

# The Good Word

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## TOBIT, PART III: GEOGRAPHY & INTERPRETATION

### ALLEGED GEOGRAPHICAL ERRORS IN TOBIT:

Having rebutted the alleged historical errors within the *Book of Tobit*, we must now look to the alleged geographical errors. The geographical locations listed in Tobit include the following cities, areas, rivers, and countries in the order of their appearance in the text: Thisbe, Kedesh Naphtali, Upper Galilee, Hazor, Peor, Nineveh, Israel, Galilee, Dan, Jerusalem, Media, Judea, mountains of Ararat, Bethel, Ecbatana, Rages, Tigris River, and Kaserin. Most of these places are well known in historical and biblical records. Thisbe, Tobit's birthplace, is only found in the *Book of Tobit*. Its location is specified in *Tobit 1:2*. So what are the alleged geographical errors? We can limit them to issues associated with Nineveh, Ecbatana, Rages, and Kaserin. One Evangelical Christian source notes:

"The geographical difficulties are also striking. In particular, the Tigris River is implied to be east of Nineveh, some distance toward Ecbatana (*Tobit 6:1-2, 11:1*), whereas Nineveh itself lay on the east bank of the Tigris. Further, in one of the major recensions of the book (that of Sinaiticus and the Old Latin followed by the Vulgate) it is stated that Ecbatana is in the middle of a plain, two days journey in distance from Rages (*Tobit 5:6*). Actually Ecbatana lies high in the mountains and is some 200 miles away from Rages."<sup>1</sup>

Let's look at the verses listed above from *Tobit*:

Leaving Nineveh: *Tobit 6:1-2* (FM)<sup>2</sup> At that she [Tobit's wife and mother of Tobiah] (*became silent and*) stopped crying. 2. The boy [Tobiah] set out and *the angel* [Raphael] *with him*; the dog too came out and went along with them. *They both journeyed along until the first night came upon them*, and they camped by the **Tigris River**. [all versions have the same general statement in slightly different words.]

On the return to Nineveh: *Tobit 11:1* When they drew near to **Kaserin**, which is opposite **Nineveh**, Raphael said ...

The critics of *Tobit* are correct in assuming that

1. *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/encyclopedia-of-the-bible/Book-Tobit>

2. The LXX text of *Tobit* throughout this article is the translation of the G<sup>II</sup> text by Joseph Fitzmyer (FM). Qumran Aramaic and Hebrew fragments agreeing with G<sup>II</sup> are in *italics*, additions/differences are in parentheses (). **Boldface** is my emphasis.

Nineveh was on the eastern side of the Tigris River. Indeed, the archaeological remains of Nineveh are on the eastern bank of the Tigris. However, when they say that *Tobit* implies that the Tigris River is east of Nineveh, they are totally wrong. That is their own presumption. Why is that? They are assuming that to get from Nineveh to Ecbatana Tobiah and Raphael would have to travel east, away from the Tigris River. Consequently, they wouldn't camp by it the first night and subsequently cross over it the next morning.



ANCIENT TRADE ROUTES IN ASSYRIA/PERSIA/ MEDIA  
[SHOWN BY THE DASHED LINES]

In reality, from Nineveh on the eastern bank of the Tigris, Tobiah and Raphael would first cross the Tigris to its western side, then travel south along the Tigris to intersect the traditional caravan routes from the northwest as well as from Palmyra [already a major trading post on the silk road in the 2nd millennium BC]. These would take them south to the town where Seleuceia, the 1st capital of the Seleucid Empire, would be later established in 305 BC. They would then cross back over to the eastern side of the Tigris [to where Seleuceia's sister city Ctesiphon would be built a couple of centuries later, *ca.* 120 BC, within a horseshoe bend in the Tigris], and then travel east on the Silk Road to Ecbatana and on to Rages [also known as Rhaga and Rhages]. None of the critics that I have encountered have understood the importance of this trade-route geography. They assumed Tobiah and Azariah (the angel Raphael) would have traveled straight south-east to Ecbatana, but there were no trade routes going that way. The mountainous geography and the lack of resupply stations precluded such a direct route. So for Tobiah and Azariah to have camped by the Tigris River (on its western bank) on the first night

of their journey would have been totally appropriate. In other words, the book of *Tobit* is correct. Later, on their return journey, as they neared home, they *drew near to Kaserin, which is opposite Nineveh*. Kaserin would have been a small town or village on the west side of the Tigris opposite Nineveh (on the eastern side) just as the text of *Tobit* presents it, and not to the east of Nineveh and across the Tigris from it as the critics have assumed. Kaserin was probably an early way-station, close to Nineveh on a connecting route leading to the main caravan route further south. This caravan route along the western bank of the Tigris would then link with the major trade-route leading NE to Ecbatana and points further east on the *Silk Road*.

