

Tobit 13: Restoration of Tobit as a Basis for the Hope of Resurrection and Restoration of Israel

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In this essay, we shall argue that Tobit 13 offers a summary of Tobit's experience of suffering and restoration as an experience that coalesces in solidarity with the nation's suffering and the hope for restoration. Using Jon Levenson's understanding of death and resurrection in the Hebrew Scriptures, we shall argue that Tobit's experience is that of death and resurrection, and that his experience forms the basis for the hope of resurrection and restoration of the nation.

In the first part of this essay, we will discuss the Redaction Criticism of this hymn. We shall highlight some textual problems that bring to the surface the question of the unity of the hymn with the rest of the narrative. As an attempt to address these textual problems, we shall argue that the hymn reflects the themes that run throughout the narrative of Tobit: this hymn fits well within the narrative. Moreover, basing ourselves on Tobit's prayer in chapter 3, we shall show that Tobit's attitude towards his suffering accounts for some of the peculiarities of this hymn. Then we shall proceed to examine Levenson's understanding of death, *Sheol*, and resurrection, and how this understanding can be applied to Tobit's experience.

1. Tobit 13 and Redaction Criticism

In the book of Tobit, various characters pray at important moments in their lives. Tobit prays in times of great duress (3:1-6), and prays immediately after being healed from his blindness when he is able to see his son Tobiah (11:14-15). Sarah prays in a time of extreme duress (3:11-15). Tobiah, too, prays immediately after he marries Sarah (8:5-7); and Raguel prays when in the morning hours he discovers that Tobiah is alive (8:15-18). Tobit's prayer in

chapter 13 is the longest prayer, which differentiates it from other prayers in this book. It is the climax of the whole narrative, whereby, after his healing and after hearing the angel Raphael's revelation of what has transpired, Tobit prays with gratitude and anticipation.

The hymn is found in most of the ancient MSS. *Vaticanus* and *Alexandrinus* contain a shorter text, while *Sinaiticus* contains the longer text, with lacunae in 13:6b.¹ According to the consensus of scholars, the longer version "represents more accurately the original form of the (text)."² The hymn is also found in the *DSS*, and in the Aramaic and Hebrew fragments (4Q196-1999 and 4Q200), but they preserve only a portion of the hymn of Tobit. These fragments "agree in general with the long recension of the book [of Tobit] found in the fourth-century text of the *Codex Sinaiticus*."³

In terms of its form, the hymn resembles a psalm, with some prophetic elements. According to Moore, this hymn is the earliest witness to a new genre of the psalms of the Second Temple Judaism, namely, the eschatological psalms.⁴ These hymns originated from Israel's longing for deliverance from foreign occupation and oppression, and from the eschatological hopes for the glorious Jerusalem.⁵ Other hymns belonging to this genre are the Psalm of Solomon 11, Sirach 35:17-20; 36:1-17, and the Qumran Psalm Scroll (Column 22:1-15).⁶ According to Westerman, allusions to Deutero-Isaiah characterize these psalms (49:6, 13, 17-18, 54:3; 7-8, 11-14); and they appear as a conclusion to a more extended text. Joy is a keynote to these psalms. It is clear that Tobit is the earliest witness to this genre.⁷

The hymns can be divided into two distinct units, as follows:

I. Tobit 13:1-18: Tobit praises God. The central theme in this section is that God punishes and shows mercy. Tobit praises God

¹ A. MOORE, *Tobit*, Anchor Bible 40A, New York: Doubleday 1996, 77.

² A. DI LELLA, "Two Major Prayers on the book of Tobit", in *Prayer from Tobit to Qumran*, New York: 2004, 96.

³ *Ibid*, 96.

⁴ A. MOORE, *Tobit*. 282.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁷ Cited by A. MOORE, *Tobit*, 283.

for his justice and mercy, which are manifested in his will to punish and to forgive sins. Tobit has experienced both (cf. 11:15 – “Although he scourges me, he has also had mercy on me”). The second part of the hymn also reflects this theme. Thus, Tobit exhorts his fellow exiles to praise God in the midst of the nations where, due to their sins, they have been scattered because God is going to show mercy and gather them together (v. 7).

