

“A Journey through the Book of Tobit: To travel is to prosper.”

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Abstract: The apocryphal Book of Tobit revolves around a journey. Tobit sends his son, Tobias, to collect some money from a distant land accompanied by an angel in disguise and a friendly dog. Together, they have many picaresque adventures. But the Book of Tobit alludes to other types of journeys as well: forced travel into exile, righteous walking in the “ways of truth and justice,” passage into death, and pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This paper will explore the narrative motif of journeys in the Book of Tobit and identify a number of possible implications for its sociological context. Finally, it will also consider various interpretations of the journey motif through art.

The Book of Tobit recounts the tale of a once-wealthy Jewish exile in Nineveh named Tobit who becomes blind while performing acts of mercy. Destitute and despairing, he sends his son, Tobias—with the angel Raphael in disguise as Azariah—on a journey to retrieve some money he had left in Media. On his way there, his son acquires a healing potion and a new wife, and eventually returns to Nineveh to restore Tobit’s sight, his family, and his fortune. Tobit dies a happy man. The story turns on the journey motif, and as such, may contribute to the recent dialogue concerning travel in the ancient world.

In order to mine the Book of Tobit for its attitudes to travel, we must first establish its context, an issue that is not easily resolved and which has, by no means, reached scholarly consensus. Although the story is set in the late eighth and early seventh centuries B.C.E., it reflects a much later composition. Some of the historical details are confused, such as the succession of Assyrian kings, suggesting to some that the author was separated from the events by a long passage of time.¹ Furthermore, Tobit calls himself a “Jew,” a term not used during the

¹ Carey A. Moore, *Tobit: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 40A; New York: Doubleday, 1996), 40.

8th C. B.C.E.² Because the text refers authoritatively to some of the prophets by name (Nahum and Amos), we might set its earliest date around 225 B.C.E. And because it does not reflect the harsh vindictive against the Gentiles or the turmoil of the Maccabean era, we might set its latest date at around 175 B.C.E.³ The author was fluent in both with non-biblical motifs (Ahikar, the grateful dead and the dangerous bride) and biblical themes⁴; the preoccupation with living faithfully while in exile suggests that the author was a Jew living in the Diaspora.

The provenance of the Book of Tobit is also a matter for considerable debate. The story was likely written in Aramaic, as five fragmentary manuscripts of Tobit (representing all fourteen chapters) were found in Qumran, four of which were written in Aramaic, and only one in Hebrew⁵; with a likely original language of Aramaic, Tobit was not likely composed in Egypt where Aramaic was not well known.⁶ Some scholars argue that the author could not have been from the eastern Diaspora because the geography is confused.⁷ For example, Tobias travels from Nineveh east to Ecbatana and comes to the Tigris River, but the Tigris is to the West of Nineveh

² For a description of the confused details, see Frank Zimmermann, *The Book of Tobit: An English Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 15.

³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003) 51. Cf. Zimmermann (24) who claims that a Seleucid hegemony in the latter half of the second century B.C.E. was the most likely back-drop for this story because of the bodies left unburied and the on-going nature of the religious persecution (see 2 Macc 9:15). Unaware of the Qumran manuscripts, he further suggests that chapter 14 was written by another hand after 70 C.E.

⁴ See, for example, Zimmermann, 5-12; Daniel J. Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 12-13, 25; John Craghan, *Esther, Judith, Tobit, Jonah, Ruth* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982), 131-133; Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 73-76.

⁵ Fitzmyer, 25. These early Qumran manuscripts support the longer Greek Sinaiticus text (reflected in the JB, NEB, and NAB) rather than the shorter Alexandrinus and Vaticanus manuscripts followed by the RSV. See, for example, J. C. Dancy, *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha: Tobit, Judith, Rest of Esther, Baruch, Letters of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel, and Prayer of Manasseh* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 11-12. See David Flusser ("Psalms, Hymns and Prayer," in M. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (CRINT 2.2; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) 556, who claims that the Aramaic in the Qumran text of Tobit reflects a much earlier date, as early as the 5th C. B.C.E. Cf. Moore, 40-42. For the purposes of this essay, I draw on the Greek text of the Alexandrinus and Vaticanus, with the NRSV translation, though in places I provide my own translations.