Historically, the Tigris River was only navigable as far north as Seleuceia/Ctesiphon which made their later locations a major junction between land travel to the east, west and north, and river travel to the south. Consequently, in *Tobit's* day, twin precursor resupply villages were positioned there to accommodate and resupply the camel caravans or river travelers on the trade-routes between Palmyra, Jerusalem, and Nineveh with the cities to the east on the Silk Road, or Babylon and the Persian Gulf to the south. The *Parthian Stations*, a book written by Isidore of Charax, a 1st century BC geographer and citizen of the Parthian Empire, is one of the very few extant records, albeit fragmentary, of the actual itinerary of the overland trade-routes from Syria to India including the names of the caravan supply stations and the distances between them.<sup>3</sup> These stations were maintained for the convenience of the merchants traveling the Silk Road. That would be the prime reason that Tobiah and his guide Azariah (the angel Raphael) would take these standard safe trade-routes which Raphael was already intimately familiar with. To journey directly eastward cross-country through a nearly impenetrable and dangerous mountainous wilderness was not an option.

*Tobit* 5:6 G<sup>II</sup> (Fitzmyer): 6. He [Raphael] replied, “Yes, I have been there often. I am acquainted with and know all the roads. I have traveled many times to **Media** and lodged with Gabael, our kinsman, who dwells in **Rages**<sup>4</sup> in **Media**. It is a journey of two full days from **Ecbatana** to **Rages**, for it lies

3. Wilfred H Schoff, *Parthian Stations by Isidore of Charax, An account of the overland trade route between the Levant and India in the first century B.C.*, Commercial Museum, Philadelphia, PA, 1914, p. 6: “(6). From that place [to] ... Ecbatana, the metropolis of Media ... 12 schoeni [a *schoenus* = a distance that a camel travels in 1 hour, (roughly 3 1/2 to 4 miles)]. And beyond that place are 3 villages in which there are stations ... (7). From that place [Rhagiana] Media, [58 schoeni ]. In it are 10 villages, and 5 cities. After 7 schoeni are Rhaga and Charax; of which Rhaga is the greatest of the cities in Media.” Thus, it was 58 + 7 = 65 schoeni from Ecbatana to Rages.  
4. MS Sinaiticus wrongly reads ἐν Ἐκβατάνοις here, instead of ἐν Ῥάγοις. The *Vetus Latina* is correct: *in Rages civitate Mediorum*.

in the mountains, whereas **Ecbatana** lies in the midst of a plain” [Note: G<sup>I</sup>, G<sup>II</sup>, & VL all concur on this geography].

However, the critics are unified in their condemnation of *Tobit's* placement of Ectabana in a plain instead of in the mountains, as well as its distance from Rages. Even the Jesuit scholar on *Tobit*, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, aligns himself with the Protestant and academic critics of *Tobit* by bolstering some of their false accusations against the truth of the geography in his own translation and commentary:

“The author of *Tobit* is scarcely well-versed in Assyrian or Median geography: Ecbatana<sup>5</sup> is 325 km from Rages<sup>6</sup>, and it is hardly ‘in the midst of a plain,’ being 1,132 meters above sea level. Moreover, the trip from Ecbatana to Rages would take far more than ‘two full days.’ According to Arrian (*Anabasis* 3.19.8-3.20.2) it took Alexander the Great eleven days of forced march to go from one to the other.”<sup>7</sup>

The archaeological site of Ecbatana lies near the city center of Hamedan in modern day Iran. It is indeed 1,132 meters above sea level. But Fitzmyer and the other critics are wrong in their characterization of it, because Hamedan does lie within a broad flat valley.



RUINS OF ECBATANA OF MEDIA IN CURRENT DAY HAMEDAN, IRAN  
There are mountains in the general vicinity, but a rather modest mountain range at that [see photo below].



HAMEDAN, IRAN LYING IN A BROAD FLAT PLAIN WITH LOW MOUNTAINS IN THE DISTANCE

5. This city is mentioned in Ezra 6:2 as “the fortified city which is in Media.” Its ruins are near the modern city of Hamedan.  
6. I.e., “65 schoeni”, i.e., 65 camel hours of travel.  
7. Fitzmyer, Joseph A., *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature Series, de Gruyter, Berlin, 2003, p. 189.



So, Ecbatana does lie within "the midst of a plain", as Raphael stated. This is also confirmed by Philip Smith's exhaustive history of *The Rise of the Median Kingdom* (1871):

"§5. The most important cities of Media were Ecbatana ... and Rhaga or, on the south side of *Elburz* [a major mountain range], near the Caspian Gates, the chief city of Rhagiana, the north-easternmost district of Media ...

"All these indications clearly identify the place with the rock of *Behistun*, which lies in the direct route from Babylon to *Hamadan*, the site of Ecbatana, and 'where the plain, the fountain, the precipitous rock, and the scarped surface are still to be seen.' The spot seems marked out by nature for records to be 'graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever;' and the traces of four sets of carvings are thus perpetuated on the face of the cliff ... At the north extremity of the mountain, in a nook or retiring angle of the hill, high upon the rock, and almost inaccessible, is the famous record of Darius, the son of Hystapes, known as *The Behistun Inscription*.

