



My Drift

Title: Bible – The Books of Tobit-Judith-Esther

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THE BOOK OF TOBIT

The Book of Tobit presents a charming tale in which beauty, suspense, and moral truth are interwoven in a most pleasing fashion, causing Tobit to become one of the most popular of the books of the APOC in the history of the Church. The story is set in the times of the Assyrian captivity and concerns the fortunes of Tobit and his son Tobias. The book was probably written early in the second century B.C. The author and where it was written are unknown.

What is the APOC in the Bible?

Apocrypha, (from Greek apokryptein, “to hide away”), in biblical literature, refers to works outside an accepted canon of scripture. The history of the term's usage indicates that it referred to a body of esoteric writings that were at first prized, later tolerated, and finally excluded.

Do Christians accept the Apocrypha?

The Catholic Old Testament (OT) Canon includes - Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, I and II Maccabees - plus sections of Esther and Daniel which are absent from the Protestant OT. Protestant Christians do not accept these writings as inspired by God and refer to them as the "Apocrypha".

The divisions of the Book of Tobit are:

Tobit's Ordeals (1:3–3:6)

Sarah's Plight (3:7–17)

Preparation for the Journey (4:1–6:1)

Tobiah's Journey to Media (6:2–18)

Marriage and Healing of Sarah (7:1–9:6)

Tobiah's Return Journey to Nineveh and the Healing of Tobit (10:1–11:18)

Raphael Reveals His Identity (12:1–22)

Tobit's Song of Praise (13:1–18)

Epilogue (14:1–15)

Tobit Summary

Tobit was a devout Israelite of the tribe of Naphtali. He often went to Jerusalem to worship and regularly gave three tenths of his produce to the Temple and other good causes. This righteous man, however, like Job, appears to receive only misfortune in return for his piety. He and his family are deported to Nineveh as captives of the Assyrians, but unlike the other exiles they continue to adhere to the strict dietary regulations of the law. Temporarily, Tobit is the recipient of good fortune as one of Shalmaneser's stewards. During this period, Tobit judiciously entrusted a large sum of his money to a friend in Media. Tobit continued to live a pious life, doing deeds of charity to his brethren, and particularly in giving proper burial to a number of the Jews who were slaughtered by the Assyrian kings. The latter activity of Tobit became known to Sennacherib, and Tobit was forced to flee for his life, leaving behind all his property and wealth. Tobit, however, continued in his acts of righteousness, and on one occasion buried the body of a Jewish brother only to receive a cruel reimbursement. Having become unclean through his contact with the dead body, he was forced to sleep outside where his face became accidentally dirtied by sparrow droppings, which got into his eyes and caused a blindness that physicians were powerless to cure. Like the wife of Job, Tobit's wife ultimately cries out the complaint of her frustration, "Where are your charities and your righteous deeds?" (2:14). Thereupon Tobit prays in anguish of soul that his life might be taken, for he is convinced that it is better to die than to live under the present reproaches (3:6).



Tobit becomes blind and wants to die



The Demon Asmodeus

At that same moment some distance away, the same prayer was being uttered by Sarah the daughter of a certain Raguel who happened to be a close kinsman of Tobit. Sarah had the misfortune of being loved by the demon Asmodeus who had slain no less than seven husbands of Sarah, each on the very night of their wedding before the marriage could be consummated. Sarah was subject to accusations and reproaches, and in her despair, she even contemplated suicide (3:10). At this point the stage is set for the main action of the story. God sends his angel Raphael to answer the respective prayers of Tobit and Sarah—not by bringing death, but by bringing happiness to all concerned, thus underlining the goodness of His providence.