⁶ Zimmermann (15-21) suggests that the author lived in the capital city of Antioch (code for Nineveh) because it had a large Jewish population and experienced the Ptolemaic practice of leaving bodies unburied. Similarly, Wills (80-87) argues for a Parthian provenance based on the prominent burial motif—Zoroastrians left corpses exposed to scavenger birds—and the Persian demon, Asmodeus; "Assyria" is thus code for Rome.

⁷ Zimmermann, 16.

(6:2-3). On the basis of the Aramaic and confused geography, Dancy argues that the author lived in Judaea.⁸ Others argue for a more specific provenance of Samaria, based on its association with the Tobiad family and the identification of Tobit's hometown as Thisbe (or as Milik claims, Thebez; see 1:2).⁹ More likely, however, Tobit was not written in Judaea, for the evident longing for a restored Jerusalem and the emphasis on how to live a righteous life while in exile would be misdirected.¹⁰ As the book closes with Tobias' family living "happily ever after" in Media, a more likely provenance would be the Eastern Diaspora. But what then do we make of the confused geography? Lawrence Wills points out that "Jewish novels," such as Tobit, often intentionally confuse the historical and geographical details in order to mark the work as fiction—much as the expression "once upon a time" marks most fairy tales—the result being that the lessons of the story transcend both time and place.¹¹ But, whatever the original provenance of the Book of Tobit may be, the fact remains that the novel was popular throughout the Middle East, as the five manuscripts at Qumran and its various translations testify; the story "spoke" to Jews in diverse locations, and was copied and preserved, edited, and adapted. Its provenance, then, is less important than its positive reception. For the purposes of this study, therefore, we will keep an open mind about the date and provenance of the Book of Tobit and the possible light that this book might bring to bear on the question of travel during the Second Temple Period.

The purpose of this Deuterocanonical book has been variously defined. For some, its importance lies in its contribution to the question, "How do Jews live a respectable life in the Diaspora?" It promotes *kashrut*, almsgiving, use of influence, reverence for Torah, observant

⁸ Dancy, 10. So also Fitzmyer, 54.

⁹ Wills, 68-69; J. T. Milik, "La Patrie de Tobie," *Revue Biblique* 73 (1960): 522-30.

¹⁰ Cf. Moore 43; Fitzmyer, 54. Steven Weitzman, "Allusion, Artifice, and Exile in the Hymn of Tobit," *JBL* 115/1 (1996): 49-61, argues that the Old Testament allusions in Tobit speak to an exilic community.

¹¹ Wills, 3. See also A.-J. Levine "Tobit: Teaching Jews How to Live in the Diaspora," *BR* 8 (1992): 8-51, 64.

burial of the dead, the centrality of Jerusalem, and prayer. Indeed, Harrington claims that the story of Tobit is “in many respects the narrative embodiment of the values of Deuteronomy.”¹² Craghan claims it is “an object lesson in the manner of preserving Jewish faith.”¹³ As the book also bears the marks of other wisdom literature, some claim that its purpose is to promote ethics and universal virtues,¹⁴ and to develop the themes of family life complete with patriarchy, strong women characters, obedient children, and endogamy.¹⁵ For others, Tobit’s value is located in its play on the themes of theodicy, for, like Job, righteous Tobit is not rewarded but falls from prosperity into despair and destitution. For still others, Tobit’s value is in its theological assertions that God is both father and judge, supreme over all things supernatural, and all-knowing; this theology reassures those in exile.¹⁶ Milik suggests that the Book of Tobit attempts to enhance the particular family-line of the Tobiads.¹⁷ Or for others, quite simply, the Book of Tobit is a romantic comedy designed to entertain.¹⁸ Given the amount of traveling going on in this book, however, I will argue that one of the purposes of this book is to promote and justify foreign travel, and it does this in four principle ways: 1) it uses travel to shape the plot; 2) it embeds travel language in non-travel moments in the narrative; 3) it presents travel as a way to advance prosperity; and 4) it regards travel as safe. This positive presentation of travel suggests

¹² Harrington, 25. See also Weitzman, 49-61.

¹³ Craghan, 130.

¹⁴ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 2nd edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 67.

¹⁵ Endogamy is marriage within a tribe (4:12), but the Book of Tobit also includes a prohibition against marriage to a foreign woman (4:12; cf. 3:15; 6:16). Harrington (10) argues that Tobit promotes “‘family values’ in the best sense.” Craghan (129) claims the Book of Tobit is a “study in Jewish family life.” Wills suggests that the importance of marrying within the tribe is the “real intention of the Book of Tobit” (78).