"§11 The native name of the historical capital, the Ecbatana of all writers later than Herodotus, is still preserved in the modern *Hamadan*. Its situation in a grassy and wooded plain, watered by streams flowing from *Mt. Elwend*, corresponds to the site of Ecbatana as described by the ancients, at the foot of *Mt. Orontes*, a little to the east of the *Zagrus* range, in the southern part of *Media Magna*. It appears to have been an unwallied city -- for it yielded without resistance to Cyrus, to Alexander, and to Antiochus the Great."<sup>8</sup>

The eyewitness account in *Tobit* is thus vindicated with regard to Ecbatana being in a plain. What about the distance to Rages? Again, according to the angel Raphael, in *Tobit* 5:6, "It is a journey of two full days from *Ecbatana* to *Rages*." Rages was a very big and important town, lying 325 km/200 miles to the east of Ecbatana on the Silk Road near the gateway to the Caspian Sea. In ancient terms that was 65 "schoeni" away, i.e., a 65-hour long trip traveling at the average caravan camel speed of roughly 5 km/hr. In contrast, however, racing camels with their long legs, small humps, and their strong will and courage can reach 40 km/hour, sometimes more. Moreover, their endurance is astonishing: a good camel can cover 120 or 130 km in 12 hours. Some specially bred camels have been known to continue at racing speed for up to 18 hours.<sup>9</sup> So, it would have been theoretically possible to make the trip to Rages in 2 days, were one traveling light or on critical business where speed was of the utmost importance. However, as we read in *Tobit* 9:5 *Raphael*

*set out with the four servants and two camels for Rages in Media* anticipating returning with 10 talents (= 750 pounds) of silver. Consequently, they would have ventured forth using the standard larger, slower, and stronger caravan camels to haul the silver back, which travel at 5 km/hr. If so, it would have taken them a week or so. So it is possible that there may be an error in the text here in terms of the travel time or the city itself. Some Roman Catholic apologists (but not Fitzmyer) have suggested an alternative theory: that there was more than one city with the name Rages, but that is highly unlikely. They also offer no proof for it. Most likely this idea comes from Blessed Jerome's Vulgate version which states "*quae* [referring to Rages] *posita est in monte Exbathanis*" = which is situated on the mountain of Ecbatana, but this is a significant deviation from all other versions. Moreover, there is no known town of Rages in the immediate area of Ecbatana.

Could there have been copyist errors or redactions to the original text of *Tobit* regarding the time to travel to Rages? With the complicated textual history of the *Book of Tobit*, its earliest Aramaic manuscript from Qumran dating from the 2nd century BC, and multiple redactions over several centuries, certain errors could have crept in. These earliest extant versions were "copied" some 500 years after Tobit and Tobiah would have recorded the events of their lives. In the interim their texts could have been redacted and the story filled in or altered by others who lacked first hand knowledge of the geography of Media. We also must recognize that our earliest extant texts, the Aramaic and Hebrew fragments from Cave 4 at Qumran, do not contain *Tobit* 5:6 which discusses the travel time between Ecbatana and Rages. Were this verse to be found within future Qumran fragments, it may or may not correct this error. Nevertheless, the rest of the alleged errors in history and in geography raised by the critics of *Tobit* have been rebutted. So these alleged errors have been erroneous personal opinions based on their own assumptions. Most are readily explainable with a little effort. Perhaps this last remaining discrepancy may be remedied as well by future ancient text discoveries.

#### USE AND INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF TOBIT:

The Fathers have unapologetically referenced *Tobit* as they would any historical book of the *Bible*. They have also quoted *Tobit* for its wisdom and moral instruction.

"2.2. The use of *Tobit* is well confirmed by its wide quoting by the Fathers of the Church. The *Bibindex* offers 235 results for this book (79 authors) ... Further, Hanhart's edition of *Tobit* refers in the apparatus to 80 ancient works of

8. <https://books.google.com/books?id=11oqAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA445&dq=City+of+Rhaga+in+ancient+Media&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiCrueSgprjAhWPU54KHbriCuCQ6AEIVjAH#v=onepage&q=Rhaga&f=false> = Philip Smith, *The Student's Ancient History: The Ancient History of the East*, Chapter XIX, *Rise of the Median Kingdom*, §5, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1871, pp. 445-453.

