

Tobit 1-2

This book tells the story of Tobit son of Tobiel son of Hananiel son of Adiel son of Gabael son of Raphael of the descendants of Asiel, of the tribe of Naphtali, who in the days of King Shalmaneser of the Assyrians was taken into captivity from Thisbe, which is to the south of Kedesh Naphtali in Upper Galilee, above Asher towards the west, and north of Phogor.

I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life. I performed many acts of charity for my kindred and my people who had gone with me in exile to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians. When I was in my own country, in the land of Israel, while I was still a young man, the whole tribe of my ancestor Naphtali deserted the house of David and Jerusalem. This city had been chosen from among all the tribes of Israel, where all the tribes of Israel should offer sacrifice and where the temple, the dwelling of God, had been consecrated and established for all generations for ever.

All my kindred and our ancestral house of Naphtali sacrificed to the calf that King Jeroboam of Israel had erected in Dan and on all the mountains of Galilee. But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the festivals, as it is prescribed for all Israel by an everlasting decree. I would hurry off to Jerusalem with the first fruits of the crops and the firstlings of the flock, the tithes of the cattle, and the first shearings of the sheep. I would give these to the priests, the sons of Aaron, at the altar; likewise the tenth of the grain, wine, olive oil, pomegranates, figs, and the rest of the fruits to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem. Also, for six years I would save up a second tenth in money and go and distribute it in Jerusalem. A third tenth I would give to the orphans and widows and to the converts who had attached themselves to Israel. I would bring it and give it to them in the third year, and we would eat it according to the ordinance decreed concerning it in the law of Moses and according to the instructions of Deborah, the mother of my father Tobiel, for my father had died and left me an orphan. When I became a man I married a woman, a member of our own family, and by her I became the father of a son whom I named Tobias.

After I was carried away captive to Assyria and came as a captive to Nineveh, everyone of my kindred and my people ate the food of the Gentiles, but I kept myself from eating the food of the Gentiles. Because I was mindful of God with all my heart, the Most High gave me favour and good standing with Shalmaneser, and I used to buy everything he needed. Until his death I used to go into Media, and buy for him there. While in the country of Media I left bags of silver worth ten talents in trust with Gabael, the brother of Gabri. But when Shalmaneser died, and his son Sennacherib reigned in his place, the highways into Media became unsafe and I could no longer go there.

In the days of Shalmaneser I performed many acts of charity to my kindred, those of my tribe. I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it. I also buried any whom King Sennacherib put to death when he came fleeing from Judea in those days of judgement that the king of heaven executed upon him because of his blasphemies. For in his anger he put to death many Israelites; but I would secretly remove the bodies and bury them. So when Sennacherib looked for them he could not find them. Then one of the Ninevites went and informed the king about me, that I was burying them; so I hid myself. But when I realized that the king knew about me and that I was being searched for to be put to

death, I was afraid and ran away. Then all my property was confiscated; nothing was left to me that was not taken into the royal treasury, except my wife Anna and my son Tobias.

But not forty days passed before two of Sennacherib's sons killed him, and they fled to the mountains of Ararat, and his son Esar-haddon reigned after him. He appointed Ahikar, the son of my brother Hanaelover all the accounts of his kingdom, and he had authority over the entire administration. Ahikar interceded for me, and I returned to Nineveh. Now Ahikar was chief cupbearer, keeper of the signet, and in charge of administration of the accounts under King Sennacherib of Assyria; so Esar-haddon reappointed him. He was my nephew and so a close relative.

Then during the reign of Esar-haddon I returned home, and my wife Anna and my son Tobias were restored to me. At our festival of Pentecost, which is the sacred festival of weeks, a good dinner was prepared for me and I reclined to eat. When the table was set for me and an abundance of food placed before me, I said to my son Tobias, 'Go, my child, and bring whatever poor person you may find of our people among the exiles in Nineveh, who is wholeheartedly mindful of God, and he shall eat together with me. I will wait for you, until you come back.' So Tobias went to look for some poor person of our people. When he had returned he said, 'Father!' And I replied, 'Here I am, my child.' Then he went on to say, 'Look, father, one of our own people has been murdered and thrown into the market-place, and now he lies there strangled.' Then I sprang up, left the dinner before even tasting it, and removed the body from the square and laid it in one of the rooms until sunset when I might bury it. When I returned, I washed myself and ate my food in sorrow. Then I remembered the prophecy of Amos, how he said against Bethel,

'Your festivals shall be turned into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation.'

And I wept.

When the sun had set, I went and dug a grave and buried him. And my neighbours laughed and said, 'Is he still not afraid? He has already been hunted down to be put to death for doing this, and he ran away; yet here he is again burying the dead!' That same night I washed myself and went into my courtyard and slept by the wall of the courtyard; and my face was uncovered because of the heat. I did not know that there were sparrows on the wall; their fresh droppings fell into my eyes and produced white films. I went to physicians to be healed, but the more they treated me with ointments the more my vision was obscured by the white films, until I became completely blind. For four years I remained unable to see. All my kindred were sorry for me, and Ahikar took care of me for two years before he went to Elymais.

At that time, also, my wife Anna earned money at women's work. She used to send what she made to the owners and they would pay wages to her. One day, the seventh of Dystrus, when she cut off a piece she had woven and sent it to the owners, they paid her full wages and also gave her a kid for a meal. When she returned to me, the kid began to bleat. So I called her and said, 'Where did you get this kid? It is surely not stolen, is it? Return it to the owners; for we have no right to eat anything stolen.' But she said to me, 'It was given to me as a gift in addition to my wages.' But I did not believe her, and told her to return it to the owners. I became flushed with anger against her over this. Then she replied to me, 'Where are your acts of charity? Where are your righteous deeds? These things are known about you!'