II. Tobit 13:9-18: Tobit praises Jerusalem. The undercurrents of this section are the same as his praise of God: justice and mercy, effected by the divine will to punish and to forgive, thematically give texture to the praise. Tobit prophesies that Jerusalem will suffer destruction on account of her sins, but God will restore her once more with full splendor and glory: “He begs that Jerusalem will be rebuilt into splendor and even describe the precious stones, wood and gold with which he hopes it will be reconstructed.”⁸ The section has prophetic and eschatological elements.

Many scholars have noted various peculiarities in this hymn. Firstly, the hymn does not mention anything concerning the characters and events that give substance to the narratives of Tobit.⁹ Tobit does not refer to himself and his experience directly in the hymn: rather, the hymn is a general acknowledgment of God’s justice and mercy, and a call to the people of Israel to confess their sins and repent. F. Zimmerman observed this and noted that instead of focusing on Tobit’s personal tragedy and recovery, the hymn focuses on the plight of the nation. Zimmerman suggests that the hymn “is not an ode of thanksgiving for one’s personal salvation, or rescue from the trial Tobit endured, or release from blindness and the like...[rather,]... it is a portrayal of a nation in captivity, urged to confess its sins before God and to repent, to pray for a golden era to come and a Jerusalem rebuilt.”¹⁰

Another scholar, J.J. Collins, has observed that the core of Tobit’s story consists of the misadventures that Tobit and his family endure. Only the opening and closing chapters (chapters 1,

⁸ J.A. FITZMYER, *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature, New York: Walter de Gruyter 2003, 305.

⁹ A. MOORE, *Tobit*, 282

¹⁰ F. ZIMMERMAN, *The Book of Tobit*, New York: Harper 1958, 24.

and 13-14) find their place in the context of the history of Israel. Therefore, “the concern for Jerusalem and for the reunification of Israel in these passages is extraneous to the core story, and not required for its completion.”¹¹ This shows that “the beginning and the ending of the story of Tobit have been expanded to provide a theological and historical frame from a Judean, Jerusalemite perspective that was not integral to original story of Tobit.”¹² For Collins, the eschatological themes at the end of the book, namely, the vision of the end of Israel’s exile and Judah’s exile are not required for the core story to make sense. On the contrary, these chapters put the whole story into a broader perspective, by introducing a Judean, Deuteronomistic theology into the story of Tobit.¹³

These features, namely, the hymn’s silence about the misadventures of Tobit and his family, its eschatological themes which are not present in other parts of the book, together with the fact that parts of the hymn or the hymn in its entirety are lacking in some versions and MSS¹⁴ have led some scholars to view this hymn as a later addition to the story of Tobit. According to this view, the author of Tobit incorporates into the book a pre-existing psalm of praise – indeed this is a common biblical feature, such as in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 (the song of Hanna), 2 Samuel 22:8-51, Isaiah 38:1-20, and Jonah 2:3-16.¹⁵ Another scholar, Deselaers, joins those who argue for the independent pre-existence of the hymn. He suggests that the core of the hymn, what he calls “a song of Jerusalem,” has been repeatedly revised in the course of Tobit’s redactional development, and thus, he claims, it is not integral to the narrative of Tobit.¹⁶

¹¹ J.J. COLLINS, “The Judaism of the Book of Tobit”, in G. G. Xeravists and J. Zsengeller, eds., *The Book of Tobit: Text, Tradition, Theology*, Boston: Brill 2005, 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ E.g., Syriac and Medieval Aramaic of Neubauer versions. Cf. J.A. FITZMYER, *Tobit*, 305.

¹⁵ A. MOORE, *Tobit*, 25.

