

TOBIT 11-14

¹When they were approaching Kaserin, which is just before Nineveh, Raphael said, ²"You are aware of how we left your father. ³Let us hurry on ahead of your wife and prepare the house while they are still on the way." ⁴As they went on together Raphael said to him, "Have the gall with you." And the dog went along behind them.

⁵Meanwhile Hannah sat looking intently down the road by which her son would come. ⁶When she caught sight of him coming, she said to his father, "Look, your son is coming, and the man who went with him!"

⁷Raphael said to Tobiah before he had reached his father, "I know that his eyes will be opened. ⁸Smear the gall of the fish on his eyes; the medicine will make the white films shrink and peel off from his eyes, and your father will regain his sight and see the light."

⁹Then Hannah ran up to her son and threw her arms around him, saying, "Now that I have seen you, my child, I am ready to die." And she wept.

¹⁰Tobit got up and came stumbling out through the courtyard gate. Tobiah went up to him, ¹¹with the gall of the fish in his hand, and holding him firmly, he blew into his eyes, saying, "Take courage, father." With this he applied the medicine on his eyes, ¹²and it made them smart.

¹³Next, with both his hands he peeled off the white films from the corners of his eyes.

The dog that was mentioned at the beginning of the journey (see 6:2) is mentioned here at the end.

Hannah sees Tobiah, whom she had described earlier as 'the light of my eyes' (see 10:5).

Raphael has already spoken of the medicinal power of gall when applied to the eye (see 6:9).

Hannah's reaction upon seeing her son echoes that of Jacob when he discovers that Joseph is still alive (see Genesis 46:29-30).

The blowing into the eyes (verse 11) was mentioned also in 6:9. The breath gives life to the eyes. We have known that Tobit's sight would be restored ever since 3:17.

Tobit echoes his wife's description of Tobiah: 'the light of my eyes' (verse 14). When he cries out: 'Blessed be his holy angels' (verse 14) he does not yet know the true identity of Tobiah's companion and guide.

Here, as throughout the story, the author uses dialogue to bring out the character of the people involved.

Tobit is effusive in his greeting of Sarah, and in his praise of God.

'Jews' (verse 17) is incorrect as a name for the exiles, who were from Israel, not Judah. This is one of many indications that the author is writing much later than the setting of his story.

Ahiqar has already featured in the story (see 1:21-22; 2:10). This is the first time we have heard of Nadin (verse 18; see 14:10). The allusion is to the adopted son of the famous sage Ahiqar in folktales from the area.

¹³When Tobit saw his son, he threw his arms around him, ¹⁴and he wept and said to him, "I see you, my son, the light of my eyes!" Then he said, "Blessed be God, and blessed be his great name, and blessed be all his holy angels. May his holy name be blessed throughout all the ages. ¹⁵Though he afflicted me, he has had mercy upon me. Now I see my son Tobiah!" So Tobit went in rejoicing and praising God at the top of his voice.

Tobiah reported to his father that his journey had been successful, that he had brought the money, that he had married Raguel's daughter Sarah, and that she was, indeed, on her way there, very near to the gate of Nineveh.

¹⁶Then Tobit, rejoicing and praising God, went out to meet his daughter-in-law at the gate of Nineveh. When the people of Nineveh saw him coming, walking along in full vigour and with no one leading him, they were amazed.

¹⁷Before them all, Tobit acknowledged that God had been merciful to him and had restored his sight. When Tobit met Sarah the wife of his son Tobiah, he blessed her saying, "Come in, my daughter, and welcome. Blessed be your God who has brought you to us, my daughter. Blessed be your father and your mother, blessed be my son Tobiah, and blessed be you, my daughter. Come in now to your home, and welcome, with blessing and joy. Come in, my daughter." So on that day there was rejoicing among all the Jews who were in Nineveh.

¹⁸Ahiqar and his nephew Nadin were also present to share Tobit's joy. ¹⁹With merriment they celebrated Tobiah's wedding feast for seven days, and many gifts were given to him.

