

FINAL PAPER

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NT504: The Greek Bible & The Western Mediterranean World: OA
April 21, 2020

Title of Document: Tobit (Apocrypha)

Hypothesized Dating of the Document, the Author, the Audience, and the Original

Context:

A. Dating of Document:

- **Approximate Date:** 225-175 B.C. was the widely accepted dating of the document.

It was believed to be written after the canonization of the Prophets as the word of God¹ but before the turbulent times of Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.) and the Maccabean revolt (167 B.C.).² This assumption was drawn since the names of the prophets, Nahum and Amos, were mentioned in the document³, and the chaos that took place during the times of Antiochus IV and Maccabean were not mentioned in the document.

B. Author(s)/Editor(s) of Document: A pious Jew was believed to be the author of the

document.² The author reflected biblical elements throughout the story of Tobit. Tobit belonged to the tribe of Naphatali (Tobit 1:1), and was taken captive to Nineveh (Tobit 1:3) like how the Israelites were taken into captive to Babylon, he would observe the Jewish festivals and offer sacrifices (Tobit 1:6-7). The other biblical elements reflected in the story of Tobit will be discussed further in the section of Analytical Skills below.

C. Major events in the Jewish world and the locality: The document was written during the reign of Antiochus III the Great, followed by Seleucus IV Philopator.⁴ The Jews had

1 David Noel Freedman, Gary A. Herion, et al., eds., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 12.

2 Larry R. Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period: A Guide for New Testament Students* (Downers Grove, IL:IVP Academic, 2002), 45.

3David Noel Freedman, Gary A. Herion, et al., eds., *The Anchor*, 8.

4Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period*, 114 and 507.

a short-lived period of peace when Antiochus III ruled and then hellenism became more and more dominant as the emperor was defeated by the Romans.

D.Intended Audience: The intended audience were the Jews who lived during the reign of Antiochus III and Seleucus IV Philopator where the Jews had to choose between following their own ancestral traditions and adapting to the hellenistic culture.

E.The document is prescriptive since this document could be used to encourage the Jews who lived in turmoil due to exile and war, and faced the challenge of adapting to the hellenistic culture and abandoning their own Jewish traditions. As described in Helyer's book, this document helped to encourage the Jews in exile to hold out hopes that the Lord would send help and deliverance if they remained faithful in God and living out the Torah.⁵

Structural Divisions

The document of Tobit can be outlined as follows based on changes in themes, characters, and events:

1. Tobit 1:1-22, it described Tobit's virtuous life as a pious Jew. He observed Jewish festivals, performed acts of charity, buried the Israelites who were put to death by the king. He escaped from the anger of king Shalmeneser who wanted to kill him because he buried the Israelites.
2. Tobit 2:1-10, Tobit returned home after king Shalmeneser died and he buried Israelites again and became blind.
3. Tobit 2:11-3:6, Tobit's wife, Anna, received a goat from her owner that she worked for and Tobit urged her to give it back because he suspected that it was stolen, he then prayed to God and wished for death.

⁵Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period*, 44.

4. Tobit 3:7-15, Sarah, the daughter of Raquel, married seven husbands and the demon Asmodeus killed all her husbands. Sarah also prayed for death.
5. Tobit 3:16-17, Raphael, was sent by God to heal Tobit's eyes and set Sarah free from the demon. It was said that Tobias, son of Tobit, would marry Sarah.
6. Tobit 4:1-5:3, Tobit instructed Tobias of the commands that he should live by after Tobit's death, and sent Tobias to get the money he left with Gabael at Rages.
7. Tobit 5:4-6:9, Tobias met Raphael, who was known as Azariah, whom Tobit found to be trustworthy. Tobias and Raphael then went on the journey together to Gabael at Rages. They caught a fish on the way that could make demon go away and treat someone's eyes.
8. Tobit 6:10-8:21, Raphael said to stay with Raguel and his wife Edna, who were relatives of Tobias, and that Tobias should marry their daughter Sarah so Tobias would inherit Raquel's possessions. Sarah's demon was defeated by the fish.
9. Tobit 9:1-6, Tobias sent Raphael to get the money from Gabael and Gabael also joined the wedding celebration.
10. Tobit 10:1-11:18, Tobit and Anna got anxious that their son had died, meanwhile Tobias, Sarah, and Raphael were heading back home after Raguel gave Tobias half of his possessions. Tobias used the fish and restored Tobit's eyesight after he got back home. Tobias and Sarah then had a wedding celebration at Tobit's home.
11. Tobit 12:1-13:17, Tobias planned to give half of what he got from Raguel to Raphael. Raphael disclosed his true identity as one of the seven angels who entered before the glory of the lord, then he ascended back to the heavens. Tobit and Tobias praised God that he was a merciful God to his children who were righteous.

12. Tobit 14:1-15, Tobit lived to 112 years old and told Tobias to head back to Media as Nineveh would be destroyed just as the prophets had said. Anna also died. Tobias lived a long life in Media after his parents-in-law also died. He praised God for the destruction of Nineveh and that the wicked Assyrians became prisoners.

