

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church
Bible Study Tobit
Session 3

Review of Chapters:

Chapter 1:

The beginning of the story starts as a tradition Jewish writing by establishing who Tobit is in the line of Hebrew genealogy. We know that he writes this story in the time of exile, and that his people had left the traditional worship at the Jerusalem Temple for sacrificing to a calf erected by King Jeroboam.

Tobit, whose name represents “God is my good” clarifies his righteousness by explaining although his tribe of people worship differently, he does go to Jerusalem at times, and he tithes to God properly.

Tobit explains he became a captive and he tried to keep his diet Kosher. Tobit needed to travel to keep his religious piety and therefore established payment to travel safely on the roads.

Tobit again shows his personal righteousness by doing acts of charity and burying the dead, even to the point of having his property confiscated, and his life threatened. Eventually a relative comes into power and interceded on Tobit’s behalf and he and his family were restored.

Comments:

The genealogy contains family names ending in “el” which reflect a relationship with God.

This particular story has Tobit living around 928 to 722 B.C.E.

Ten talents is approximately 350 kg or 750lbs.

In the Middle Ages Tobit was known as the saint for the gravediggers.

Tobit is victimized for practicing his Jewish piety

Chapter 2:

This second chapter again starts with a view of Tobit's charity inviting a poor person to celebrate Pentecost and dine with them. Again, Tobit is called out to bury the dead putting himself in legal and life jeopardy.

After burying the dead and falling asleep, Tobit wakes up blind. He is blind for four years and family cared for him for two of those years. His blindness led his wife Anna to do women's work for wages.

Through Anna's work she receives a goat, and Tobit (so worried about his own righteous status) does not believe the goat has been earned and argues with his wife. Per his wife, this unbelief that God will provide due to his own acts of charity, calls Tobit's faith into question.

Comments:

There is a question as to Tobit's charity leading to his blindness. This may be a reference to Tobit being blinded by his own righteousness that he is separating himself from family and others as suggested by Anna at the end of the chapter.

The ultimate question of this chapter is the relationship between good deeds and a good life.

Chapter 3:

Tobit with grief and anguish prays while weeping. He prays for forgiveness and relief from punishment, he speaks of the commandments of God and judgment. Lastly, he is despondent and feels it is better to die than go on.

The story then turns into a parallel ongoing story of another righteous family stricken with anguish. Sarah, a distant relative of Tobit, has been married to seven husbands who all died prior to consummating their marriage. Sarah was plagued by a demon who was causing their deaths.

Sarah, like Tobit, has reached a point of suicidal ideology. But opposite of Tobit, rather than staying suicidal she begins a prayer of praise and gratitude to God, but then ends by asking God to take her life or answer her prayers.

God hears both Tobit and Sarah and sends the angel Raphael to heal them both. God decides Tobit should regain his sight and Tobit's son Tobias will marry Sarah and free her from the demon.

Comments:

The evil one, or demon named Asmodeus becomes the reference villain in later Jewish legends. It is said that Asmodeus was in love with Sarah hence the killing of her husbands.

Notice the difference between Tobit and Sarah's prayers. Sarah does not confess sin.

The angel Raphael has meaning as Raphael means "God has healed."

Chapter 4:

Tobit is contemplating his death and discusses his finances and burial with his son, Tobias. Tobit then includes burial needs for his wife, Tobias' mother. Along with this he instructs his son on faith and righteousness.

Tobit then lectures Tobias on prosperity and giving alms with a trust in God that these acts will deliver them from dwelling in the Darkness at the time of death.

Tobit then continues on the sanctity of marriage and a reminder of his family heritage. He discusses idleness and reminds Tobias it would be the right thing to do in taking a wife from their distant family tree as is their tradition.

Tobias is then schooled on how to properly reward those who provide services, not to become a drunkard, give to the poor, seek wise counsel, and always praise the Lord.

Then Tobit bids Tobias to recover the money saved for safe travel.

Comments:

Tobit's testament is an early Hellenistic style of the father offering advice to his children with prophetic insight.

The honoring of one's mother and father even in burial is a remembering of the Decalogue, along with the purity of marriage and the evils of sexual sins. The continuing advice reads like the "golden rule" and Tobit points to avoiding excess in drinking.