¹When the wedding celebration was over, Tobit called his son Tobiah and said to him, "My child, see to it that you pay the wages of the man who went with you, and include a bonus." ²He replied, "Father, how much shall I pay him? It wouldn't hurt to give him half of the possessions he brought back with me. ³For he has led me back to you safely, he cured my wife, he brought the money back with me, and he cured you. How much extra shall I give him as a bonus?" ⁴Tobit said, "He deserves, my son, to receive half of all that he brought back." ⁵So Tobiah called him and said, "Take for your wages half of all that you brought back, and farewell."

⁶Then Raphael called the two of them privately and said to them, "Bless God and acknowledge him in the presence of all the living for the good things he has done for you. Bless and sing praise to his name. With fitting honour declare to all people the deeds of God. Do not be slow to acknowledge him. ⁷A king's secret ought to be kept, but the works of the Lord should be acknowledged and made known. Do good and evil will not overtake you. ⁸Better is prayer with fasting and almsgiving with righteousness than wealth with wrongdoing. It is better to give alms than to hoard gold. ⁹For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, ¹⁰but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies.

Both son and father are exceedingly generous.

'Cure'(verse 3) translates the Greek *θεράπειω* (*therapeuō*; see also Wisdom 16:12; Sirach 38:7).

'Do good and evil will not overtake you' (verse 7) is typical of Deuteronomist thought. Tobit kept his faith when a lot of evil was overtaking him. Now at last he can experience God's promised blessing.

'Prayer'(verse 7) has held a central role in the story. 'Fasting'(verse 8) was traditionally associated with mourning (see Esther 4:3). In 1Maccabees 3:47 it is part of a ritual pleading for God's assistance in battle. It does not feature in Tobit, unlike 'almsgiving'(see 4:7-11). Almsgiving features also in the Wisdom of Ben Sira, a contemporary of the author of Tobit (see Sirach 29:10-13; 40:17, 24).

It is interesting to hear Jesus speak of the importance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving coming from the heart (see Matthew 6:2-22).

On verse 11 see verse 7.

In verse 12 the transcendent majesty of God is highlighted. God is not an object of direct, unmediated human experience. Hence the role of Raphael, the mediating angel (compare Job 33:23).

In introducing himself to the reader Tobit spoke of his practice of burying the dead (verse 13; see 1:17-19; 2:4-8).

The suffering in Tobit's life tested his faith. Raphael was able to report to God that Tobit passed the test (verse 14).

Verse 15 is the earliest mention in the Bible of the 'seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord'. It is picked up in the Book of Revelation (see 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 8:2). Only two others are named: Michael (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7) and Gabriel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). The apocryphal book *I Enoch* adds Uriel, Raguel and Saraqael (one manuscript adds Remiel). The idea appears to have been borrowed from the religion of ancient Iran, and the seven spirits who served the god Ahuramazda.

The reaction of Tobit and his son is standard for an encounter with the divine. Raphael is 'only' an angel. It is God whom they must thank and praise.

The whole book is in response to the command given here: 'write down all these things that have happened to you' (verse 20).

¹¹"I will now declare the whole truth to you and will conceal nothing from you. I have already said that a king's secret should be kept, but the works of the Lord should be revealed in all their glory. ¹²When you and Sarah prayed, it was I who brought the record of your prayer before the glory of the Lord, and likewise whenever you would bury the dead. ¹³And that time when you did not hesitate to get up and leave your dinner to go and bury the dead, ¹⁴I was sent to you to test you. And at the same time God sent me to heal you and Sarah your daughter-in-law. ¹⁵I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord."