9. <http://www.dahabplazahotel.com/camel-and-horse-riding.html>



more than 50 authors ... No ancient commentary was preserved ... Nevertheless it was quoted quite often as a moral authority.”<sup>10</sup>

The only liturgical use of *Tobit* occurs in the Matins for Thursday in the 5th week of Great Lent in *The Life of St. Mary of Egypt* written by St. Sophronius (AD 560-638), Patriarch of Jerusalem, who begins with:

*It is good to keep close the secret of a king, but it is honorable to reveal the works of God* [Tobit 12:7], said the angel Raphael to Tobit after the old man’s eyes were healed miraculously. Indeed, not to keep the secret of a king is a dangerous, fearful matter, but to remain silent about God’s wondrous works is a great loss to the soul. I remember the Gospel text in which punishment is promised to the indolent servant, who took a talent from his lord and buried it, earning nothing with the gift; therefore, I am afraid to hide the works of God. I will not keep silent about the account that has reached me. Let no one doubt the authenticity of the story or any of its wondrous details, for nothing in it is merely my opinion, and I would never devise fables about what is holy. As for those who have no faith and consider the miracles too remarkable to be true, in view of the weakness of human nature may the Lord have mercy on them! But now I must begin my tale of marvelous events that took place among us.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned in Part I of this series on *Tobit*, it was not until the time of the Venerable Bede (AD 673-735) of Northumbria (England) that an allegorical interpretation of *Tobit* had been written. Subsequently, *Tobit* could be interpreted as an allegory of the salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ our Lord. But before that, it was only interpreted historically.

For our purposes here I would like to discuss a select few of the teachings of *Tobit*.

#### ON THE SILVER RULE:

What is the “Silver Rule?” The Silver Rule seems to have originated with *Tobit 4:15* (FM), “*What you do not like to be done to you, do not do to anyone!*” It is an earlier and negative formulation of what later will be termed our Lord Jesus Christ’s “Golden Rule:” *St. Matthew 7:12* (KJV): “*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*”

The earliest reference we have to Tobit’s “Silver Rule” is found in the *Didache* (c.50-100 AD)<sup>12</sup>:

*Didache 1.1* There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.

1.2 Now this is the way of life: First, you shall love God, who made you. Second, you shall love your neighbor as yourself; **but whatever you do not wish to happen to you, do not do to another.**

It was not infrequently mentioned by other writers and was consequently included three times in the 4th century collection the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*<sup>13</sup> -- evidence of the rule’s popularity even without directly referencing Tobit:

(1) But as to those who are obedient to God, there is one law of God, simple, true, living, which is this: **Do not that to another which thou hatest another should do to thee.**<sup>14</sup>

(2) Wherefore he that avoids a curse, let him not curse another; for **what thou hatest should be done to thee, do not thou to another.**<sup>15</sup>

In this third passage below we see *Tobit*’s “Silver rule” quoted as *Holy Scripture* in the midst of other verses of *Holy Scripture*.

(3) The first way, therefore, is that of life; and to this, which the law also does appoint: *To love the Lord God with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, who is the one and only God, besides whom there is no other; and thy neighbor as thyself. And whatsoever thou wouldst not should be done to thee, that do not thou to another. Bless them that curse you; pray for them that despitefully use you. Love your enemies; for what thanks is it if ye love those that love you? For even the Gentiles do the same ...*<sup>16</sup>

#### ON THE GIVING OF ALMS DELIVERING FROM DEATH:

St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and Martyr (AD 69-156), in his *Letter to the Philippians 10:2*, startles us with a profound soteriological pronouncement: “When you can do good, defer it not, **because alms deliver from death.**”<sup>17</sup> Such a teaching is found in *Scripture* only in the *Book of Tobit*:

*Tobit 4:7* (FM [MS 319, (lacuna in G<sup>1</sup>)]) *give alms from what you have; and do not turn your face away from any poor person. Then God’s face will not be turned away from you.* 8 According to what you have, give alms proportionately; (if you, my son, have abundance, according to that abundance give alms;) if you have little, do not be afraid to give (according to) the little you can. 9 So you will be storing up good treasures (by giving alms) against the day of need. 10 **For almsgiving preserves one from death and keeps one from going off into Darkness** [VL agrees: Quoniam eleemosyna a morte liberat, et non patitur ire in tenebras]. 11 Indeed, almsgiving is a good gift in the sight of the Most High for all who give it.

*Tobit 12:8* (FM) Prayer with fidelity and almsgiving with righteousness are a better good than wealth with wickedness. It is better to give alms than to hoard gold. 9a **For almsgiving saves one from death; it wipes out all sin** [VL & G<sup>1</sup> agree].

10. Michal Wojciechowski, *Authority and Canonicity of the Book of Tobit*, 2014 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273462227>

11. St. Sophronius, *The first Day of the Month of April, The Life of Our Venerable Mother Mary of Egypt*, in St. Demetrius of Rostov, *The Great Collection of The Lives of the Saints*, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2012, p. 7.

12. *Didache: The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles*, in Michael W. Holmes (editor & translator), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, Third Edition*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 345.