¹⁶ George W. E. Nickelsburg (“Stories of Biblical and Post-Biblical Times,” pages 33-87 in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, edited by Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984, 44) argues that Tobit reassures those who suffer that God is present and active, and it calls those who despair to praise, repentance, and a pious life. The book is thus doxological and parenetic. See also Craghan, 133.

¹⁷ Milik, 522-530; see also Wills, 72.

¹⁸ Zimmerman, 12, claims that the story of Tobit evolved from a number of folktales and, when written down, was given a Jewish twist. For a survey of opinions on the purpose of Tobit, see Moore, 22-33. See Wills, 68-69, for the entertainment value of the text.

an audience that may have been required to travel but feared the breakdown of the family. Never fear, says Tobit, good things happen when people travel!

1) Travel shapes the plot of the book

Literally, as we see in the following chart, notions of travel influence every turn in the plot.¹⁹

1:1-2	Prologue: Tobit is introduced as the speaker		
1:3-16	Tobit walks in the ways of righteousness	1:4-8	He travels to Jerusalem to leave offerings.
		1:8-11	He travels to Assyria in exile but does not eat the Gentile's food.
		1:12-15	Tobit travels to Media to buy for the king.
1:16-3:6	Travel is dangerous; Tobit stays home.	1:16-20	Tobit buries bodies, but must flee. He loses everything but his wife and son.
		1:21-2:1	Sennacherib is killed; his sons flee. Tobit returns to Nineveh under the sponsorship of Ahikar.
		2:1-10	Festival of Weeks dinner ends with Tobit blinded.
		2:10-3:6	Ahikar travels to Elymais; Tobit becomes destitute, shamed by his wife, and vows to travel to his death; he prays.
3:7-17	Sarah's story	3:7-17	Rather than cause her father to travel to Hades in sorrow, Sarah decides not to kill herself; she prays.
3:17	The prayers go up to the presence of God, and Raphael is sent to Tobit and Sarah; their prayers are answered as they both move from one place in the house to another.		
4:1-12:22	Tobias travels.	4:1-20	Tobit remembers the money he left in Rages; he instructs Tobias in the right ways (ὁδοί) of life.
		4:21-5:17	Tobit and Tobias make travel plans and hire Azariah (the angel, Raphael, in disguise).
		5:18-6:1	Anna protests that her son will no longer come and go before them, but is reassured because an "angel" (ironic) will travel with him.
		6:2	Tobias, Azariah, and the dog travel.
		6:3-9	Tobias catches a fish
		6:10-17	Azariah tells Tobias about Sarah; they plan how they will take her back to Nineveh.
		7:1-8:19	Tobias and Azariah arrive in Ecbatana; Tobias marries Sarah and uses the fish's liver to repel the

¹⁹Harrington (10) notes, only in passing, that the central plot of the Book of Tobit is the motif of a quest.

			demon, Asmodeus; Azariah follows Asmodeus to Egypt; Tobias does not travel to the grave that was prepared for him.
		8:20-9:6	The wedding festivities last 14 days; Azariah travels to Rages to get the money and Gabael.
		10:1-7	Tobit and Anna anxiously await Tobias' return.
		10:7-14	Tobias and Sarah say good-bye and leave Ecbatana.
		11:1-19	They arrive in Nineveh; Tobias heals Tobit's blindness with the fish's gall; the community celebrates.
		12:1-22	Tobit pays Azariah for traveling with Tobias; Azariah reveals that he is Raphael, then travels (ἀναβαίνω) to heaven.
13:1-18	Tobit instructs and praises God.		
14:1-10	Tobit's farewell address	14:3-4	Tobit tells Tobias to take his family to Media
		14:5-10	Tobit anticipates the return of Israel to Jerusalem.
14:11-13	Tobit and Anna die. Tobias and his family move to Ecbatana.		
14:15	Tobias praises God when the exiles from Nineveh arrive in Media.		