¹⁶The two of them were shaken; they fell face down, for they were afraid. ¹⁷But he said to them, "Do not be afraid; peace be with you. Bless God forevermore. ¹⁸As for me, when I was with you, I was not acting on my own will, but by the will of God. Bless him each and every day; sing his praises. ¹⁹Although you were watching me, I really did not eat or drink anything. What you saw was a vision. ²⁰So now get up from the ground, and acknowledge God. See, I am ascending to him who sent me. Write down all these things that have happened to you." And with that he ascended.

²¹They stood up, but could no longer see him. ²²They kept blessing God and singing his praises, and they acknowledged God for these marvellous deeds of his, when an angel of God appeared to them.

¹Then Tobit exclaimed in joy: "Blessed be God who lives forever, and his kingdom. ²For he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades in the lowest regions of the earth, and he brings up from the great abyss. There is no one who can escape his hand.

³Acknowledge him before the nations, O children of Israel; for he has scattered you among them. ⁴He has shown you his greatness even there. Exalt him in the presence of every living being, because he is our Lord and he is our God; he is our Father and he is God forever. ⁵He will afflict you for your iniquities, but he will again show mercy on all of you. He will gather you from all the nations among whom you have been scattered.

⁶If you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will no longer hide his face from you. So now see what he has done for you; acknowledge him with full voice. Bless the Lord of righteousness, and exalt the King of the ages.

In the land of my exile I acknowledge him, and make known his power and majesty to a nation of sinners: 'Turn back, you sinners, and do what is right before him; perhaps he may look with favour upon you and show you mercy.'

⁷As for me, I exalt my God, and my soul rejoices in the King of heaven.

⁸Let all people speak of his majesty, and acknowledge him in Jerusalem.

This psalm has been inserted here. It celebrates God's action in Tobit's life and Tobit's exemplary response. Tobit's life offers hope to all Jews living in exile.

'Joy'(verse 1) is the prevailing mood of the psalm (see verses 7, 10, 11, 13 and 14), as it is in Deuteronomy (see Deuteronomy 12:7; 14:26; 16:11). Verse 2 is a Deuteronomic formula; see also Psalm 89:32-34; Wisdom 12:22). It is God who leads us down into the realm of the dead. It is God who rescues us from serious illness and renews our life (verse 2; see 1Samuel 2:6; Wisdom 16:13).

God is envisaged in patriarchal terms as 'Father'(verse 4); that is, as the source of life, the provider, teacher and disciplinarian.

Verses 5-6 echo Deuteronomy:

If you call [these words] to mind among all the nations where YHWH your God has driven you, and return to YHWH your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then YHWH your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom YHWH your God has scattered you.

– Deuteronomy 30:1-3

Verses 6-10 were accidentally omitted from Codex Sinaiticus, and have been added from other Greek manuscripts and from the Old Latin Version.

'King of Heaven' is used as an epithet for God also in Daniel 4:37.

'Jerusalem' introduces a new section of Tobit's prayer, in which the city itself is addressed (verses 9-17)

Tobit began his story by speaking of his pilgrimages to Jerusalem prior to his exile (see 1:4-8). The author now looks back on the city after its destruction in 586 (after the time in which our story and so Tobit is located). The second temple was not seen as the final product. Everyone looked forward to its being rebuilt (see Isaiah 54:11-12; 60:1-14; Micah 4:2; Zechariah 8:22).

Verse 11 brings to mind the promise expressed by Isaiah:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light; those who
lived in a land of deep darkness – on
them light has shone. You have multiplied
the nation, you have increased
its joy.

– Isaiah 9:2-3

The author has a broad picture of God's plan for the world. Verse 11 echoes:

Many peoples shall come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain
of YHWH, to the house of the God of
Jacob; that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of YHWH from
Jerusalem.

– Isaiah 2:3

Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,
because the abundance of the sea shall
be brought to you, the wealth of the
nations shall come to you.

– Isaiah 60:5

The yearning for the return of Jews to Jerusalem from the foreign lands in which they were scattered is found in other writings from the Hellenistic period (see 2Maccabees 2:18)

Verse 14 echoes Isaiah 66:10.