Key Theological Themes/Topics

The author of this document tried to encourage the Jews in exile who were facing war with neighboring countries and cultural clashes between their traditions and hellenism: virtuous Jews in exile would face trials and tribulations but as long as they were faithful in trusting God and following God's commands, God's deliverance would come to them and his words through the prophets would all come true. The destruction of Nineveh signified that the wicked would be punished by God as he promised. But there is a question one might be led to think back then and even in today's world- Why would God let sufferings come to virtuous people who are faithful to God? The story of Tobit had a happy ending, but how could this story be encouraging when the ending turned out to be not so happy or even tragic in real life for someone? Even though this story is fictional in genre⁶, the use of fish to drive away demon might be a bit too far-fetched and had no biblical foundation.

Analytical Skills

The story of Tobit reflected biblical elements which showed that the author was a Jew and it certainly made the story more relatable for the Jews. Tobit's story acted like a reminder for the Jews to remember what had happened to their ancestors and how God had been with them in the past. God did it in the past and he would continue to do it - his deliverance would come and all his promises would be fulfilled in due time when the Jews were faithful in trusting God and following his commands. Here are the biblical elements that the author used in the story:

⁶Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period*, 44.

1. Similarities could be traced to the book of Daniel. In Tobit 1:10-13, Tobit refused to eat the food of the gentiles when he was in exile, he had good standing with the king. In Daniel 1:8-21, Daniel and his friends refused to defile themselves with royal food and wine everyone else had, and they also had good standing with the king.
2. Similar to the book of Job, Tobit had similar experiences as Job where sufferings happened to virtuous and blameless men, they both wished for death but persevered and remained faithful to God and were later rewarded with more blessings and possessions at the end.
3. The commands Tobit taught Tobias in Chapter 4 of Tobit were similar to the ones God taught the Israelites through Moses after the Israelites were led out of Egypt in Exodus 20 - 23 and these commands were later reinforced in the book of Deuteronomy.
4. The close father and son relationship between Tobit and Tobias was similar to those between Abraham and Issac, Issac and Jacob, etc., in the book of Genesis.⁷
5. Tobias's engagement to his wife Sarah bore resemblances to those of Issac and Jacob to their wives in Genesis.⁶
6. God's reward for the just and punishment of the wicked in Tobit 13 and 14 resembled the blessings and curses Israelites would receive whether they obeyed God or not in Deuteronomy 28 and 29.⁶
7. There was a visitation of an angel in the book of Numbers, chapter 22, in the story of Balaam.

Summary Statement

Studying the different primary documents that were written in the Second Temple Period helped me understand the historic background of the Jews and the formation of Christianity. The Second Temple Period marked a time of constant chaos for the Jews, when they were in exile, under the rule of non-Jewish kings, being oppressed, challenged by hellenism. The Jews, even

⁷David Noel Freedman, Gary A. Herion, et al., eds., *The Anchor*, 8.

though a people chosen by God, had gone through a long period living in grief and much hardships because of their disobedience to God. The documents in this period were written with much anticipation for God to punish the wicked and restore the Jews as promised by God. These writings also served to remind the Jews that their sins caused God to turn away from his people, but he would restore them if they were willing to repent, turn back to him, and follow his commands.

The New Testaments continued God's plan of salvation to save people from the rest of the world. The Gentiles, however, ought not to be proud but tremble, like in Romans 11:20-21, because of the unbelief of the Jews, we were given the opportunity to be grafted in and share in the nourishing sap from the olive root. Because of God's great love and grace for his creation, Jesus died for us all, we are able to be called the children of God through faith and receive the the greatest gift of salvation. But we have to stay alert, and do not despise this wonderful gift of salvation, these primary documents would serve the same purpose to us as they did to the Jews- to remind us that it was disobedience and unbelief that made God turn away from his people.

Just like the Jews that were in exile waited anxiously for God to fulfill his promises, the whole world is waiting anxiously for God to fulfill his promises to us. We are living in such chaos with the global pandemic going on, many lost their lives and millions lost their jobs, many people live in hopelessness and fear. People who believed in God died from the disease along with those who did not believe in God. Is God angry at our sins? What is God's heart in this pandemic? When is it going to end? It seems like we are in similar situations as the Jews who lived in the Second Temple Period, the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Romans 8:22). Christians today need to be reminded about God's promises to us in the Bible: whoever believes will have eternal life (John 3:15); God

is love (1 John 4:8); nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39); when we pray to him he will give us peace that transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7); love God with all our heart, soul, and mind; love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-39); people from every nation, tribe, people, and language worship the lamb of God (Revelation 7:9). God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, he is faithful and keeps all his promises. We will keep our hope just like how the Jews did, we will pick up our cross to follow Jesus, live out God's commands and be the light and salt to the world, so we can run to his embrace and be called good and faithful servants when we see Jesus face to face one day!