The center piece of the Book of Tobit is Tobias' journey to collect some money that Tobit left in Rages.²⁰ The prologue to this sequence introduces Tobit who had once traveled and been prosperous but, when he is no longer able to travel, becomes destitute and blind. He prays to travel to his death.²¹ At the same moment many miles away, Sarah prays for death because a demon has killed seven husbands before her marriage to them has even been consummated. Because Tobias travels, he finds a cure for Tobit's blindness and a cure for the demon, Asmodeus, who kills Sarah's husbands. Because he travels, he meets Sarah and, as her last living relative, marries her, saving her from reproach and death, and her family from extinction because there are no more heirs (3:15). Because Tobias travels, he recovers the money Tobit left with Gabael. Because Tobias travels, he returns to Nineveh, cures Tobit's blindness, restores his

²⁰ See Nickelsburg (40) who claims that the main line of the plot is the line through Tobit's and Sarah's suffering through to healing, but this is resolved through Tobias' journey.

²¹ Anatheia Portier-Young, "Alleviation of Suffering in the Book of Tobit: Comedy, Community, and Happy Endings," *CBQ* 63 (2001): 35-54, argues that Tobit's wish to die is similar to Elijah's death wish: Elijah too is rescued by an angel.

fortune and family honor, and provides a long life and good burial for his parents. And finally, because Tobias travels to Ecbatana, he has a safe place to flee before Nineveh is destroyed.

Tobias's journey resolves all the conflicts created in the narrative.

Within the larger narrative of Tobit, Tobias' journey plays a central role, taking up nine out of the fourteen chapters in the entire book. As the Tobias journey approaches, the narrative pace slows considerably. Rather than summary statements that span years, specific and prolonged dialogue slows the pace to virtual time, often needlessly repeating conversation. For example, during his double employment interview, first with Tobias and then with Tobit, Azariah asks Tobit why he wants to know about his family (5:11); twice, Azariah claims that he is familiar with the journey to Media (5:6, 10). Furthermore, as might be expected, the number of journeying words increases at the start of Tobias' journey, but they increase unnecessarily. Tobit 5:17 alone, for example, contains eight words drawn from the journey motif.

καὶ εὐδόκησαν οὕτως καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς Τωβιαν ἕτοιμος γίνου πρὸς τὴν ὁδόν καὶ εὐοδώθειτε καὶ ἠτοίμασεν ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ τὰ πρὸς τὴν ὁδόν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ πορεύου μετὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ δὲ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ οἰκῶν θεὸς εὐοδώσει τὴν ὁδόν ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄγγελος αὐτοῦ συμπορευθήτω ὑμῖν καὶ ἐξηλθαν ἀμφοτέρω ἀπελθεῖν καὶ ὁ κύων τοῦ παιδαρίου μετ' αὐτῶν

The unnecessary profusion of words here suggests a building focus on Tobias' journey.

Furthermore, Tobias' journey is framed by a series of proverbs spoken by Tobit, and the brief mention of the dog that accompanies the travelers (6:2; 11:4).²² Amid a larger plot driven by travel, Tobias' journey thus forms the central piece.

2) Travel language is embedded in non-travel moments in the plot

Even a casual reading of the Book of Tobit reveals abundant travel language. The third word in Tobit's narrative, after the editorial introduction, is the word ὁδοῖς ("ways"); the fifth

²² Zimmerman (7-10) argues that the presence of the dog is a remnant of the story's oral transmission.

word is ἐπορευόμεν (“I was walking”). Travel language is defined generally as any nouns (ὁδός, τρίβος) or verbs that suggest movement from one place to another, either under one’s own power (compounds with ἔρχομαι, πορεύομαι, βαίνω, εὐδοῶ, στρέφω, ἐπανέρχομαι, or φεύγω) or under the influence of another (compounds with ἄγω). See the chart below for frequency and distribution.

Chapter:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
ἔρχομαι I go, I come	1:18, 22	2:3, 13			5:14, 21	6:1	7:1	8:11	9:6	10:1	11:6 (2), 17	12:18		
διέρχομαι I go through	1:21													
ἔξέρχομαι I go out					5:17;			8:14, 20	9:3		11:10, 16			
εἰσέρχομαι I go in			3:17	4:10	5:9, 10	6:15, 17		8:13			11:15			
ἀναβαίνω I go up												12:20		
καταβαίνω I go down			3:17			6:2								14:1 0
πορεύομαι I go, I come	1:3, 6, 7, 14, 15, 19	2:10 (2)	3:5	4:5, 15	5:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, 17	6:1, 18		8:2, 10, 21	9:2, 5	10:7, 14	11:1, 4, 6, 16			
συνπορεύομαι I go with	1:3				5:3, 9, 12, 17, 22									
προσπορεύομαι I go to						6:18								
ἐκπορεύομαι I go from					5:18									
εἰσπορεύομαι I go into					5:18		7:11					12:15		
ὁδός way	1:3, 15		3:2	4:5, 15, 19	5:6, 17 (3), 22	6:1				10:7, 14	11:5			