13. A controversial 4th century compilation from several sources.

14. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, I.1.1, ANF VII, p. 391:

15. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, III.1.15, ANF VII, p. 431.

16. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*, VII.1.II, ANF VII, p. 465

17. St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians*, Chapter X, ANF, Vol. 1, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, p. 35. Commemorated on Feb 23, martyred c. AD 160.

9b Those who give alms will enjoy a full life.

Thus, *Tobit* appears to be the original source of the teaching that sins can be purged by the giving of alms and save one from death -- an idea found in the papyrus MS 319, G<sup>1</sup>, G<sup>II</sup>, and VL texts of *Tobit*.<sup>18</sup>

Admittedly, King Solomon (10th century BC) did mention that “*righteousness delivereth from death*” (Proverbs 10:2b, 11:4b), but that is a far cry from the more specific statement of *Tobit* (7-8th century BC) that *almsgiving preserves one from death and keeps one from going off into Darkness and wipes out all sin*. *Tobit* himself practiced almsgiving his entire life and taught his son Tobiah to do the same. Moreover, *Tobit* further taught that almsgiving is a treasure that can be used in the future *in the day of need*, to preserve one from death, and keeping one from going off into Darkness. At first one might think that this concept is opposed to salvation by faith in Christ and His sacrifice for our sins on the cross. But that is not the case as we will see from the discerning writings of St. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200-258 AD).

The Latin Father St. Cyprian referenced this idea of alms-giving saving one from death more than once:

*St. Cyprian: On Works and Alms*: Be rather such a father to your children as was Tobias. Give useful and saving precepts to your pledges, such as he gave to his son; command your children what he also commanded his son, saying: “*And now, my son, I command thee, serve God in truth, and do before Him that which pleaseth Him; and command thy sons, that they exercise righteousness and alms, and be mindful of God, and bless His name always.*” [Tob.14:10-11]. And again: “*All the days of thy life, most dear son, have God in your mind, and be not willing to transgress His commandments. Do righteousness all the days of thy life, and be not willing to walk in the way of iniquity; because if thou deal truly, there will be respect of thy works. Give alms of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor man. So shall it be, that neither shall the face of God be turned away from thee. As thou hast, my son, so do. If thy substance is abundant, give alms of it the more. If thou hast little, communicate of that little. And fear not when thou doest alms; for thou layest up a good reward for thyself against the day of necessity, because that alms do deliver from death, and suffereth not to come into Gehenna. Alms is a good gift to all that give it, in the sight of the most high God*” [Tob. 4:5-11].<sup>19</sup>

*St. Cyprian: Of the Benefit of Good Works and Mercy, Testimonies*: Of this same matter in *Tobit*: “*And I said to*

18. This concept is thought by some to be derived from *Daniel 4:24b* (KJV) ... *break off thy sins by righteousness* [חַדְשׁוּ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ], and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity. LXX (Brenton) ... *atone for thy sins by alms* [ἐλεημοσύνη], and thine iniquities by compassion on the poor: it may be God will be long-suffering to thy trespasses. But neither connect this with saving one from death as *Tobit* does.

19. Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise VIII, On Works and Alms*, ¶20, ANF V, p. 481-2

*Tobias, My son, go and bring whatever poor man thou shalt find out of our brethren, who still has God in mind with his whole heart. Bring him hither, and he shall eat my dinner together with me. Behold, I attend thee, my son, until thou come*” [Tob.2:2]. Also in the same place: “*All the days of thy life, my son, keep God in mind, and transgress not His precepts. Do justice all the days of thy life, and do not walk in the way of unrighteousness; because if thou act truly, there will be respect of thy works. Give alms of thy substance, and turn not thy face from any poor man. So shall it come to pass that the face of God shall not be turned away from thee. Even as thou hast, my son, so do: if thou hast abundant substance, give the more alms therefrom; if thou hast little, communicate even of that little. And do not fear when thou givest alms: thou layest up for thyself a good reward against the day of need; because alms delivereth from death, and does not suffer to go into darkness. Alms is a good office for all who do it in the sight of the most high God.*” [Tob. 4:5-11].<sup>20</sup>

*St. Cyprian: Alms Deliver from Death: But I wonder that some are so obstinate as to think that repentance is not to be granted to the lapsed, or to suppose that pardon is to be denied to the penitent, when it is written, “Remember whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the first works,”* (Rev. 2:5) which certainly is said to him who evidently has fallen, and whom the Lord exhorts to rise up again by his works, because it is written, “*Alms do deliver from death,*” [Tobit 4:10] and not, assuredly, from that death which once the blood of Christ extinguished, and from which the saving grace of baptism and of our Redeemer has delivered us, but from that which subsequently creeps in through sins.<sup>21</sup>