⁹O Jerusalem, the holy city, he afflicted you for what your children have done, but will again have mercy on the children of the righteous.

¹⁰Acknowledge the Lord, for he is good, and bless the King of the ages, so that his tent may be rebuilt in you again in joy. May he cheer all those within you who are captives, and love all those within you who are distressed, to all generations forever.

¹¹A bright light will shine to all the ends of the earth; many nations will come to you from far away, the inhabitants of the remotest parts of the earth to your holy name, bearing gifts in their hands for the King of heaven. Generation after generation will give joyful praise in you; the name of the chosen city will endure forever.

¹²Cursed are all who speak a harsh word against you; cursed are all who conquer you and pull down your walls, all who overthrow your towers and set your homes on fire. But blessed forever will be all who revere you.

¹³Go, then, and rejoice over the children of the righteous, for they will be gathered together and will praise the Lord of the ages. ¹⁴Happy are those who love you, and happy are those who rejoice in your prosperity. Happy also are all people who grieve with you because of your afflictions; for they will rejoice with you and witness all your glory forever. ¹⁵My soul blesses the Lord, the great King!

The new Jerusalem

¹⁶For Jerusalem will be rebuilt as his house for all ages. How happy I will be if a remnant of my descendants should survive to see your glory and acknowledge the King of heaven. The gates of Jerusalem will be built with sapphire and emerald, and all your walls with precious stones. The towers of Jerusalem will be built with gold, and their battlements with finest gold. The streets of Jerusalem will be paved with rubies and with stones of Ophir. ¹⁷The gates of Jerusalem will sing hymns of joy, and all her houses will cry, 'Hallelujah! Blessed be the God of Israel!' and the blessed will bless the holy name for ever and ever."

For similar apocalyptic descriptions of the new Jerusalem see Isaiah 54:11-14 and, in the Newer Testament, Revelation 21:10-21.

Scholars are still not certain where Ophir was. It was famous for its gold and precious stones (see 1 Kings 10:11; 1 Chronicles 9:10; Job 28:16).

'Fearing the Lord' (verse 2) is the traditional way of speaking of someone who lives a genuine religious life, respecting the presence and the will of God. Like Job, Tobit was finally rewarded by God.

Nahum's words delighting in the imminent fall of Nineveh were spoken between 620 and 612, some years after the death of Tobit.

The author quoted Amos earlier (see 2:6). Amos prophesied in the years from 762 to 750.

Samaria was already desolate at the time the author has Tobit dying, and Jerusalem's destruction was yet to come. The author, writing well after these events, is portraying Tobit as a prophet.

The second temple was a much simpler structure than the temple of Solomon (see Ezra 3:12-13).

¹So ended Tobit's words of praise.

²Tobit died in peace when he was one hundred twelve years old, and was buried with great honour in Nineveh. He was fifty-eight years old when he lost his eyesight, and after regaining it he lived in prosperity, giving alms and continually fearing the Lord God and acknowledging God's majesty. ³When he was about to die, he called his son Tobiah and the seven sons of Tobiah and gave these instructions:

"My son, take your children ⁴and hurry off to Media, for I believe the word of God that Nahum spoke about Nineveh, that all these things will take place and overtake Assyria and Nineveh. Indeed, everything that was spoken by the prophets of Israel, whom God sent, will occur. None of all their words will fail, but all will come true at their appointed times. So it will be safer in Media than in Assyria and Babylon. For I know and believe that whatever God has said will be fulfilled and will come true; not a single word of the prophecies will fail.

All of our kindred, inhabitants of the land of Israel, will be scattered and taken as captives from the good land; and the whole land of Israel will be desolate, even Samaria and Jerusalem will be desolate. And the temple of God in it will be burned to the ground, and it will be desolate for a while.

⁵"But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendour; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it.

All the nations will worship YHWH

⁶Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth. They will all abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into error; ⁷and in righteousness they will praise the eternal God. All the Israelites who are saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice, but those who commit sin and injustice will vanish from all the earth.

