

TOBIT – SHORT VERSION

The Book of Tobit, named after its principal hero, is one of the seven books of the Old Testament not found in the Hebrew Canon or Protestant Canon of the Bible.

Although Tobit, Judith and Esther are placed amongst the *historical books* of the Old Testament, they do not belong there because they are more fictional (called by some authors “historical novels”) than historical. In his book *Reading the Bible*, Timothy Carmody writes that the books of Tobit, Judith and Esther “describe the faith of a particular person who acts in accord with God’s will and brings about the salvation of the nation or the blessings of God on his or her family. All three books introduce a problem or crisis at the beginning of the book that is developed and eventually resolved in the story” (p.99).

Since Tobit and Judith were written around the time of the Maccabees and Esther sometime before them, I am placing these three “historical novels” after the books of Maccabees.

Historical context. Tobit is portrayed as a devout and wealthy Israelite living in Nineveh. He is one of the many deportees taken there after the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians in 721BC.

In its introductory remarks on Tobit, the *Collegeville Bible Commentary* writes: “*The Book of Tobit was written around the beginning of the second century B.C.*

“This period was marked by growing Hellenization. Greek customs were adopted, the Greek language became common, and Greek cities were built with gymnasia and hippodromes.

“Jewish response to Hellenization was mixed. Zealous Jews resisted every trace of Greek influence, while others found ways to adapt Greek philosophy and language to the service of Judaism. The question of whether to adapt to Greek culture became crucial under the Seleucids, who began to force what had been a rather peaceful progress of Hellenization. The author of Tobit wrote for Jews who were

concerned about being faithful to God and who were questioning God’s fidelity to them in the midst of this cultural turmoil”(p.832).

Timeless themes. Tobit contains many timeless themes such as prayerfulness, family loyalty, piety towards parents, purity of marriage, reverence for the dead, charity toward the stranger and the poor, challenge of cultural assimilation, and even the influence of demons and angels.

Division of chapters

PART 1: Predicaments of Tobit and Sarah (Chapters 1-3)

PART 2: Journey of Tobiah & Raphael (Chapters 4-6)

PART 3: Marriage of Tobiah & Sarah and the healing of Sarah (Chapters 7-10)

PART 4: Journey home and healing of Tobit (Chapters 11-12)

PART 5: Tobit’s prayer of thanksgiving and wise advice (Chapters 13-14)

This is such a beautiful story it is worth reading all 14 chapters.