God's Angel Raphael

The denouement is initiated by Tobit's decision to inform Tobias about the money he had deposited with his friend in Media some years earlier. Taking opportunity of the occasion to impart some very excellent instruction in righteousness (chapter 4), Tobit informs Tobias concerning the money and the decision is taken to send Tobias in quest of it. A suitable traveling companion is needed, however, and Tobias chances upon one Azarias who is well-qualified and who in reality is the disguised Raphael. Despite the protestations of Tobias' mother, Anna, the pair set out on their adventuresome journey accompanied by young Tobias' dog. Camping on the banks of the Tigris that night, Tobias is nearly swallowed by a fish as he washes. Azarias directs Tobias to catch the fish, to cut out its heart, liver, and gall, and to store these safely among his gear. As they continue their journey, upon the questioning of Tobias, Azarias explains that the organs of the fish are particularly useful for two things: the smoke from the burning heart and liver will drive away evil spirits; and from the gall can be made a salve that will take away the white films from a blind man's eyes. Azarias tells Tobias that he is to take Sarah as his wife. Tobias,

however, has already heard of Sarah's plight and is consequently not at all eager to follow the direction of Azarias. When Azarias reminds Tobias of the potency of the fish organs, Tobias' mind is changed. The delightful meeting of Raguel and Tobias occurs next, and in due course the marriage is proposed and indeed, despite Raguel's warning, takes place the same day.



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That night as the couple retire to their bed chamber, Sarah, Raguel, and his wife, Edna, are all seized with anxiety. Indeed, so pessimistic is the father that when all have retired, he rises secretly and digs a grave for Tobias that he might be buried immediately. A maid is forthwith sent to see whether Tobias is alive or dead. Tobias, however, when he entered the bed chamber had, as directed, made a fire, and placed the heart and liver of the fish on the fire, and the smoke that was produced drove out the demon as had been promised. Tobias and Sarah then had prayed together and had gone to sleep, voluntarily forgoing the consummation of their marriage. The maid found them asleep and reported to Raguel that Tobias was alive and well, upon which Raguel prays a prayer of thanksgiving.

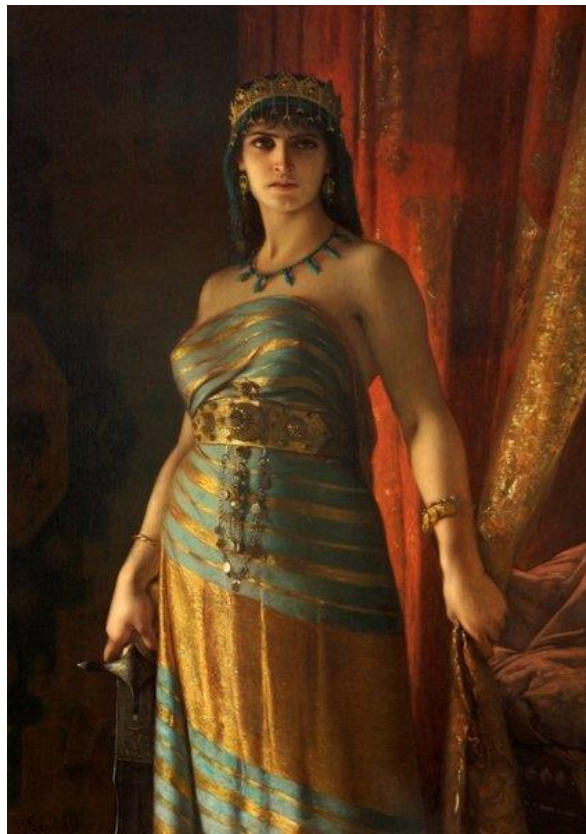
The next day a great feast of celebration that lasted fourteen days began. Tobias sends Azarias to Media to fetch his money and to bring his father's friend to the wedding feast. At this point the narrative returns to Nineveh and to the deep concern of Tobit and Anna at the delayed return of Tobias. Tobit believes that Tobias is well; Anna, however, insists that her boy is dead and is angry with Tobit for trying to deceive her. Meanwhile Tobias and his new wife, with half of Raguel's wealth, accompanied by Azarias and, of course, Tobias' dog, too, finally take their leave of Raguel and Edna. Tobias and Azarias (and the dog) run ahead of the entourage in their haste to return home. At this point the narrator says, "Now Anna sat looking intently down the road for her son" (Tobit 11:5). Suddenly she catches sight of them in the distance and reports to her blind husband "Behold your son is coming." Thereupon follows one of the most delightful reunions of lit.—there is much weeping and rejoicing, and, of course, the gall salve is applied to the father's eyes and his blindness is removed.