εὐδοῶ (lit) I travel well, prosper				4:19	5:17 (2), 22		7:12			10:11, 14				
ἀποστρέφω I turn away, remove			3:6				7:2 (2)							
ὑποστρέφω I turn back					5:22	6:13								
ἐπιστρέφω I turn back		2:5	3:17		5:16								13:6 (2), 8	14:5 (2), 6
ἐπανέρχομαι I return						6:17								
φεύγω I flee	1:18, 21					6:17		8:3						
ἐκφεύγω I run away													13:2	
κατάγω I bring down			3:10			6:15							13:2	
ἀνάγω I bring up													13:2	
τρίβος path				4:19										
διασπείρω I scatter													13:3	
σκορπίζω I scatter			3:4										13:5	14:4
Total = 128	14	5	8	8	30	12	5	8	4	7	11	3	8	5

Usually within the narrative of Tobit, travel language refers literally to movement from one place to another. This includes, of course, broad sweeping references to Tobit's pilgrimages to Jerusalem, his move into exile, his travel for the king, the flight from persecution, and, of course, Tobias' journey to Ecbatana and back. Sometimes, the language of movement is used more locally, as when Tobias goes to his father to speak to him (2:3) or when Tobias goes to his physicians (2:10). In one notable and surprising moment in the plot, travel language links Tobit and Sarah in their combined plight: Tobit simultaneously goes into his house while Sarah comes down from her room (τῷ καιρῷ ἐπιστρέψας Τωβιτ εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ καὶ Σαρρα ἦ

τοῦ Ραφουηλ κατέβη ἐκ τοῦ ὑπερώου αὐτῆς; 3:17). This statement marks the beginning of Raphael's intervention. Finally, when Tobit is about to die, he warns his son and grandsons that the people of Israel will all be scattered but that God will bring them back in due course (14:3-7). The whole book, in fact, is framed by the mention of Tobit's exile and the forced exile of the people of Nineveh.

Travel language is also used figuratively in Tobit. First, it serves in descriptions of righteous living. Tobit uses travel language to refer to his faithful life, for he claims to “walk in the ways of truth” (ὁδοῖς ἀληθείας ἐπορεύομην; 3:1). He claims that “all God's ways (ὁδοί) are mercy and truth” (3:2). Tobit instructs Tobias to go (πορευθῆς) in the ways (ὁδοῖς) of righteousness (4:5) and not to walk with drunkenness (μὴ πορευθῆτω μετὰ σοῦ μέθη ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ σου; 4:15); he should ask God that all his ways (ὁδοί) may be straight (εὐθεῖαι) and that all his paths (τρίβοι) and plans prosper (εὐδοιωθῶσιν; 4:19). Similarly, Tobit uses the language of travel when he discusses *not* living a righteous life; he says to God, “And now your many judgments are true in exacting penalty from me for my sins. For we have not kept your commandments and have not walked (ἐπορεύθημεν) in accordance with truth before you” (3:5).²³ Secondly, travel language is used figuratively to describe the descent into death, the darkness, or Hades. When Sarah contemplates suicide, for example, she refrains only because she “will bring [her] father in his old age down in sorrow to Hades” (κατάξω μετ' ὀδύνης εἰς ᾗδου; 3:10; cf. 13:2). Elsewhere, Tobit assures Tobias that almsgiving will not allow him to go (οὐκ ἔα εἰσελθεῖν) into the darkness (4:10). Travel language is the primary vehicle (!) used to describe the activity of both living and dying.

²³Πορεύομαι is generally used to refer to the more physical aspects of travel. See, for example, 5:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14, and 17.

