Week 70, Lecture 208. Introduction to Tobit.

Very Different from the NT.
We are “fairly certain” of the text of the NT. It was written in Greek.
We have thousands of Greek manuscripts (hand-written copies) from before printing was invented.
Every one of those manuscripts has mistakes, but they do not all make the same mistakes.
In addition to these Greek manuscripts, we have thousands of manuscripts containing ancient translations.
The most important of these are in the Latin, Syriac, and Coptic languages.
In rare instances when the Greek manuscripts are ALL confusing, these ancient translations often help.
So we have a pretty good chance of getting close to what the original writers wrote for the NT.

The Situation with Tobit. By contrast, we are not absolutely sure what language Tobit was written in.
Most scholars think it was written in a Semitic language, probably Aramaic. Maybe Hebrew.
We have no substantial part of the book preserved in ancient Aramaic.
The “fragments” from Qumran are just that: about the size of playing cards and postage stamps.
Our earliest complete manuscripts are in Greek.
We have several translations into other languages.

Versions of Tobit
Two Greek Versions, one is 1700 words, about 22% longer than the other
This means we basically have two quite different ancient versions of the book.
Neither of these versions is in the language in which it was originally written.
The “Old Latin” Version
Jerome’s Vulgate
Syriac Version

The Shorter Greek Version
Sometimes referred to as G-I
is found mainly in Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Alexandrinus.
“B” is the abbreviation of “Vaticanus, and “A” is the abbreviation for “Alexandrinus
Sometimes this version is referred to as BA, after the two major ancient manuscripts that support it.
For a long time, scholars thought that this version was the more ancient version.
KJV, Brenton (Vaticanus), RSV, NETS G-I

The Longer Greek Version
Sometimes referred to as G-II
is found mainly in Codex Sinaiticus
It is also sometimes called S (since Codex Sinaiticus is its major witness).
The majority of scholars now regard this as the more ancient version.
JB, NJB, NAB, NABRE, NRSV, NEB, REB, NETS G-II

Translations of the Greek OT Available Online.
http://www.ecmarsh.com/lxx/ Sir Lancelot Brenton (1851)

1 Lectures numbered consecutively. This is this week's 1st lecture, but its number reflects its place in the total sequence.
2 BibleWorks software contains both English translations of the NETS, but it labels with an “S” the translation that is not based on Codex Sinaiticus!
3 Includes both Greek versions of Tobit
4 Contains only the shorter Greek version of Tobit. Based on Codex Vaticanus.
**The Old Latin Version.** As far as I know, no English translation exists. There never was a complete Old Latin Bible. Rather, communities of Latin speaking Christians had books or parts of books translated for various purposes. E.g., for use in worship; for instruction. The Old Latin generally supports the longer Greek version.

**Jerome’s Vulgate Version.** Douay-Rheims (1899), Knox Translation (Msgr. Ronald Knox, 1952) 5

**Jerome’s Translation Process**
Jerome’s version is not very helpful in recovering the original text. Jerome did not believe that Tobit should be part of the Bible, so he left it out when he translated the Vulgate. A couple of bishops who were friends with Jerome pleaded with him to make a translation. He gave in, -- grudgingly! He claims he made his translation from an Aramaic version -- but he was not very good at Aramaic. So he had a Jewish man read each verse and translate it into Hebrew. Jerome would then translate the Hebrew into Latin, and dictate it to a scribe. Jerome claims that he completed the project in 1 day -- as much attention as it deserved, as far as he was concerned!

**The Syriac Version** -- called “the Peshitta” -- is a later version which is dependent on the Greek versions. As I understand it, the Syriac is not an independent witness to earlier tradition. I know of only one English translation of the OT of the Syriac Bible -- but it does not contain Tobit!. *Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text: George M. Lamsa’s Translation from the Aramaic of the Peshitta.* HarperCollins. Reprint of a 1933 original published by A. J. Holman Co. ISBN 0-06-064926-7 6
This translation has been severely criticized for its shortcomings. But it is better than nothing. I am checking to see if the Antioch Bible series is going to include it. **[Next Day: They will do Tobit!]**

**Date:** Most scholars date the book about the year 200 to 170. The “second Temple” has been built. Many Jews are living in the Diaspora. There are similarities with Daniel, Judith, and Esther. There is no anti-Gentile attitude to give evidence that the persecution of Antiochus IV had begun (ca. 165 B.C.). There is no belief in resurrection of the dead found in the book of Tobit (a doctrine which began about 165 B.C.)