The gall salve is applied to Tobit's eyes and his blindness is removed

At the gate of Nineveh, they meet Sarah and the slaves and cattle that made up part of Raguel's gift. Another week of celebration takes place. Afterward Tobit and Tobias offer half of Raguel's gift to the good Azarias. Azarias, however, only remarks that thanksgiving is due to God for His goodness. Then he volunteers, "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One" (12:15). They fall on their faces in fear, but Raphael says not to be afraid. He adds that he was sent by God, but was really only an apparition, and when he has directed them to write what has happened in a book, he disappears. Then follows a magnificent prayer of rejoicing, which Tobit is said to have written. The final chapter of the book is rather anticlimactic, which gives an account of Tobit's last words that includes a warning for his descendants to leave Nineveh because Jonah's prophecy was going to come true. The death of Tobit and then of Anna is recorded. Tobias and his family then returned to Ecbatana, where he eventually buried both Raguel and Edna. The book ends with a notice of the death of Tobias at the age of 127 years with the note that before his death he heard of the destruction of Nineveh.

THE BOOK OF JUDITH



Judith

The Book of Judith is a deuterocanonical book (Bible books written between the Old and New Testament periods), included in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles, but excluded by Jews and Protestants. However, it remains a popular and widely read work among the apocrypha of the Old Testament.

The story revolves around Judith, a daring and beautiful widow. During the final stages of an Assyrian siege which has convinced her city of Bethulia to surrender, she travels to the camp of the enemy general Holofernes and seductively ingratiates herself to him. Soon, as he lies in a drunken stupor, she decapitates him, then takes his head back to her grateful countrymen. The Assyrians are then routed, and Israel is saved. Though she is courted by many, Judith remains quietly unmarried for the rest of her life.



Judith with the head of the enemy general Holofernes

Although artfully constructed, the book contains numerous historical anachronisms (something out of place and time) and must thus be considered a work of fiction. Regardless, it has inspired numerous works of art, music, and drama.

The book can be divided into five parts:

Assyrian Threat (1:1–3:10)

Siege of Bethulia (4:1–7:32)

Judith, Instrument of the Lord (8:1–10:10)

Judith Goes Out to War (10:11–13:20)

Victory and Thanksgiving (14:1–16:25)

Summary

Nebuchadnezzar has grown angry with the people of the Levant who resist his rule, and vows to destroy them. He assigns his military commander Holofernes to this task, and a great army sweeps down from Mesopotamia into Syria and Lebanon toward Israel. The nations in its path immediately surrender and beg for peace. The Israelites, however, fast and pray to God for deliverance. The town of Bethulia is particularly desperate, since it stands in the way of the mighty army's path to Jerusalem. (1-4)

Holofernes is amazed that the Israelites have the courage to resist him. Achior, the leader of all the Ammonites, briefs him on Israel's sacred history and declares that Israel will be invincible unless it sins against God. "Who is God except Nebuchadnezzar?" Holofernes replies. He orders Achior bound and taken to Bethulia, where he can share the Israelites' fate. The Ammonite leader is treated with hospitality by the citizens of the city, who welcome him into their assembly. Holofernes arrays his troops for battle, but the Edomites in his coalition convince him to lay siege to the city instead, by taking control of its water supply, which lies outside the city walls. After a little more than a month, the people of Bethulia are ready to surrender, but their mayor, Uzziah, convinces them to hold out for five more days. If God does not deliver them by the fortieth day of the siege, he vows to accede to their wishes and surrender to Holofernes' forces. (5-7)

It is only now that the lovely, pious widow Judith appears on the scene. She prophetically proclaims that to surrender to Holofernes' would be sin. "If we are captured, all Judea will be captured and our sanctuary will be plundered; and he (God) will exact of us the penalty for its desecration," she argues. Judith declares that she herself will become God's agent of deliverance. She prays desperately to God to allow her to use "deceitful words" to defeat the Assyrians. She then attires herself glamorously, receiving the praise of the people of Bethulia as she leaves through the city gate together with her maid. She is immediately arrested by an Assyrian patrol but convinces them that she has useful information for Holofernes. She is consequently taken to him, amidst great excitement on account of her unrivaled beauty. (8-10)

Holofernes assures Judith that she will not be harmed if she is willing to serve his master, Nebuchadnezzar. She confirms the report of Achior the Ammonite regarding the Israelites' invincibility. However, she reports that the people of both Bethulia and Jerusalem have been so hard pressed by the siege that they are about to sin egregiously by consuming sacred food items dedicated to God.