Because travel language is used to describe the activity of living and dying, it make sense that journeys—and impending journeys—become the context for instruction on righteous living, and warnings against unrighteous living. For example, when Tobit sends Tobias on his journey, he teaches him about the care and burial of his parents (4:3-4), remembering the commandments (4:5), acting in truth (4:6), alms-giving (4:7-12; 16), marriage (4:8-13), idleness (4:13), and general conduct (4:14-19). As they travel to Media, Raphael instructs Tobias about the medicinal value of the fish’s liver, heat, and gall (6:7-9), and the need to marry Sarah (6:11-17). Sarah’s parents send the newlyweds back to Nineveh with instructions for Sarah to honor her in-laws and for Tobias to love his wife (10:12). When Tobit settles his account with Azariah/Raphael, he also sends him with instructions about alms and making God known (12:5-10), an occasion that leads to Raphael’s angelophany and ascent (ἀναβαίνω; 12:11-20). Finally, as Tobit is about to journey into death, he delivers a testamentary parenesis to his son and grandsons that they give alms, praise God, and leave Nineveh as soon as Anna dies (14:8-11).

Travel thus not only shapes the plot of the story of Tobit, but excessive travel language—both literal and figurative—is embedded into the very fiber of the tale.

3) Travel advances prosperity

The Book of Tobit demonstrates that travel advances prosperity. First, Tobit claims that Israel was taken into exile because they did not travel willingly to Jerusalem. His compatriots in the tribe of Naphtali went to Dan and “all the mountains of Galilee” in order to sacrifice to the golden calf that King Jeroboam had erected there (1:5); they did not travel to Jerusalem to worship in the temple as it had been “prescribed for all Israel by an everlasting decree” (1:6). In sharp contrast, Tobit claims that he *did* travel to Jerusalem on a regular basis, taking with him an

abundance of offerings; travel was Tobit's way of being faithful to God. In the same breath, Tobit describes his wealth, perhaps inferring—along Deuteronomic lines—that his prosperity was a direct result of his faithfulness to travel to Jerusalem (1:6-8). As a result of Naphtali's unwillingness to travel to Jerusalem, Assyria forces them to travel to Nineveh in exile, and Tobit, though not complicit, is forced to go with them. The setting of Tobit in exile in Nineveh is thus established on the basis of Israel's misdirected travel.

Second, Tobit explains that his faithfulness to God results in more travel. Once in Nineveh, Tobit remembers God with all his heart (1:12) and, more specifically, refrains from eating the food of the Gentiles (1:10-11), again unlike his compatriots, and as a result, the "Most High" gives him favor with King Shalmaneser (1:13). Tobit is assigned the task of purchasing whatever the king needs and thus travels often to Media (1:14). Not only is travel Tobit's reward for faithfulness, but his travel results in an accumulation of wealth—some ten talents worth of silver—which he is able to leave in trust in Media with Gabael (1:14). Reclaiming this stash of money becomes the prime motive for Tobias's travel, which receives the most substantial treatment in the narrative.

Third, like his father before him, Tobias also prospers when he travels. After Tobit becomes blind, Tobias goes to Media to reclaim the money that was left with Gabael. Tobias travels there and not only reclaims the money—by way of his angelic companion—but also returns with a wife, her substantial inheritance, and the miracle cure for his father's blindness. Tobias' trip brings prosperity, long life, and peace to the extended families of Tobit and Tobias.

If travel is the cause for prosperity, then the obverse would also be true: that failure to travel results in destitution. Indeed, this does seem to be the case in the Book of Tobit, as we have already seen in Israel's failure to travel regularly to Jerusalem and their ensuing exile.

After Shalmaneser's death, according to Tobit, Sennacherib becomes the new king and travel conditions become unstable – from ἀκαταστατέω (loosely translated as “not standing upright”)—so Tobit stays home (1:15). While home, he remains faithful to God by other means, principally, by burying the Israelite bodies that are left in the wake of Sennacherib. When people begin to notice these righteous deeds and plot against him, Tobit fears for his life, hides himself, and later flees. This journey results in the loss of all his possessions (1:20). But because of the intervention of his nephew, Ahikar, Tobit journeys home again and rejoins his wife and son. Again because Tobit is home and not traveling, he buries abandoned bodies, but this time, because he has become defiled and cannot re-enter his house, he sleeps in the courtyard; bird droppings fall into his eyes and he becomes blind. As his resources wane, his wife tries to earn some money, but it shames him to the point of suicide. Thus, because Tobit does not travel, he loses his sight, his prosperity, the affections of his wife, and his will to live. Tobit was not lucky when he stayed at home.

In the Book of Tobit, therefore, travel results in prosperity and *not* traveling results in misfortune.