^{8[9]} So now, my children, I command you, serve God faithfully and do what is pleasing in his sight. Your children are also to be commanded to do what is right and to give alms, and to be mindful of God and to bless his name at all times in truth and with all their strength.

So now, my son, leave Nineveh; do not remain here. ¹⁰On whatever day you bury your mother beside me, do not stay overnight within the confines of the city. For I see that there is much wickedness within it, and that much deceit is practised within it, while the people are without shame. See, my son, what Nadin did to Ahiqar who had reared him. Was he not, even though still alive, forced to go underground? For God repaid him to his face for this shameful treatment. Ahiqar came out into the light, but Nadin went into the eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahiqar. Because he gave alms, Ahiqar escaped the fatal trap that Nadin had set for him, but Nadin fell into it himself, and was destroyed.

¹¹So now, my children, see what almsgiving accomplishes, and what injustice does—it brings death! But now my breath fails me." Then they laid him on his bed, and he died; and he received an honourable funeral.

The hope expressed in verse 6 goes beyond 13:11. God's mercy reaches out to the whole world.

There are many echoes of Deuteronomy in this passage (as in many other places in Tobit). The final sentence in verse 7 is typical of the Deuteronomists' theology of reward and punishment.

Tobit has lived according to the values expressed in verses 8-9 (see 1:3; 3:2): a life of righteousness, almsgiving, and truth, mindful of, and praising, God. His son, grandchildren and their posterity are to live in the same way.

Nadin has already been mentioned in 11:18. Here we are given more details of his behaviour towards Ahiqar (Tobit's nephew; see 1:21) who reared him. This element of the story is taken over from the ancient folktale.

Verse 11 summarises a central theme of the story: the importance of almsgiving.

Tobiah is carrying out his father's wish (see 4:34; 6:14; 14:10).

Tobiah's age when he died is a sign of God's abundant blessing for the life he lived (see Job 42:12, 16; Proverbs 16:31; 20:29; Sirach 18:8).

The Encyclopedia Britannica has this to say about Cyaxares of Media:

In 614 the Medes took Ashur, and in 612 they occupied and sacked Nineveh. About the same time they seem to have conquered the kingdom of Mannai in what is now north-western Iran and in 609 invaded and afterward subjected Urartu in the Armenian Highland. The Median army took part in the final defeat of the Assyrians in northern Mesopotamia (612–609); and, when the territory of Assyria was divided between Media and Babylonia, Media took Assyria with Harran. Five years of war between Media and Lydia in Anatolia (590–585) ended when the two countries accepted the Halys River as their boundary. Cyaxares died shortly afterward.

This final passage in Tobit speaks of the blessings received by Tobit. It also offers divine assurance of God's will for his people. Assyria, the country responsible for the destruction of the northern kingdom and the reducing of Judah to a vassal state, will be destroyed, thus opening the way for the return of exiles and the rebuilding of the temple (see 13:5, 9-17; 14:5-7).

The author of our story, writing at a time when many Israelites were living in foreign lands, and when Judah is a small province in the vast Hellenized world, is giving voice to the faith that one day all will be restored, and the whole world will recognise YHWH as God.

¹²When Tobiah's mother died, he buried her beside his father. Then he and his wife and children returned to Media and settled in Ecbatana with Raguel his father-in-law. ¹³He lovingly cared for his parents-in-law in their old age, and buried them in Ecbatana of Media. He inherited both the property of Raguel and that of his father Tobit. ¹⁴He died highly respected at the age of one hundred seventeen years. ¹⁵Before he died he heard of the destruction of Nineveh, and he saw its prisoners being led into Media, those whom King Cyaxares of Media had taken captive. Tobiah praised God for all he had done to the people of Nineveh and Assyria; before he died he rejoiced over Nineveh, and he blessed the Lord God forever and ever. Amen.