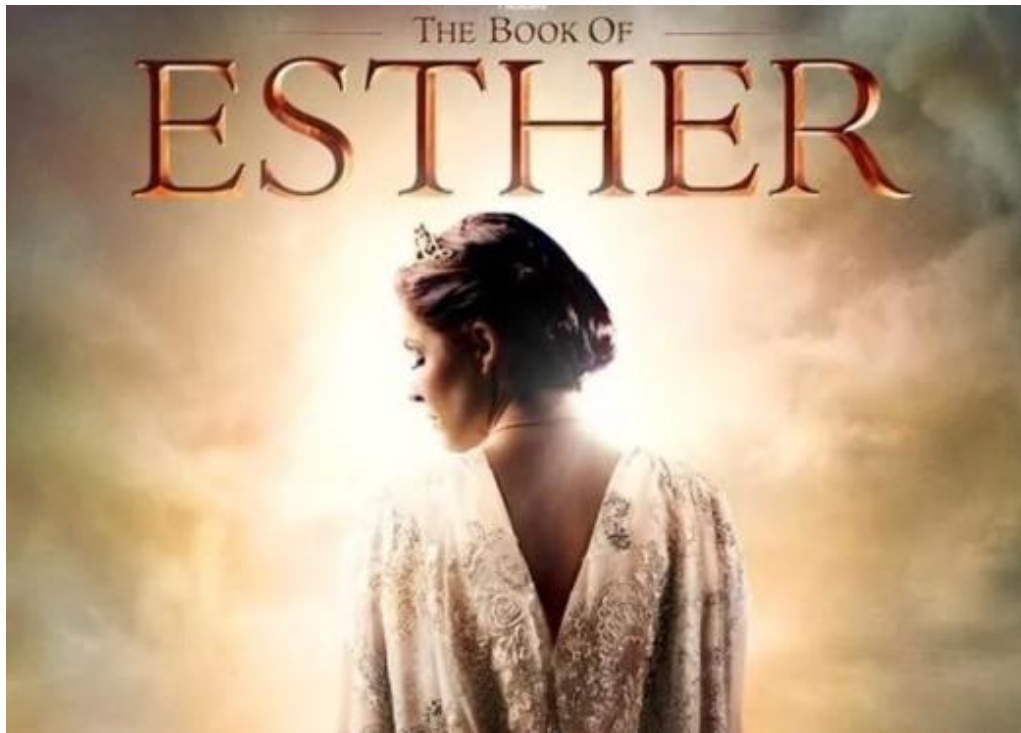
She explains that this very situation is what prompted her own decision to come over to the Assyrian side, rather than to share in the Israelites' now certain doom. She promises to act as Holofernes' agent to tell him when these sins have been committed, and thus when it is safe for him to attack. Holofernes agrees to the plan and marvels at Judith's wisdom, promising her rich rewards. He offers her a sumptuous meal, but she piously declines to eat the non-kosher food. She has brought her own supplies in a bag, however, and survives on this while she stays in the camp for three days, leaving each night to pray, supposedly for God's revelation as to the propitious time for Assyria to attack. On the fourth day, Holofernes determines that he must have his way sexually with the alluring Judith. She now accepts his offer to eat with him and "become like one of the daughters of the Assyrians," reclining seductively before him at a lavish dinner. The overjoyed and lustful Holofernes becomes so aroused that he consumes a huge quantity of wine at dinner in anticipation of possessing Judith. (11-12)