4) Travel is safe

Although the journey of Tobias is framed by blessings and reassurances of safety (5:17-22; 11:17 cf. 5:14; 10:6), the Book of Tobit surprisingly emphasizes that travel is a means for prosperity rather than a source of fear. So for example, when Tobit instructs Tobias to go to Rages to acquire the money, he does not tell him to be afraid because of the journey; the fear of poverty is much greater (4:21). Before Tobias sets out, he expresses concern, not for his safety, but that he will not be recognized by Gabael and given the money; he also does not know the

way (5:2). For this reason, and not to protect him, Tobit hires the angel Raphael—disguised as Azariah—to accompany (συμπορεύεται) Tobias (5:3, 9, 12, 17, 22). Then, when Tobias is delayed, Tobit worries not for the death of his son but that Gabael has died or that Tobias has been detained (10:2). When Anna expresses fear for her delayed son, it is for their livelihood and not for Tobias’ safety (5:18-20); she wants his coming (εἰσπορεύεσθαι) and going (ἐκπορεύεσθαι) before them (5:18). The word φοβέω (“I fear”) is used 12 times in the Book of Tobit, but never when referring to travel (1:19; 2:8; 4:8, 21bis; 6:15bis, 18; 12:16-17; 14:2, 6). Thus, physical danger does not seem to be a significant factor in travel, with one notable exception. When Tobias does not return, his mother becomes inconsolable saying, “My child has perished and is no longer among the living... Woe to me, my child, the light of my eyes, that I let you make the journey” (10:4-5; cf. 5:21). But Tobit rebukes her (10:6) and, as the reader well knows, Tobias will return safely. Anna’s fears are misplaced; her incessant worry and lament is neither necessary nor justified. The book here serves to silence—and ridicule—the noisy complaining woman.

If the Book of Tobit wanted to convey the impression that travel was dangerous, there might be mention of the travelers arming themselves or hiding along the way. There might be mention of robbers or wild beasts. Instead of arms, the travelers take a dog, which otherwise plays no role in the plot except to lend a whimsical tail (pardon the pun). The only danger that Tobias and Azariah encounter is when a fish tries to eat Tobias’ foot (6:3); with little fanfare, he escapes, captures, kills, and eats the fish. He dries the fish’s guts to use later as potions for deliverance and healing (6:4-7). Far from being a danger, the fish becomes a source for salvation. The couple also seems to have no want for food, since they have the remains of the salted fish,

and they find their way to Media without incident. Travel is depicted as an interesting and magical adventure that brings riches, health, and happiness.

Finally, the comedic nature of the Book of Tobit, so well described by David McCracken,²⁴ precludes worry of any kind: the reader, if not the characters, know before it even starts that Tobias' journey will bring healing to Tobit, salvation and marriage to Sarah, and prosperity to all through a successful collection of money. All will be well.

Conclusion

The Book of Tobit is replete with travel positively conveyed. Not only does the plot hinge on the journey motif but journey language is embedded throughout the narrative with unnecessary abundance. Furthermore, those who view travel as dangerous are readily dismissed; their fears are unfounded. To travel is to prosper.

I often think that the stories in the Bible start out in a relatively secular environment and then they are spun to ask "Where is God in this story?" Only after the fact do the authors insert theological reflection into the tale. (We see a similar move in the various recessions of Esther, for example.) So if I have successfully argued that at least one of the early agendas of this tale is to promote travel, then we might wonder what the context was that prompted such an agenda. Several possibilities present themselves. Perhaps the economy had failed and people had to travel in order to send money home to their families; the promise of wealth calmed the turmoil in the family. This is a possible scenario given the emphasis of wisdom literature on family strength and identity. Perhaps the book was simply the result of a traveling salesman spinning a

²⁴ "Narration and Comedy in the Book of Tobit," *JBL* 114/3 (1995): 401-418. See also I. Nowell, "The Book of Tobit: Narrative Technique and Theology" (PhD dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1983); G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).

tale to convince his wife to stop complaining that he was never home; this seems more plausible when we note that Anna is harshly rebuked when she expresses her fears for her son. Perhaps the story is meant to reassure those who had to travel because of political issues—exiles—that they can make lemonade and prosper in spite of their displacement. Or perhaps it was a justification for a transient, nomadic life. When we place these possibilities within the historical context—between 225 and 175 B.C.E. —we might surmise that travel had become the not-yet-acceptable activity of wealthy Jews influenced by their Greek neighbors.

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