In this last passage St. Cyprian clarifies the apparent conflict between alms delivering from death and the salvation announced in the Gospel of Christ Jesus. It has to do with the sins committed after we have come into the faith, after our baptism. The blood of Christ shed on the Cross for us extinguishes corruption and death, i.e., those things that we have inherited in Adam and all of our sins up to baptism. However, we also incur personal guilt after baptism through the multitude of sins we subsequently commit in word, thought, and deed. These need to be *loosed* through confession and repentance. After our repose they can also be forgiven through the giving of alms in our behalf. Such works of righteousness can tip the scales in our favor, when, after our repose, our soul ascends through the toll-houses of the “particular/preliminary judgment.” In each toll-house the demons bring before us all of the sins which we have committed (as well as many other sins we did not commit, but which they accuse us of anyway, to frighten us). Every sin not erased from our record by confession and repentance adds weight to the demons’ side of the balance. If they win this judgment, then

20. Cyprian *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise XII, Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews, Bk. 3, Of the Benefit of Good Works and Mercy*, Testimonies ¶1, ANF V, p. 531

21. Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian, Epistle LI, ¶22, ANF V*, p. 332.

they are allowed by God to drag the sinner off into Darkness to await the Great Judgment.<sup>22,23</sup> However, those sins that linger can be balanced out through works of righteousness performed during our lifetime -- especially the giving of alms from the heart which is the practical expression of compassion, of love for our neighbor. It is here, in the preliminary judgment of the



DETAIL OF THE "LAST JUDGMENT", NORTHERN RUSSIA, 16TH CENTURY, SHOWING THE AERIAL TOLL HOUSES AS WHITE DISCS LABELED WITH THE PARTICULAR SIN, AND A LARGE BALANCE WEIGHING OUT THE PRELIMINARY JUDGMENT OF A SOUL TRYING TO PASS THROUGH TO HEAVEN. (FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE HERMITAGE MUSEUM, ST. PETERSBURG)

toll-houses, that *almsgiving saves one from death; it wipes out all sin* (Tobit 12:9), that *almsgiving preserves one from death and keeps one from going off into Darkness* (Tobit 4:10). In addition, following one's death, the prayers of the Church in one's behalf especially during the Divine Liturgy and the giving of alms in the name of the reposed by his family, friends, and acquaintances may make the difference between salvation and condemnation by our Lord Jesus Christ, because Almsgiving is one form of righteousness that the angels can use to overcome the accusations of the demons.

*St. Cyprian: On Prayer with Fasting and Almsgiving:* Moreover, those who pray should not come to God with fruitless or naked prayers. Petition is ineffectual when it is a barren entreaty that beseeches God [cf. Col. 1:2]. For as every tree that bringeth not forth fruit is cut down and cast into the fire; assuredly also, words that do not bear fruit cannot deserve anything of God, because they are fruitful in no result. **And thus Holy Scripture instructs us, saying, Prayer is good with fasting and almsgiving [Tob. 12:8]. For He who will give us in the day of judgment a reward for our labours and alms, is even in this life a merciful hearer of one who comes to Him in prayer associated with good**

22. St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homily on the Departure of the Soul*, in Archimandrite Panteleimon, *Eternal Mysteries Beyond the Grave*, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY, 1996, pp. 62-68.

23. Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow (1816-1882), *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. II, § 249, pp. 526-538, <https://nftu.net/metropolitan-macarius-moscow-judgment-toll-houses/>

works.<sup>24</sup>

Here St. Cyprian calls *Tobit* "Holy Scripture" and reinforces the idea that prayer with fasting and almsgiving, i.e., good works/works of righteousness, will result in a reward from the Just Judge on the day of judgment. Moreover, our Lord is a Merciful Hearer in this life for those who come to Him in prayer and with works of righteousness done in His Name and according to His will -- thus, a two-fold benefit.

*Tobit 12:11 (FM)* "So now, my children, see what almsgiving accomplishes, and what wickedness does -- how it brings death. But now my life is failing me." So they laid Tobit on his bed, and he dies. He was buried there with due honor.

#### ON THE ANGELS OF GOD AND THEIR MINISTRY TO MANKIND:

*St. Cyprian: On the Angels:* Those prayers quickly ascend to God which the merits of our labours urge upon God. Thus also Raphael the angel was a witness to the constant prayer and the constant good works of Tobias, saying, *It is honourable to reveal and confess the works of God. For when thou didst pray, and Sarah, I did bring the remembrance of your prayers before the holiness of God. And when thou didst bury the dead in simplicity, and because thou didst not delay to rise up and to leave thy dinner, but didst go out and cover the dead, I was sent to prove thee; and again God has sent me to heal thee, and Sarah thy daughter-in-law. For I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels which stand and go in and out before the glory of God* [Tob. 12:12-15].<sup>25</sup>

St. Hippolytus of Rome (c. AD 170-235) in his commentary to *Daniel* (1.28.6) refers to the prayer of Tobias and Sarah (Tob. 8) in the context of the Susannah story, treating *Tobit* as a recognized book:

*St. Hippolytus: For even now the angel of God.* He shows also, that when Susanna prayed to God, and was heard, the angel was sent then to help her, just as was in the case in the instance of Tobias and Sara. For when they prayed the supplication of both of them was heard in the same day and the same hour, and the angel Raphael was sent to heal them both. [Tob. 3:16. *At that very moment the prayer of both of them was heard in the glorious presence of God.*]<sup>26</sup>

#### ORTHOPRAXIS AND ORTHODOXY IN THE END TIMES, THE TIME OF THE ANTICHRIST:

However, there is another important aspect of *Tobit* that bears mentioning. With Tobit's deportation into the Assyrian Empire in 732 BC he did not have easy access to the Jerusalem Temple, its priests, levites, and services. Being surrounded by Israelites in Nineveh who had ceased worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob generations before, as well as hostile pagan Assyrian society, Tobit and his family were at

24. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise IV. On the Lord's Prayer*, §32, ANF V, p. 456

25. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise IV. On the Lord's Prayer*, §33, ANF V, p. 456.

26. Hippolytus (Greek), *Fragments from Commentaries*, §55, ANF V, p. 193.



times subject to religious and ethnic persecution. Nevertheless, his life, works of righteousness, and wise instruction, although coming centuries before the incarnation of Christ, are nonetheless examples to us of how to conduct ourselves, and how to hold on to what we have in difficult times: to worship the Lord in His Temple, to search out the hierarchs and priests who are still alive and hold fast to the truth and minister to our spiritual needs, to keep the fasts, to celebrate the feasts with other believers, to bury the dead with honor and respect, to distribute alms, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, and to care for widows and orphans. Tobit truly held fast to that which he had received and passed that down to his son Tobiah and daughter-in-law Sarah.

In the *Apocalypse* St. John was told by the Lord to write messages to the 7 Churches. Those Churches in Thyatira and Philadelphia were told to hold fast to what they had already received, i.e., the entirety of the faith, the Holy Tradition, so that they might be “overcomers” in their days of tribulation and be rewarded in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Consequently, Tobit is a type of the True Orthodox Christian living in a hostile pagan, syncretist, and ecumenist world -- not unlike that of today. His life, works of righteousness, and wise instruction, although coming before the incarnation of Christ, are nonetheless examples to us of how to conduct ourselves, and how to hold on to what we have. Is that not what we Orthodox, often living far from a Church try to do in our times?

Let’s now read from *Tobit* with this aspect in mind.

*Tobit 1:3* (FM) I, Tobit, walked the paths of fidelity and righteousness all the days of my life. I gave many alms to my relatives and those of my nation who went with me in captivity to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians ... 6. I was the only one to go frequently to Jerusalem on feast days, as was prescribed in a standing decree for all Israel. Taking along the firstfruits of crops and the firstlings of flocks, the tithes of the cattle, and the first shearings of the sheep I used to run off to Jerusalem. 7. I gave them to the priests, the sons of Aaron, at the altar of sacrifice. To the Levites ministering in Jerusalem I would give tithes of wine, grain, olive oil, pomegranates, and other fruit. The second tithe for the sixth years I saved as money, and I would go and dispense it in Jerusalem each of those years. 8. I gave it to the orphans, the widows, and the proselytes who joined the children of Israel. When I brought and donated it to them in the third year, we feasted on it, keeping with the decree set down about them in the law of Moses and according to the instructions given by Deborah, the mother of our ancestor Hananiel, for my father had died and left me an orphan. 9. When I reached manhood, I married a woman from our ancestral kindred and had by her a son whom I named Tobiah. 10. After deportation to the Assyrians, when I was taken captive and came to Nineveh, everyone of my relatives and my people there used to eat the food of the Gentiles, 11. but I kept myself from eating such food. 12. Because I was duly mindful of my God, 13. The

most High granted me favor and good standing before Enemesar [Sargon II], and I used to buy for him all that he needed ...16. In the days of Enemesar [Sargon II], I gave alms to my relatives, to those of my people. 17. I shared my food with the hungry and my clothing with the naked; and if I saw the dead body of anyone of my nation tossed beyond *the wall of Nineveh*, I would bury it. 18. I Also buried anyone whom Sennacherib had put to death after he came back in flight from Judea in the days when the King of Heaven passed judgment on him for all his blasphemies [701 BC]. In his anger he slew many of the Israelites, but I would steal their bodies and bury them; when Sennacherib looked for them, he did not find them.