When Holofernes' servants leave Holofernes and Judith alone to have some privacy, he immediately falls asleep in a drunken stupor. Seeing her opportunity, Judith takes Holofernes' sword from where it hangs above his bed. She then prays to God for strength and decapitates her enemy. Summoning her maid, they place Holofernes' head in Judith's food bag and make good their escape, a feat made easy by Judith's authorized nightly prayer vigils outside the camp. Returning to Bethulia, Judith produces Holofernes' head for all to see to the great joy of the Israelites. Achior the Ammonite confirms the identity of the head and is so impressed by God's miraculous work through Judith that he accepts circumcision and becomes a Jew. The Assyrians, meanwhile, have discovered Judith's treachery and are thrown into disarray. Following Judith's advice, the men of Bethulia attack, mustering their fellow Israelites to drive the enemy back even beyond Damascus. Judith receives high honors and adulation; even Jerusalem's high priest Joakim comes to pay his respects. Judith then retires to her home and lives the rest of her life as a widow, despite many offers of marriage. She dies at the age of 105. (13-16)

BOOK OF ESTHER

The Book of Esther describes events that purportedly took place during the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus, probably a reference to Xerxes I (486-465 BCE) or possibly Artaxerxes I or II (465-358 BCE). Given the language used, certain factual discrepancies, and the opening verse of the book that looks back in time, the book was probably written sometime between 400 and 150 BCE. The author's familiarity with the Persian Empire would argue for a date of

composition earlier in this time period (4th to 3rd century BCE). In any case, this makes the Book of Esther one of the later writings of the Old Testament, perhaps close in time to two intertestamental books about women: Judith and Susanna.



Summary

The Book of Esther tells the story celebrated at Purim of how Queen Esther and her cousin Mordecai saved the Jewish people from the plot of the wicked Haman, who was advisor to the Persian King Ahasuerus and who tried to have the Jews destroyed.

What is “Purim”?

Purim, (Hebrew: “Lots”) English Feast of Lots, a joyous Jewish festival commemorating the survival of the Jews who, in the 5th century bce, were marked for death by their Persian rulers. The story is related in the biblical Book of Esther.

Outline

1. King Ahasuerus Banishes Queen Vashti (Esther 1:1-22)

Ahasuerus, king of all Persia and Media, orders Queen Vashti to appear at his lavish banquet to be admired for her beauty, but she refuses. King Ahasuerus, guided by his officials, worried lest all women follow Vashti’s example, banishes Vashti and commands all the women in the kingdom to honor their husbands.



Queen Vashti: Judaism's first feminist bad girl
She told the king, 'I will not be your trophy, I will not be your sex object.'

2. Esther Becomes Queen (Esther 2:1-18)

King Ahasuerus has all the beautiful young virgins in his kingdom gathered into his harem so that he might choose a queen. Ultimately, he chooses Esther, adopted daughter of a Jewish exile named Mordecai.



Queen Esther and Mordecai

3. Mordecai Saves King Ahasuerus (Esther 2:19-23)

Meanwhile Mordecai, while sitting at the king's gate overhears two of the king's eunuchs hatching a plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus. Mordecai tells Esther, who tells the king, and the two men are hanged.

4. Haman Plots to Destroy All the Jews (Esther 3:1-15)

Haman, the king's chief official, is angered by Mordecai's refusal to bow down before him and convinces the king to issue a proclamation that on the 13th day of Adar, the day chosen by lots called purim, the Jews would be destroyed, and their goods plundered. While the city of Susa is thrown into confusion by the decree, the king and Haman sit down to drink wine.



Mordecai's refuses to bow down before Haman

5. Esther Agrees to Speak for Her People (Esther 4:1-17)

After Mordecai sends word to Esther that she should appeal to the king to spare her people, Esther sends word back that she has not been summoned into the king's presence for 30 days, and the punishment for appearing without being summoned is death. Mordecai responds that if she does not do this, deliverance will come from somewhere else, whereupon Esther asks that all the Jews fast and pray on her behalf for three days, and then she will go unbidden before the king.