**Literary Form / Genre.** The book is best described as a short story or novella. It is not a work of history. Its main purpose is to instruct Jews on how to live faithfully when they are scattered among other nations.

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**Week 70, Lecture 209. Tobit’s Life Prior to Exile, Tobit 1:1-9**

*Introduction, 1:1-2* 7 [I outlined this, just for fun!]

The book of the words of Tobit,
of the seed of Asiel.
from the tribe of Naphtali,
2 who was taken captive

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5 See CatholicBible. Online for these translations: [http://catholicbible.online/](http://catholicbible.online/)

6 If you go to: http://syri.ac/brock/bible and scroll down to “Translations of the Peshitta,” you will find that none of the English translations, including this one, is regarded as being very accurate.

in the days of Shalmaneser,  
the king of the Assyrians,  
from Thisbe,  
which is south of Kedesh of Naphtali,  
in the Upper Galilee  
above Asher [better, Hazor]  
behind the road of the west,  
north of Phogor.

**Note on the Spelling of Names**

Some translations of Tobit will give its characters names based on the Greek spelling of those names. E.g.,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Spelling</th>
<th>Standard Spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonas</td>
<td>Jonah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moyses</td>
<td>Moses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephthaleim</td>
<td>Naphtali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemessaros</td>
<td>Shalmaneser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In my translation I am going to use “standard spelling”
for ease of comparison with other books of the bible  
to keep my spell-checker from going crazy and for simplicity’s sake

**[son] of Tobiel.** Literally, simply “of Tobiel.”

Often biblical Greek leaves out “son” when it is clear from the context.
It also sometimes leaves it out when it is not clear – at least to modern readers -- from the context 
– e.g., when it might mean “[brother] of”

**A lot of “El” names.** “El” is short for “Elohim” the Hebrew word for “God.”

Tobi-el, Hanani-el, Gaba-el, Rapha-el, Ragu-el, Asi-el.

One would expect this from someone who claims to be from one of the Northern tribes.
Names honoring “the LORD” ending in “-yah” (-jah, -iah) were more common in the South
Tobi-jah, Hannani-ah

**Verse 2, Directions**

“south of . . . north of . . .” literally, “to the right of . . . to the left of”
road of the west,  literally, “road of the setting of the sun”

In ancient Israelite maps the East was at the top. So “north” was on the left and south was on the right.
Benjamin < ben-yamin (son of my right hand) is in the south. Yemen (“right”) is in the “south” of Arabia.

**Orienting a Map.**

If this seems strange, we still talk about “orienting” ourselves -- literally, “getting East correct!”

Today to get “East” correct it is easier for us to get “North” right. We have magnetic compasses!
These directional expressions are Semitisms -- evidence the original language was not Greek.
Most scholars think the book was composed in Aramaic (now lost).
There are Aramaic & Hebrew copies of Tobit, but these are medieval – translated from the Greek.

**The upper Galilee**

“The.” Christians usually just say “Galilee.” Jews almost always say “the Galilee.”

“Did you visit the Galilee when you were in Israel?”

**Upper Galilee.** “Upper” does not mean “north.” I think it refers to the more mountainous part, “upstream.”
“Upper Egypt” refers to south Egypt, which is “upstream” for the Nile.
Hazor. Hazor was one of the most powerful Canaanite cities before the Israelite settlement.

Greek: Assēr & Aṣēr, rendered: Asher (NABRE, RSV, NRSV); Aser (NAB); Aser (KJV) Hazor (NJB, CEB, AB). Hazor. This last might seem to be the furthest from the Greek letters!

You have to realize that “H” is never written in Greek.

In modern Greek, there is a little symbol called a “rough breathing” that represents it.

