

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church
Bible Study Tobit
Session 1

The Manuscript of Tobit

As is common with ancient Biblical text, Tobit as we have it here today is not the only version/translation. There are many various ancient versions which is the subject of much debate and speculation. Fragments of Tobit have even been found among the discoveries of Qumran. In 1952 in Cave 4 of the Qumran fragments there were three manuscripts, one in Hebrew and two in Aramaic.

The fragments of Tobit found in Qumran differ considerably from the medieval Aramaic and Hebrew forms of the Book of Tobit that were known prior to 1952.

During the nineteenth century Constantin von Tischendorf discovered a manuscript entitled “*Sinaiticus*” in the library of St. Catherine’s Monastery on Mt. Sinai in 1844 that contained a form of the story of Tobit.

In the Greek version this book is entitled, “*Book of the Words of Tobit.*” In the Latin Vulgate it is known as “*Book of Tobias.*” Along with these varying titles, the characters of the story include a version where both father and son are both named Tobias, which in turn leads to another version entitled “*The book of both Tobiases.*”

The Language of Tobit

This work has ancient versions in Latin, Greek and Syriac among others, but it seems to have been composed originally in a Semitic language, leaning toward an original Aramaic composition. Some argue that the Greek form was the original but this argument is weakened by the Qumran discoveries.

The version we know consider as our modern day Tobit comes from a *Greek Long*, and *Greek Short Recension*. The one used in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* is based on the Greek text of *Codex Sinaiticus*.

***Tobit: Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (CEJL)* eds. Stuckenbruck, Loren T., Pieter W van der Horst, Hermann Lichtenberger, Doron Mendels, and James R. Mueller

Feature: **Tobit: Joseph A. Fitzmyer (2003)**

The Purpose of Tobit

For the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, they have included the book of Tobit not only as a story about Tobit and his son Tobias during the Assyrian captivity in the eighth century BC, but also because it is considered a source of moral instruction, liturgical typology, and prophecy.

The Apostolic Fathers such as Clement of Rome and Polycarp of Smyrna, Greek Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and John Chrysostom, Latin Fathers such as Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo, Syriac Father Ephrem all believed the book of Tobit to be canonical. While Origen and Jerome who would occasionally reference the work, did take issues with its canonicity.

Canonicity

419 A.D Canon 24 Council of Carthage stated that “nothing be read in church besides the Canonical Scripture. Tobit is included in this list as canonical scripture.

Bede, Allegorica interpretation in Tobiam PL91,923C-D states, “For Tobit signifies the people of Israel, who served God with a true faith and works while others were dedicated to idolatry.”

Sermon of St Augustine, Questions on the Old and New Testaments: Tobit
Augustine, Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti, De Tobia, PL 35.2363-4

“For the truly faithful person, the person who does not doubt God’s promises, is the one who gives generously from little. Therefore, comforting his heart with the hope of the future, Tobit, devoted to God, was found to be strong and brave in trial, showing that, when in want, one ought to be all the more vigilant in God’s fear, because if want does not prompt you to seek God’s help, how much less will security?”

In the daily readings of the Catholic church Tobit is often read during the summer months or what we refer to as ordinary time (Pentecost).

***The Early Church Fathers Bible Commentary: The Book of Tobit, ECFBC, ed. John Litteral, June 2021.*

Reflection Questions for week 1

(Please note that you do not have to answer these questions. This is food for thought. And if you do answer them, you will definitely learn something. I do encourage you on doing some of your own research.)

Chapter 1

Do you think Tobit, who is Jewish and striving to be righteous, has struggles with his own ancestry who he stated, “sacrificed to the calf that King Jeroboam of Israel had erected?”

Tobit struggled with the foods eaten by the Gentiles. How difficult is life in exile for the Jewish people? What familiar songs or stories of the Hebrew exile come to mind?

What does the first chapter say about material goods? Acts of charity? How does Tobit’s desire to do things right interfere with society? Why did God let a good man have all his property confiscated? Was justice eventually served?

Chapter 2

What was Pentecost to the Jewish people of this time? Does it relate to the Christian idea of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came into people to lead and guide them into the truth as proposed by Jesus Christ?

What is this story telling us about charity? Is food charity also part of Jesus’ mission? Why do you think food and abundance are always written about in both Old and New Testaments including the Apocrypha?

In this story it is acceptable for Tobit’s wife to work. If this story was written and told orally in the time of Jesus, what does that say about women in society during that time? Is there a possibility that our current view of women’s roles in Jesus’ time may be different than those we have been taught in the past. Again, referring to the difference between ancient Hebrew society and the more modern Greek-like Jews of Jesus’ time.

Chapter 3

When Tobit prays, does it remind you of other Hebrew writings?

Do you feel from Tobit’s prayer/poetry that he is truly repenting?

What did his prayer bring forth in you, emotions, thoughts?

Why do you think Sarah would be plagued by a demon that would kill her husbands before they consummated their marriage? What purpose do you think this narrative serves? Are there others in Old and New Testaments that are similar?

Thoughts about Sarah and her suicide poem/prayer?

In comes the angel Raphael to answer prayers. At the end of chapter three we get a glimpse of God's plan from Sarah and Tobias. How do you feel with God interfering in human affairs on a human level as to show angel Raphael as an ordinary person? Is this a glimpse into the son of God coming to work in the human world as Jesus?

Bonus question:

If you were going to preach on this reading, what would you preach on?