

The Final Prayer of Tobit (13)

This prayer has nothing directly to do with the story just told, but everything with its message of praise of God, and trust in his mercy and benevolence.

The prayer places the exile experience in the context of the sins of the people, while the return to Judah is allowed by God following their repentance “He both punishes and pardons .. though he punishes you for your iniquities he will take pity on you all .. if you return to him” This a message for all sinners of all ages.

God is always deserving of praise “I for my part sing his praise .. I for my part extol him and my soul rejoices”. Even in suffering God must be trusted, remain at the centre of our lives and not be rejected.

The prayer looks forward to a restored Jerusalem as a sign of God’s love “because Jerusalem will be built anew and his house for ever and ever” and, in an intriguing echo of the universality of ‘Third’ Isaiah, looks to the time when every nation will recognise and worship God “Many nations will come from far away .. to dwell close to the Holy name of the Lord God”

Conclusion

The Book of Tobit illustrates that the common prayers of post-exilic Judaism contained a combination of themes - praise/adoration, petition, penitence, thanksgiving.

But it also reveals what Judaism saw as the ideal believer: a person who always had trust in God, no matter what suffering was given them; a person who worshipped God in humility but at the same time had the confidence to communicate with him as a friend with total honesty about their feelings; and a person who thanked God for all his blessings. This message is one that is eternally valid in any genuine spirituality.

Our Catholic Faith Prayer and Spirituality 2010-2011

4. Prayer in the Book of Tobit *Penance, Petition, Praise and Thanksgiving*



1. What Can We Learn About Suffering From This Book?
2. Do You Agree With Tobit’s View of Sin?
3. What Kind of Person Is Seen As The Ideal Believer?

What the Book of Tobit is All About

The Book of Tobit is a Deutero-Canonical book, that is, part of the Catholic Bible but not accepted as inspired in either the Protestant Bible or the Jewish scriptures. It is a fictional story (with much inaccurate ‘history’!) that has the aim of showing the great goodness and justice of God and to stress that he is ever-present in our lives.

The Story

A good man, Tobit, who supported the poor with almsgiving and always helped others, becomes blind and undergoes suffering. His son, Tobias, is sent to his kinsman, Raguel, to recover money left in his keeping, and on the way is persuaded by a travelling companion to ask for the hand of Raguel’s daughter, Sarah, in marriage. The



companion is the Archangel, Raphael, who tells Tobias how to cure his father’s blindness and how to dispose of the demon Asmodeus who has killed all of Sarah’s previous suitors.

The First Prayers are by Tobit and then Sarah.

Each, in their own way, address God with praise, speak to him about their sufferings, and ask that either these be removed or that they should be allowed to die. Inexplicably but humbly, Tobit attributes his misfortune to his own sinfulness. Sarah proclaims her innocence.

Praise:

Tobit (3:2f) “Your ways are just .. All your ways are grace and truth”

Sarah (3:11f) “ You are blessed God of mercy .. May all things you have made bless you”

Sighs of Suffering:

Tobit (3:1) “Do not punish me for my sins, for my needless faults”
(3:6) “I have endured groundless insult ..am in deepest sorrow”

Sarah (3:15) “ I have remained pure .. I have not dishonoured your name .. I have lost seven husbands ..I can no longer bear to hear myself defamed”

Petition for Relief or Death

Tobit (3:6) “Be pleased to take my life from me .. Be pleased to deliver me from this affliction”

Sarah (3:15) “If it please you not to take my life then look with pity on me”

The Second Prayers are by Tobias and Sarah, and by Raguel.

Tobias and Sarah pray to God after their marriage for protection from Asmodeus (although it is placed in the Book immediately after Asmodeus has actually been overcome), while Raguel thanks God for their survival. Both prayers again begin with praise to God, followed in Tobias’ case by the petition. Raguel’s prayer indirectly gives thanks as well.

Praise

Tobias & Sarah (8:7) “You are blessed,
blessed is your name ..”

Raguel (8:15) “You are blessed with
every blessing that is pure”

Petition

Tobias (8:7) “Be kind enough to have pity
on her and me and bring
us to old age together”

Raguel (8:16-17) “You have shown us your boundless mercy .. Let
them live their lives in happiness and mercy”

Tobias’ and Sarah’s prayer is also a beautiful prayer about marriage “you it was who created Adam, you who created Eve his wife, to be his help and support .. so I take my sister not for any lustful motive but I do it *in singleness of heart*” (8:7).

Tobit’s Prayer of Praise (11:14) after his cure shows that his immediate reaction is to thank God with a four-fold blessing.