The word Hellos (Greece) is spelled Ελλος.

Ancient manuscripts were written in all capitals, with no breathing marks: ΕΛΛΟΣ

In ancient Greek, you just had to know when to add “H” to a word beginning with a vowel. So “Aser” could have been pronounced “Haser,” not too far from “Hazor!”

Tobit’s Life as a Young Man

I Tobit walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life. And I performed many charitable deeds for my relatives and for my countrymen who went with me in captivity to the land of the Assyrians, to Nineveh.

And when I was in my own country, in the land of Israel, and when I was young, the entire tribe of Naphtali my ancestor revolted against the house of David my ancestor and from the city of Jerusalem, the one chosen from all the tribes of Israel for all the tribes of Israel for the purpose of offering sacrifice. And the Temple of God’s dwelling was sanctified and built in that city for all generations forever.

Tobit. In the Greek we have a first-person narrative up to Tobit 3:6. After that the story is told by a narrator. In Jerome’s Vulgate, the entire story is told by a narrator. The first chapters do not portray Tobit tell us about himself.

When I was young . . .

The revolt against Solomon took place about 930 B.C. The deportation to Assyria took place in 733 B.C. This would make Tobit over 200 years old when he was deported to Assyria!

Confusion about these dates is one of many examples that Tobit written long after the events it purports to narrate.

David my ancestor!??

David was from the tribe of Judah. He would not have been an ancestor of someone from the tribe of Naphtali. Sinaicus has the phrase. Other Greek manuscripts do not have it.

More about Young Tobit

All of my kinsmen and the house of Naphtali my ancestor, they used to sacrifice to the calf -- the one Jeroboam the King of Israel had made in Dan -- upon all the mountains of the Galilee. I, however, travelled to Jerusalem absolutely alone many times for the festivals, just as it is written for all Israel as an eternal command. As for the first-fruits and the first produce and the tithes of the herds and the first-shearings of the sheep -- once I had them I hurried to Jerusalem; and I used to place them before the altar for the priests, the sons of Aaron. As for the tithe of grain and of wine and of oil and of pomegranates and of figs and of the rest of the fruits -- [they were] for the sons of Levi who were serving in Jerusalem. And the second tithe of the six years I would tithe in money [silver], and I would go and spend these things in Jerusalem each year. And I would give these things to the orphans and the widows and to proselytes - - the ones who were attaching themselves to the children of Israel. I would bring and give [these] to them in the third year, and we would eat them according to the ordinance which was ordained concerning them in the law of Moses, and according to the command of Deborah, the mother of Hananiel, our father, for my father left me an orphan when he died. And when I became an adult, I took a wife from the seed of our lineage, and by her I begot a son, and I called his name Tobias [better: Tobiah].

The Laws on Tithing. Irene Nowell has a helpful Excursus on Tithes™

In the earliest legislation in Numbers, the tithes were to support the local clergy in the villages.

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Later Deuteronomy centralized all worship in Jerusalem, and abolished local sanctuaries. Then the tithe was to be used for a banquet in Jerusalem. But every third year, that tithe was to be used for relief of the poor in the local area. There was no tithe in the 7th year, the sabbatical year. So in years: 1, 2, 4, & 5 the money was to be spent in Jerusalem In years 3 & 6, the money was to be used for the relief of local poor. Originally Numbers and Deuteronomy were separate books. But after the Exile they became combined into one book, the Torah (the “Law of Moses.”) This reference to “The Law of Moses” as one work is evidence that Tobit is post-exilic (after 500 B.C.)

Order of Writing in the OT. We read Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy first, but much of what is in the prophets was put into writing earlier than what we call “the Law of Moses.” Similarly, in the NT we read the Gospels first but the letters of Paul (50-ca 67) were actually written before the Gospels (70 - 95)

Tithing after the Exile. Now the different tithes (originally different local laws) had to be reconciled with each other. Different scribes did this in different ways. Without going into all of the gory details, our Tobit was “super observant.” Carey Moore (Anchor Bible commentary) observes that then, as now, taxes were complicated. PJM. Old taxes never die; they just get moved to a new jurisdiction!