6. Esther Invites the King and Haman to Two Banquets (Esther 5:1-8)

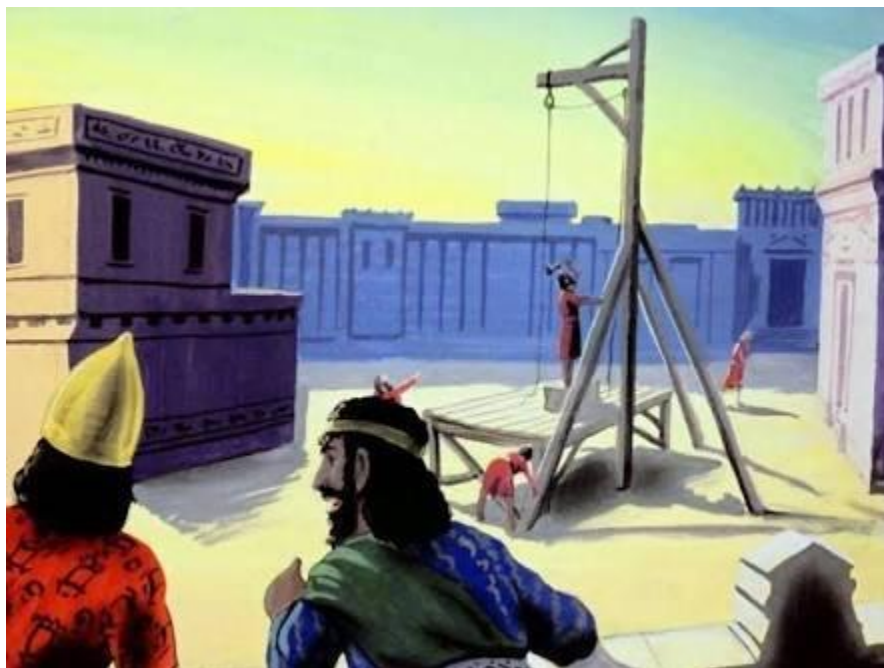
Esther goes before King Ahasuerus who welcomes her, inquires as to her request, and offers her half of his kingdom. She issues an invitation to the king and to Haman for a banquet, and at that first banquet, invites the king and Haman to another banquet the following night.



Esther appeals to the king to spare her people

7. Haman Builds a Gallows for Mordecai (Esther 5:9-14)

Haman, puffed up by his exalted position and the queen's attention, as well as continually angered by Mordecai's lack of respect, follows the advice of his wife Zeresh and his friends to have a huge gallows built for the purpose of hanging Mordecai.



Haman has a huge gallows built for the purpose of hanging Mordecai

8. Mordecai Is Honored (Esther 6:1-13)

Meanwhile the king is unable to sleep that night and asks for the royal records to be read to him. It just so happens that the records that are read tell of Mordecai's saving the king from an assassination attempt. The king asks Haman, who has come to the king's chambers early in the morning to ask for permission to kill Mordecai how he might honor one deserving of recognition. Haman, assuming he is the deserving one, advises parading the honoree through the city clothed in the trappings of the king. The king tells him to do that for Mordecai. Thus, Haman is forced to lead his enemy with honor through the streets rather than seeing him hung on the gallows.

9. Queen Esther Appeals to the King and Haman Is Hanged (Esther 6:14-7:10)

At the second banquet, Esther reveals to the king that she is a Jew, pleads for her people, and names Haman as the villain. The king, mistaking Haman's appeal for mercy at Esther's feet for an attempted seduction of the queen, orders Haman hung on the very gallows he has had built for Mordecai.

10. The Edict against the Jews Is Reversed (Esther 8:1-17)

Esther persuades the king to issue a new decree reversing the king's earlier unalterable decree to annihilate the Jews. Now the enemies of the Jews are to be annihilated instead, and there is much rejoicing.



Purim Is Established

11. The Edict Is Carried Out and Purim Is Established (Esther 9:1-10:3)

On the very day when the initial slaughter of the Jews was to be carried out, the Jews instead took vengeance on their enemies. The Jewish festival of Purim is established in memory of these events, and King Ahasuerus elevates Mordecai to the position previously held by Haman.

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