¹⁶ Quoted by S. WEITZMAN, “Allusion, Artifice, and Sacrifice in the Hymn of Tobit”, *JBL* 115/1 (1996) 51, footnote 5.

Zimmerman once suggested a very late date for the incorporation of this hymn, a view that became very popular. He argued that the hymn portrays a context in which Jerusalem and the Temple have been destroyed and the people have been scattered into exile; they have been reduced to a state of mourning. So he concludes that "the date of the psalm suggests itself: sometime after the destruction of the Temple, 70 CE."¹⁷ This view could no longer hold, however, after the discovery of the Qumran fragments that contained Tobit 13, together with its narrative introduction (4Q Tob^{ac}):¹⁸ "While these fragments indicate that the hymn was part of Tobit at a relatively early stage in its transmission history, they cannot foreclose the possibility that the hymn was interpolated into the narrative at an even earlier stage in its history."¹⁹

There obviously, then, are issues that bring out into the open the question concerning the unity of the whole book of Tobit and its textual history. While these questions are beyond the scope of this essay, we argue that this hymn fits in well within the overall unfolding of the narrative, and thus, it serves as a recapitulation of the whole narrative. The hymn sums up the themes that run throughout the narrative, which revolve around the experience of exile. We shall demonstrate how Tobit's total solidarity with the sins and sufferings of his fellow Israelites, a solidarity reflected in his prayer in chapter 3, accounts for these peculiarities. Thus, we shall suggest that this hymn acts as a summary of the theology of the whole narrative; it fits in the overall narrative scheme of the story of Tobit. The hymn may have pre-existed, and may have been added later to the narrative, but the author succeeded brilliantly in his effort to integrate the hymn thematically into the narrative.

2. The Relationship of Tobit 13 with the Rest of the Narrative

There are those that have argued that the exile is the root cause of all the misfortunes suffered in the story of Tobit. Behind Tobit's personal tragedy is a deeper crisis, a greater misfortune, namely,

¹⁷ F. ZIMMERMAN, *The Book of Tobit*, 25.

¹⁸ A. MOORE, *Tobit*. 283.

¹⁹ S. WEITZMAN, "Allusion, Artifice", 51

the nation's exile to Nineveh in Assyria. For the Israelites, exile means loss of place, respect, prosperity, and communal relationship.²⁰ One scholar goes so far as to assert that the story of Tobit is a "parable" of the national history and destiny, that is, it is a personal story through the lens of which one comes to understand the national story.²¹

The central theme in Tobit 13 is that God punishes the sins of Israel, but nevertheless shows mercy whenever Israel turns to God in repentance. This theme runs throughout the story of Tobit, intertwined with the whole experience of the exile. Moreover, Tobit applies the nation's experience to himself, as we shall explain later. Tobit's story commences when he is still in his home country in Naphtali (chapter 1). There Tobit stands out for his exemplary piety and righteousness. Even when the rest of his fellow Israelites, led by their king Jeroboam, apostatize, Tobit faithfully goes to Jerusalem at regular intervals to offer sacrifices, always in accord with God's commandments (1:4-8). However, since the Israelites have apostatized, God punishes them; the Assyrians carry the nation, including Tobit and his family, into exile, specifically, to Nineveh (v. 10). In exile, the rest of his fellow Israelites follow the ways of the Gentiles, but Tobit keeps himself pure (1:10-12). Since he is in exile, Tobit can no longer observe the commandments of the Torah requiring sacrifices and the payment of tithes. Tobit

²⁰ W. SOLL, "Misfortune and Exile in Tobit: The Juncture of Fairy Tale Source and Deuteronomic Theology", *CBQ* 51 (1989) 224. The editor notes that Soll's use of the term "fairy tale source" exemplifies what Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J., calls the *fallacy of subjectivist projection*. Concisely speaking, one evaluates the speech, writing, or behaviour of another not through the other's cultural lenses but through one's own: "Subjective projection results when we interpret the words and deeds of other men by reconstructing in ourselves their experience and uncritically adding our intellectual viewpoints which they do not share" (B. LONERGAN, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, New York: Philosophical Library 1957, 540). The genre of the fairy tale belongs to that of Europe and applies only to the fanciful. To apply it to the cultural milieu of the Book of Tobit, or to its sources, authors and redactors seems itself to be a fanciful application.