Contrast with the rest of his tribe: Loyalty to Jerusalem Evidence this was actually written by a Judean. Imagine if your read the following words, allegedly written by a Protestant: All of my fellow Protestants threw away their statues, and stopped venerating them. They would no longer make the sign of the cross, or do any of the other holy practices that have been handed down to us in our sacred tradition that comes to us from the Apostles. I, for one, would suspect that these sentiments had in fact been written by a Catholic!

Absolutely Alone. Exaggeration In a later chapter (4, I think) he will admit that some others did in fact accompany him on these journeys.

“Hurried to Jerusalem” Literally, “ran” away to Jerusalem. His eagerness to sacrifice Also to avoid having the food spoil. The journey would have about 100 miles.

Deborah. Tobit was evidently raised by his grandmother. She is the first of several “strong women” in this story.

Tobiah/ Tobias In the Vulgate, both father and son have the same name. “Tobias” reflects the Greek spelling; “Tobiah” would be closer to Hebrew or Aramaic. Some commentators speculate that this might be a remnant of the folktale “The Grateful Dead.” This ancient folktale appears to have inspired Tobit. More on this in the next lecture.

Week 70, Lecture 210. Tobit’s Early Life in Nineveh  Tobit 1:10-22

The Captive Tobit Does Well (1:10-16). After I was taken captive to Assyria, and when I was taken captive, I went to Nineveh. And all of my kindred and those of my people ate the food of the Gentiles. I kept myself from

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10 See Fitzmyer, “Paul,” NJBC, 1337.
eating from the food of the Gentiles.  

12 And when I was mindful of my God with my whole soul 13 the Most High also gave me favor and status in the presence of Shalmaneser. And I used to buy for him everything that was needed. 14 I would go to Media and buy for him there until he died. And I deposited sacks of silver with my kinsman Gabael [son] of Gabri in the country of Media -- ten talents worth. 15 And when Shalmaneser died, and his son Sennacherib reigned after him, and the roads to Media fell into disrepair, and I was no longer able to travel to Media.

And . . . And . . . And! Not good English style. This shows the flavor of a “Semitic” style. And I actually left one of them out! [The “also” in verse 13.]

Verse 11, “I kept myself from eating . . .” Literally, “I kept my soul . . .” A Semitism. Evidence this was probably originally written in Aramaic (or possibly Hebrew).

Dietary Laws. These are important in Daniel and in Judith. Not, however in Esther, who apparently has no trouble attending royal banquets as queen. Diet is a way to “keep separate.” All religions have a tension: how much to “adapt” to a culture; how much to stay separate. When religions feel threatened; they emphasize being separate.

Verse 12, “And when I was mindful.” The other Greek version says “Because I was mindful.” As I am going through both translations in detail, I think I am detecting “editorial improvements” in the short version.

Verse 13, The Most High. This was originally the title of the main God of the Canaanites. It was claimed for “the LORD” after the Israelite settlement in Canaan. During monarchical & exilic times it fell into disuse. It enjoyed a revival in the post-exilic period.11

Verse 13. Deuteronomistic Theology. Tobit Has a Good Job. He attributes this to God rewarding his pious actions. Deuteronomistic theology (expressed most fully in Deuteronomy 28). God rewards the good; God punishes the evil. Deuteronomy introduces the “Deuteronomistic History” -- Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings Main point: The LORD blesses Israel when they are faithful; punishes them when they are unfaithful. Deuteronomistic theology is “alive and well.” Hospital chaplains encounter it frequently. It expresses how people actually feel when they are sick.

Verse 14, Ten Talents. Price of silver (9/12/19) ca. $18.00 per ounce. Catholic Study Bible (p. 1807) gives a talent as a bit over 75 ½ pounds. That would be 1208 ounces. So this would be over $20,000.00 today ($21,744.00), a considerable sum.

