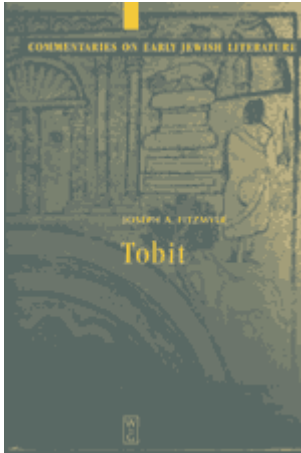


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Fitzmyer, Joseph A.

Tobit

Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature

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The Book of Tobit is challenging in a variety of ways. The situation of the transmission of the text is difficult; several text forms in different languages are extant. The genre is not easy to determine, and the theological content offers various aspects ranging from ethics to human images of God, from the theology of prayer to eschatological motifs. It is hence appropriate to approach this book repeatedly from divergent perspectives.

Fitzmyer's commentary is a very important contribution to the knowledge about and the interpretation of the book of Tobit. Its point of departure, its strength, and its focus can be seen from the first sentence of the preface: "A modern commentary on the Book of Tobit must take on a different shape in view of the discovery of the fragmentary Aramaic and Hebrew texts of it among the Dead Sea Scrolls" (v). It is indeed the manuscript evidence that covers a large part of the introduction (3–17), and that determines the layout and design of the commentary.

At the very beginning the introduction confronts the reader with the unusually complicated manuscript transmission of the story of Tobit. This is salutary for modern readers of Bible translations, since every translation smoothes the underlying text and at times might suggest the wrong impression that there was one clear text from the ancient times up to our era. Fitzmyer presents here a clear and distinct overview of the manuscript evidence. He first distinguishes the Greek translations: the Short Recension (G^I; mainly Vaticanus and Alexandrinus),

the Long Recension (G^{II}; Sinaiticus; the fragmentary MS 319), and the Intermediate Recension (G^{III}; MSS 44; 106; 107; a compromise between the other two Greek recensions). Fitzmyer makes clear that G^{II} is more original. The Latin translation is also known in two forms: the shorter Latin Vulgate (Vg) by St. Jerome and the Long Recension of the Old Latin (VL). The picture is enlarged and complicated by the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls, here the Hebrew and Aramaic fragments of the book of Tobit found in Cave 4 in 1952. Fitzmyer acknowledges repeatedly the great work of J. T. Milik, who pieced together the many fragments of the manuscripts. The final publication in the DJD series was done by J. A. Fitzmyer himself ("Tobit," in *Qumran Cave 4:XIV* [DJD 19; 1995], 1–76). It can be noted here that in the commentary Fitzmyer offers a brief insight into the content of the Aramaic and Hebrew texts of Tobit. The next part of the introduction discusses the question of the original language of the book. Fitzmyer presents the pros and cons of the different opinions and finally follows Milik's judgment that Tobit was an original Aramaic composition.

The report of the complicated manuscript transmission covers the first half of the introduction. The other chapters in the introduction deal with subject matter and literary genre, the integrity of the book, its teaching, date and place of composition, and the question of canonicity. The reviewer welcomes Fitzmyer's argumentation for the integrity of the book, since it seems to be difficult to work with the usual criteria for different sources or layers in a story that underwent such a complicated process of transmission. Page 58 summarizes the structure and outline of the book (which mirrors the outline of the following commentary), and pages 59–88 present a comprehensive general bibliography. Further bibliographical information is added after each chapter in the introduction as well as after each section of the commentary.

The design of the commentary takes the manuscript evidence into account in a sophisticated way. For each section, the English versions of G^{II} (based on Sinaiticus and MS 319) and G^I are put in synoptic columns. Words in italics represent what corresponds to the Aramaic or Hebrew fragments of Tobit from Qumran. Text in parentheses represents differences or additions found in the Qumran texts. The two columns of the translation are followed by a shorter part headed with "Comment." Here Fitzmyer comments on the storyline and the structure of the narrative, and he adds information about persons, places, and dates mentioned in the text. Then follows a larger part headed "Notes." These notes refer to the differences between the text forms and versions of the story of Tobit. Fitzmyer often quotes parts from the VL or the Vg, too, in order to show the details of how, for example, G^I curtails the *Vorlage* or how Jerome's Vg

sometimes smoothes things out. Hence, each version is largely dealt with as a text in its own right, and the reader of the commentary gets an idea of how the versions relate to each other and how they pursue at times their own ways. The notes are also the place where Fitzmyer mentions reflections of or allusions to other parts of Scripture.

Necessarily, the notes on such allusions or references are short. As an example, one might look up the passages that deal with the Jewish obligation to marry within one's clan or tribe (112, 156, 172): the relevant passages from the Torah are mentioned, and it is stated that Tobit (1:9) followed the endogamy or consanguineous marriage of the patriarchs in Genesis (112). Fitzmyer also admits that this becomes an important theme in the book of Tobit. However, there is no further interpretation of this matter in the commentary. It is not Fitzmyer's goal to pursue such questions, and hence this is no critique. Fitzmyer rather provides the basic information that is necessary to find one's way through the thicket of variations. As another example, Tobit 14:4 may be mentioned. From Fitzmyer's translation and notes (321, 325–26) one can clearly see that G^{II} refers back to the prophecy of Nahum, while G^I mentions Jonah. Since the story is about the awaited destruction of Nineveh, Nahum seems to be more appropriate. From the lack of both names in VL and Vg Fitzmyer concludes that, in contrast to Jonah in G^I, the mention of Nahum in G^{II} may be a secondary insertion into a text that originally did not mention either. Probably the insertion of Jonah in G^I was made by one who was more familiar with Jonah than with Nahum. Here the commentary ends, but one could pursue the issue further and ask what the mention of either Nahum or Jonah contributes to the meaning of the text, what the allusion to Nahum's prophecy means, why the reader needs to know Nahum's book in order to understand Tobit here appropriately, and so forth. These issues of intertextuality Fitzmyer does not stress. Again, this is no critique but rather a suggestion for further study on the book of Tobit for which Fitzmyer provides an invaluable tool.

The book comes with several helpful indexes, such as an index of references, of names and subjects, and of modern authors. The index of references is not limited to biblical texts but includes also the Old Testament pseudepigrapha, the New Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, rabbinic literature, early Christian literature, Greek and Roman literature, and papyri. This indicates that Fitzmyer at times refers to the book's history of reception and provides ample background information about the setting of the book of Tobit in the early Jewish literature.

As already stated, Fitzmyer's commentary on the book of Tobit is a masterpiece. It sets the benchmark for the new Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature series edited by Loren T. Stuckenbruck, P. W. van der Horst, H. Lichtenberger, D. Mendels, and J. R. Mueller. The editors and the publisher (de Gruyter) are to be commended for launching a new series of commentaries on a group of texts that are so important for our understanding of the history and literature of early Judaism as well as of early Christianity. The reviewer hopes that soon other commentaries will follow that are as excellent, well thought-out, and intelligible as Fitzmyer's painstaking work on the book of Tobit.