²¹ R. BAUCKHAM, "Tobit as a Parable for the Exiles of Northern Israel", in *Studies in the Book of Tobit: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, London: Clark 2006, 141.

substitutes almsgiving and other works of charity for the Temple sacrifices. "[Tobit] replaces his obedience to the Temple in Jerusalem with the practice of various acts of charity (1:16-17), of which pride of place goes to the giving of alms and the burying of the dead (1:18)... in the Second Temple Judaism, the giving of alms becomes a suitable substitution for animal sacrifice."²²

The situation in exile is grim; having returned from a failed expedition to conquer Jerusalem (v. 18), King Sennacherib punishes the Jews by killing many of them and casting their bodies out onto the street unburied, as if they were common criminals.²³ In defiance of the king's wishes, Tobit buries them. Consequently, when the king finds out, Tobit is forced to flee for his life and go into hiding. All his property is confiscated (vv. 19-20).

Through the intervention of his cousin Ahiah, Tobit is restored to his family and property, but he cannot enjoy his prosperity in the midst of the adversities and killings that his fellow Israelites are suffering (2:2-6). Nevertheless, Tobit continues to practice acts of mercy by burying the dead. As he does this, however, he suffers another misfortune: blindness (2:9-10). Thus, "the book of Tobit represents the exile as a devastating disruption of Jewish existence, a 'root misfortune' ultimately responsible for all of the individual misfortunes that beset Tobit and Sarah."²⁴ These calamities are presented within the scope of God's justice, manifested through punishment, and at the same time of God's mercy. Divine justice and mercy are the central themes of Tobit's hymn.

Towards the end of the narrative, Tobit receives his sight, his property is restored and his son is married to Sarah who is now healed. This is the moment when Tobit sings the song of praise from within the milieu of the nation's misfortune (Tobit 12:22–13:17). In this song, "Tobit foresees the end of the exile for his descendants and his nation...the national story of misfortune and its reversal thus forms a kind of a broad inclusion around Tobit's

²² G.A. ANDERSON, "Tobit as Righteous Sufferer" (2008; unpublished Article), 3. Recently published as Gary ANDERSON, "Tobit as a Righteous Sufferer", in *A Teacher for All Nations*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, Leiden: Brill 2011, 491-507.

²³ W. SOLL, "Misfortunes and Exile in Tobit", *CBQ* 51 (1989) 224.

²⁴ S. WEITZMAN, "Allusion, Artifice", 60.

individual story of misfortunes and its reversal.”²⁵ Moreover Tobit attributes both his hardships and their reversal to God. When his eyes are opened, he says, “Though he has afflicted me, he has had mercy upon me.”²⁶

This reflects the theology of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic historian, namely, that of the manifestation of God’s justice through his punishment of sins, and the manifestation of God’s mercy through restoration. In the narrative of Tobit, the misfortunes of the nation are the consequences of God’s judgment on the sins of the nation; repentance and righteousness draw forth God’s mercy, and hence, deliverance from misfortunes. Tobit’s hymn reflects this understanding.²⁷

Since the operative principle in the hymn is that God afflicts and shows mercy, and since in chapter 13, Tobit has experienced both, he gives thanks to God, and invites the nation to do likewise.²⁸ Tobit 13 hints that Israel is going to enjoy a reversal of their situation in exile. The exile is going to come to an end; the land will be returned to them (cf. a partial fulfilment of restoration in chapter 14).