V. 15. His son Sennacherib -- NABRE Note (Sennacherib was not Shalmaneser’s son!) Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) [was] the son of Sargon II; neither was descended from Shalmaneser. On such historical inconsistencies, see Introduction; also notes on 5:6; 6:2; 9:2; 14:15. 12

Tobit Suffers for Burying the Dead, 1:16-20 16 In the days of Shalmaneser, I did many charitable deeds for my kinfolk, those of my people. 17 I would give my bread to the poor, and clothing to the naked. And if I saw anyone of my people who had died and been cast behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury him. 18 And if Sennacherib killed anyone -- when he came fleeing from Judea at the time of the judgment which the King of Heaven rendered unto him because of all of the blasphemies he had blasphemed -- I buried him. For he killed many of the people of Israel in his anger; and I would steal their bodies, and bury them. And [when] Sennacherib looked for them, he did not find them. 19 And a certain man from Nineveh informed the king about

11 Moore, Tobit, 117.
12 NABRE note to Tobit 1:15.
me, that I was the one burying them. And I hid myself. And when I found out that the king knew about me, and that he was seeking to kill me, I was afraid, and ran away. And everything that belonged to me was seized for the royal treasury, and nothing was left to me except Anna, my wife, and Tobiah, my son.

Had died. Some commentators think this refers to execution. If so, Tobit’s act would have been “civil disobedience.” Lack of burial was part of the punishment for many crimes.

NT example: Joseph of Arimathea could have gotten into big trouble if he had not asked Pilate for the body of Jesus.

Verse 18, The Flight of Sennacherib from Judea. This is a reference to the story in 2 Kings 18-19

Tobit’s Fortunes Restored, 1:21-22

And there had not passed forty days before two of his sons killed him. And they fled into the mountains of Ararat. And his son Esarhaddon reigned after him. And he appointed Ahiqar, the [son] of my kinsman Anael, over all of the accounts of his kingdom, and he gave him authority over all financial management. Then Ahiqar pled on my behalf, and I returned to Nineveh. For Ahiqar had been the chief cup-bearer, over the signet ring, and financial administrator and accountant for Sennacherib, King of the Assyrians. And Esarhaddon reappointed him. He was my brother’s son, and from my kindred.

V. 21, Ahiqar. NABRE Note

Ahiqar: a hero of ancient folklore, known for his outstanding wisdom. The Story (or Wisdom) of Ahiqar was very popular in antiquity and is extant in many different forms: Aramaic, Syriac, Armenian, Arabic (Arabian Nights), Greek (Aesop’s Fables), Slavonic, Ethiopic, and Romanian. The sacred author makes Tobit the uncle of the famous Ahiqar in order to enhance Tobit’s own prestige.

Financial Management / Financial Administrator

The words are dioikēsis and diokētēs. Our Catholic word “diocese” is related to them. One has to be a good “financial manager” to be a bishop!

Reappointed him. So NRSV, NAB, NJB. Another translation is: “appointed him Second [to himself].” So RSV, CEB, NABRE.

Summary. Tobit’s name is almost certainly short for Tobiah (the LORD is my good) or Tobiel (God is my good). At this point in the story he has been through some “hard times.” Basically he is doing well. He is a model of the rewards that can be expected by Israelites who live faithfully among pagans.

Post Lecture Note: “The Grateful Dead” I forgot to include this in the lecture!

There was an ancient folktale, “The Grateful Dead,” widely known in many cultures in the Ancient Near East. It recounts the story of a man who gives a corpse that he came across a decent burial. The ghost of the man rewards him by helping him with success in his ventures. It appears that the both Tobit -- who piously buries the dead -- and his son Tobiah are helped by a spirit -- the angel Raphael. In the Latin Vulgate both Tobit and Tobiah have the same name: Tobias. Some scholars think in an earlier version Tobit was even closer to “The Grateful Dead,” and that father and son having the same name is evidence that an earlier version of the story had only one character helped by the angel.

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13 NABRE, note to Tobit 1:21.

14 Moore (Tobit, 123) translates “second only to himself” in the Anchor Bible, but admits that the Greek is “cryptic.” A post-lecture reflection occurs to me: “second only to himself” would be a close tie-in to the Joseph Story in Genesis.