah is a prayer of national repentance and a prayer for the reversal of the covenant curses as a whole. The author urges God to act for the sake of God's reputation among the nations.

8. What does the speaker note about the lasting impact of these Apocryphal texts?

The speaker notes the enduring influence of these Apocryphal prayers and hymns, specifically the Prayer of Manasseh, the Song of the Three Young Men, and the Prayer of Azariah, within Christian worship traditions. They have been used in Catholic and Anglican churches from the early centuries of Christianity to the present day, highlighting their continued relevance and spiritual value.