Here Tobit seems to restrict his alms-giving to relatives and Israelites. Below, as you will see, he advises his son to give alms to any poor person, as well as any righteous person. Consequently, Tobit’s entire life reflects a godly righteousness and heartfelt love for others, as should ours. Later, Tobit thoroughly instructs his son Tobiah in godliness including honoring one’s parents properly and obeying the Lord’s commandments -- in other words teaching many things that need to be repeated over and over again in our generation and in the coming time of the Antichrist when the love of many will turn cold, when many will turn against one another, persecute one another, and kill one another:

*Tobit 4:1* (FM) On that day Tobit recalled the money that he had left in trust with Gabael in Rages of Media. 2. He said to himself, “I should have asked for *death*. *Why should I not call my son Tobiah and explain to him about that money before I die?* 3. So he called his son Tobiah. When he came to them he said, “Bury me decently and honor your mother, not abandoning her for the rest of her life. Do *what is pleasing* to her and *do not grieve* her spirit in any way. 4. Remember her, my boy, because she faced many risks for you while you were (*she carried you*) in her womb. When she dies, bury her alongside of me in the same grave. 5. *Be mindful of (God) the Lord, my boy, every day of your life. Do not seek to sin or transgress His commandments.* Practice righteousness *all the days of your life*, and tread not the *paths of wickedness*. 6. For those who *act with fidelity* will prosper in all they (*you*) do. To all those who practice righteousness [MS 319] 7. *give alms from what you have; and do not turn your face away from any poor person. Then God’s face will not be turned away from you.* 8. According to what you have, give alms proportionately; (*if you, my son, have abundance, according to that abundance give alms;*) *if you have little*, do not be afraid to give (*according to*) the little you can. 9. So you will be storing up *good treasures (by giving alms)* against the day of need. 10. For almsgiving preserves one from death and keeps one from going off into Darkness. 11. Indeed, almsgiving is a good gift in the sight of the Most High for all who give it. 12. Be on your guard, my boy, against all illicit sex. Above all, take a wife from among the descendants of your ancestors, and do not marry a foreign woman who is not of your fathers’ tribe. For we are children of the prophets, and truly children of the prophets. Noah was a prophet first, then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our ancestors of old; all of them



## THE GOOD WORD

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took wives from their kindred, and they were blessed in their children and their posterity will inherit the land. 13. Now then, my boy, love your relatives, and let not your heart disdain to take a wife from among the daughters of the children of your people. For in pride there is ruin and much anarchy; and in shiftlessness there is loss and great poverty. Shiftlessness is the mother of famine. 14. Pay the wages the same day for anyone who works for you; do not withhold the wages of anyone even over night. Your reward will not be withheld from you, if you serve God faithfully. Be circumspect, my boy, in all that you do and disciplined in all your behavior. 15. What you do not like to be done to you, do not do to anyone! Do not drink wine to excess, and let not drunkenness be an evil that accompanies your way. 16. Give some of your bread to the hungry and some of your clothing to the naked. Give as alms all that you have over and above your needs, and let not your eye begrudge your giving of it. 17. Put your bread on the tombs of the righteous, but give not of it to sinners.<sup>27</sup> 18. Seek advice from every sensible person and do not despise it since every bit of advice is useful. 19. On every occasion praise God and beg Him that your ways may be made straight and all your paths may lead to prosperity. For no nation has good counsel, [S:] but the Lord Himself supplies them with good counsel. Whomever He wishes, the Lord casts down to deepest Hades. So, my boy, remember these commands, and let them not be effaced from your mind.

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27. St. Augustine, *Sermon 361.6* interprets this to mean do not put your [wine and] bread on the tombs of the unrighteous/sinners/unbelievers, in Sever J. Voicu (ed.), *Commentary on Tobit, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol XV: Apocrypha*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2010, p.12-13.

## CONFESSING GOD BEFORE MEN:

Lastly, Tobit and his son Tobiah, as we are, are instructed to confess God before men -- something that is praised and encouraged at every opportunity, so that our Lord Jesus Christ will confess us before His Father!

*Tobit 12:6* (FM) Then Raphael called the two of them privately to say to them, "Praise God and acknowledge before all the living the good things that He has done for you, so as to praise Him and sing hymns to His name. Declare God's words to all people with due honor; be not slow to acknowledge Him. 7. It is right to conceal a king's secret, and to make manifest and acknowledge the acts of God with due honor. Do good, and evil will not come upon you.

*St. Cyprian: On Confessing God Before Men During Times of Persecution*, It was before predicted that the world would hold us in abhorrence, and that it would stir up persecutions against us, and that no new thing is happening to the Christians, since, from the beginning of the world, the good have suffered and the righteous have been oppressed and slain by the unrighteous ... And Daniel, devoted to God, and filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaims and says: "I worship nothing but the Lord my God, who founded the heaven and the earth." (*Bel and the Dragon* verse 5). Tobias [Tobit] also, although under a royal and tyrannical slavery, yet in feeling and spirit free, maintains his confession to God, and sublimely announces both the divine power and majesty, saying: "In the land of my captivity I confess to Him, and I show forth His power in a sinful nation" [*Tobit 13:6b*].<sup>28</sup>



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28. Cyprian, *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise XI. Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus, ¶11, ANF V*, p. 503