In the second part of Tobit’s hymn (vv. 9-18), the general principle stated in 13:2 is applied to Israel: “For he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades, and brings up again, and there is no one who can escape his hand.” Israel suffers punishment for her iniquities, but God will show mercy and gather Israel from among the nations where they have been scattered. Tobit’s vision of the future, therefore, is both Deuteronomistic and Jerusalem-centered. Tobit’s vision of the future restoration of the whole nation gives a place of prominence to the glorious Jerusalem of the future. This is significant because the restoration of Israel cannot be complete unless it includes all the twelve tribes. This restoration will include the resolution of the religious schism occasioned by Jeroboam’s sin, a schism that brought forth God’s punishment by means of exile. Hence the hymn seems to capsulize the concerns

²⁵ R. BAUCKHAM, “Tobit as a Parable for the Exiles”, 141.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 141

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 141

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

of the whole narrative by locating Tobit's experience within the context of the national experience.

Tobit's attitude towards his misfortunes gives backbone to this understanding. His attitude towards his suffering shows that, although the hymn in chapter 13 does not make mention of his personal misfortunes, he is indeed taking upon himself the sins and the sufferings of his people.

G. Anderson suggests that the book presents Tobit as a righteous sufferer, who suffers the fate of his nation despite the fact that he is innocent of their crime.²⁹ In the first chapters of Tobit, Tobit's exemplary righteousness poses a sharp contrast with the sinfulness of his fellow Israelites. While the rest of the nation apostatizes by worshipping and sacrificing to the calf that Jeroboam made, Tobit keeps the commandments. Ever obedient to the Law of Israel, he goes to Jerusalem yearly to worship there and offer sacrifices, just as the Torah has commanded (1:5-6).

Tobit is innocent, but he suffers the consequence of the nation's apostasy, i.e., the exile. It is to be reiterated that while the book presents Israel's misfortunes as a consequence of their sin, the book expresses at the same time with pristine clarity Tobit's innocence.³⁰ In the exile, the rest of the Israelites go after the ways of the Gentiles. Tobit, however, keeps the Torah: he remains faithful to the commandments by keeping himself clean, by avoiding the Gentiles' food, and by doing acts of mercy (1:16-17). Tobit is a morally upright person. Nevertheless he suffers calamity after calamity: he loses his property and his eyesight. Regardless of what the trial may be, Tobit never complains to God, nor does he settle himself into the option of pleading his innocence before God.

Bauckham explains the significance of Tobit's attitude. In 2:1-4, while Tobit is celebrating the feast of Pentecost, he learns that one of his fellow Israelites is lying dead on the street unburied. He goes to bury him, and on coming back to eat, he remembers with sorrow the prophecy of Amos. "Your festivals will be turned into mourning and all your songs lamentation" (Amos 8:10). Tobit reacts by weeping, for he sees that this prophecy has come to

²⁹ G. ANDERSON, "Tobit as Righteous Sufferer", 3.

³⁰ R. BAUCKHAM, "Tobit as a Parable for the Exiles", 144.

fulfilment in his person: the Pentecost celebration has turned into an occasion for lamentation. Tobit interprets this circumstance as an instance of God's judgment on the nation: Amos declared this prophecy within the milieu of the idolatrous festivals that were taking place at the sanctuary in Bethel (Amos 5:5; 7:10-13; 8:3); now in the story of Tobit, the apostasy at Dan and Bethel has drawn forth from God a punishment for Israel through the exile (cf. 1:15).³¹ Tobit, as I have said, is innocent of his crime.³² Bauckham:

The fact that, by virtue of his exile, Tobit had to celebrate [Pentecost] away from home in Nineveh may serve to associate his worship with the apostate worship that had brought the exile on his people. ... Tobit's inability to fulfil the requirements of the Torah highlights the way he, despite his innocence, had had to suffer the full consequence of the sins of the rest of his people.³³

It is from within the persistent theme that as an innocent man, Tobit identifies himself with the plight of his people in their sins that he applies to himself the prophecy of Amos (8:10). He is not defending his own innocence as if he were to put a distance between himself and the sins of his people. On the contrary, he accepts the way God is treating him "because of his solidarity with his people."³⁴

His prayer in chapter 3 reflects his solidarity with his people in their state of sin. Having suffered grievously, Tobit confesses 'his sins,' and prays to God that he may die, so that he may be relieved from his grievous suffering. The prayer reads as follows (3:2-6):

³¹ R. BAUCKHAM, "Tobit as a Parable for the Exiles", 144.

