

# Tobit

## Overview

### ➤ Deuterocanonical Books

- The early Christian Church used the same Greek-language Scriptures as the Jews of the time (some of whom spoke no Hebrew), the so-called Septuagint, which consisted of the books of what we now call the Old Testament and the “Apocrypha,” or Deuterocanonical Books.
- During the first century, the Jews disagreed as to what constituted the canon of Scripture. In fact, there were a large number of different canons in use, including the growing canon used by Christians.
  - In order to combat the spreading Christian cult, rabbis met at the city of Jamnia or Javneh in A.D. 90 to determine which books were truly the Word of God. They pronounced many books, including the Gospels, to be unfit as scriptures.
  - This canon also excluded seven books (Baruch, Sirach, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Tobit, Judith, and the Wisdom of Solomon, plus portions of Esther and Daniel) that Christians considered part of the Old Testament.
- In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformers removed a large section of the Old Testament in agreement with the Jamnia Canon. They charged that these writings were not inspired Scripture and branded them with the pejorative title “Apocrypha.”
  - They were written in Greek and not Hebrew
    - Example to counter this: portion of Tobit in Hebrew found at Qumran among the Dead Sea Scrolls
  - Catholics refer to them as the “deuterocanonical” books (since they were disputed by a few early authors and their canonicity was established later than the rest), while the rest are known as the “protocanonical” books (since their canonicity was established first).
  - The Bible has always contained all the 46 books of the Old Testament and in fact, there are still approximately 5,600 original manuscripts that still contain all those books.

### ➤ Tobit

- Book combines historic and wisdom literature
- Theme:
  - Rom. 8:28 – “All things work together for good...”

- How does a loyal servant of God live in this very big and complex world? How does one spiritually survive, and even thrive, *in* this world, without being *of* this world?
      - The preoccupation of Tobit is, I submit, moral and ascetical. It is a book about how the loyal servant of God must live.
      - In this respect, it is instructive to observe that early Christian exegesis of the Book of Tobit was of a predominantly moral and ascetical interest. With very few exceptions, patristic interpretation of Tobit was straightforward and literal, with relatively little, and hardly any sustained, appeal to hidden symbolisms.
  - The longest extant patristic work devoted to Tobit, that of Ambrose of Milan, exemplifies this approach convincingly.
    - After drawing attention to the major moral features of Tobit's character, Ambrose devotes the rest of his discourse to a robust condemnation of avarice and usury.
    - That is to say, Ambrose went to Tobit almost exclusively for moral teaching.
  - Patrick Henry Reardon (Orthodox priest, Editor of "Touchstone" Magazine
    - *Tobit is a short book. Indeed, Jerome tells us that translating it into Latin cost him only "the labor of one day."*<sup>1</sup> *It should be remarked, however, that this small book belongs in a big world, with a rich and very wide cultural setting.*
    - *I like to think of the Book of Tobit as a kind of universal essay, in the sense that its author makes considerable effort to place his brief, rather simple narrative within a literary, historical, and moral universe of surprising breadth and diversity, extending through the Fertile Crescent and out both sides.*
    - *To find comparable dimensions of such large cultural exposure among biblical authors, one would have to go to Ezekiel, Luke, or the narrator of Job.*

## **Characters**

- **Tobit**
  - A faithful Jew from the Northern Kingdom of the tribe of Naphtali
  - Taken into captivity to Ninevah (modern day Iraq)
- **Anna**
  - Tobit's wife
  - Fantastic painting of Tobit and Anna when she is accused of stealing a goat.
- **Tobias**
  - Tobit's son and main character of the book

- The one who goes on a journey with Raphael
- **Sarah**
  - Lived in Ecbatana in Media (modern day Iran)
  - Seven times widowed on her wedding night
  - Tobias' future wife
- **Raguel**
  - Sarah's father
- **Raphael / Azarias**
  - Archangel who is linked to ministry of healing
  - One of the seven archangels who stand before the Lord
  - May be the Angel at the pool of Bethesda
- **Gabael**
  - Relative of Tobit from the tribe of Naphtali
  - Lived in Media
- **Asmodeus**
  - In some angelic hierarchy – a fallen angel just under Lucifer in power
    - One of the princes of hell
    - Possibly corresponds to Abbadon in Rev. 9:11
  - Possibly means “wrath demon”

## Historicity

- **Great debate whether book is historical fact or historical fiction**
  - Catholic Encyclopedia:
    - *Until recently there never was question among Catholics in regard to the historicity of Tobias. It was among the historical books of the Old Testament, the Fathers had always referred to both elder and younger Tobias and to the other personages of the narratives as to facts and not to fancies. The stories of almsgiving, burial of the dead, angelophany, exorcism, marriage of Sara with Tobias the younger, cure of the elder Tobias — all these incidents were taken for granted as fact-narrative.*
    - *With these and a few other exceptions, Catholic exegetes are unanimous in clearly defending the historicity of Tobias.*
  - **From Introduction on the USCCB Website:**
    - *The Book of Tobit, named after its principal character, combines Jewish piety and morality with folklore in a fascinating story that has enjoyed wide popularity in both Jewish and Christian circles.*
- **Mark Shea – recent blog post on his opinion of Tobit**
  - *There are a number of clues in the text of Tobit which communicate to the reader that the author does not intend us to read the book as a historical chronicle, but as a work of fiction.*

➤ **Dr. Taylor Marshall – response to Mark Shea**

- *There is one problem with this kind of defense regarding “Tobit as inspired fiction.” The Church Fathers did not believe in the fictional nature of the book of Tobit. They believed and taught that Tobit was historical person and that the book bearing his name told a true and historical story.*
- *St. Polycarp, St. Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. Athanasius, St. Cyprian, St. Ephrem, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine refer to the characters and narrative of Tobit as historical.*
- *As late as 1822, the Holy See had a book put on the Index of Forbidden Books because it asserted by the book of Tobit was not historical but poetical (the book was Joahnn Jahn’s *Introductio in libros sacros*).*
- *Did St Augustine or even St Thomas Aquinas miss something important when they taught that Tobit was historical and factual?*
  - *Whenever I am asked to side with someone against both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, I get a bit nervous. In fact, it is a pretty safe rule of thumb to always side against a position when both Augustine and Thomas agree with the opposite position.*
  - *Moreover, the Pontifical Biblical Commission decreed that we are to hold the historical books of Scripture historically (Biblical Commission, June 23, 1905)...and Tobit is a historical book.*
- *It is the historical consensus of the Catholic Church that Tobit is not only inspired and inerrant, but that it is also historical. Nevertheless, there had better be some pretty good reasons for defending the historicity of Tobit. Granted, there are some problems. I’ll cite the old Catholic Encyclopedia on this subject of historical problems and then their common answers as they address them much more precisely than I can.*

➤ **We will treat this as an historical book**

**Outline of the Book**

- I. Tobit’s Ordeals ([1:3–3:6](#))
- II. Sarah’s Plight ([3:7–17](#))
- III. Preparation for the Journey ([4:1–6:1](#))
- IV. Tobiah’s Journey to Media ([6:2–18](#))
- V. Marriage and Healing of Sarah ([7:1–9:6](#))
- VI. Tobiah’s Return Journey to Nineveh and the Healing of Tobit ([10:1–11:18](#))
- VII. Raphael Reveals His Identity ([12:1–22](#))
- VIII. Tobit’s Song of Praise ([13:1–18](#))
- IX. Epilogue ([14:1–15](#))