³² Surprisingly Bauckham argues that Tobit is guilty of not keeping the pilgrimage. His inability to make the pilgrimage, however, is due to the fact that he is in exile. Tobit fully identifies himself with Israel's sin: he knows that the exile is a punishment that God is inflicting upon his people. The failure to celebrate Pentecost is merely one of many consequences rendered inevitable by the exile. One could argue that Tobit's sin consists of his remonstrance with his wife (2:11-14). This incident, however, does not present Tobit as a man who degrades his wife; rather it presents Tobit as utterly helpless and frustrated because he cannot serve God by acts of charity. Indeed, he can no longer guarantee that the Law is kept even in his household.

³³ R. BAUCKHAM, "Tobit as a Parable for the Exiles", 145.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

² Righteous art thou, oh Lord; all thy deeds and all the ways are mercy and truth, and thou dost render true and righteous judgment forever.

³ Remember me and look favourably upon me; do not punish me for my sins and for my unwitting offences and those which my fathers committed before thee.

⁴ For they disobeyed thy commandments, and thou gavest us over to plunder, captivity, and death; thou madest us a byword of reproach in all nations among which we have been dispersed.

⁵ And now thy many judgments are true in exacting penalty from me for my sins and those of my fathers, because we did not keep thy commandments. For we did not walk in truth before thee.

⁶ And now deal with me according to thy pleasure; command my spirit to be taken up, that I may depart and become dust. For it is better for me to die than to live, because I have heard false reproaches, and great is the sorrow within me. Command that I now be released from my distress to go to eternal abode; do not turn thy face away from me.³⁵

According to Anderson, the most striking features of this prayer are, first, Tobit's open acknowledgement of God's righteousness and justice; and, second, Tobit's acknowledgement of his sinfulness in solidarity with his people in their iniquities despite the fact that he is innocent:³⁶

Though [Tobit] has ample opportunity to trumpet his own innocence in the face of great apostasy... he does not march down that path. Instead, when he catalogues the sins of Israel that have led the nation to its current predicament, he does not distinguish his own behaviour from that of his peers... for Tobit, the present predicament of Israel is not simply the results of others' sins; he identifies himself among the guilty.³⁷

Thus, in his prayer, Tobit "portrays himself as being caught up in the judgment of exile";³⁸ this reflects Deuteronomic theology:

Tobit does not challenge the justice of God as Job does; on the contrary, one finds in this prayer an explicit and detailed affirmation of the deuteronomic theology of God's just judgment on Israel. It is for Israel's sin that the harshest language is reserved. Tobit not only affirms this theology but identifies himself with the wayward Israel to

³⁵ Biblical text is from The Revised Standard Version, Catholic edition.

³⁶ G. ANDERSON, "Tobit as a Righteous Sufferer", 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ W. SOLL, "Misfortunes and Exile", 224.

a striking degree...even while his personal innocence makes him conspicuously innocent.³⁹

Tobit's identification with his people in their sins accounts for the lack of reference in his hymn in chapter 13 to his personal misfortunes and restoration. Tobit understands his personal trials in terms of his nation's suffering; and since his suffering cannot be separated from the national tragedy, in his hymn Tobit does not put his personal trials and the nation's suffering in two separate categories. In other words, Tobit does not refer to his personal suffering and deliverance in the hymn because he fully identifies with the people in their sin and suffering.

The underlying theme in the incident that invited the anamnesis of the prophecy of Amos in chapter 2, his prayer in chapter 3, and the hymn in chapter 13 is the Deuteronomistic understanding of sin, punishment and God's mercy. In all three texts, (a) God's righteousness and justice in dealing with sin is acknowledged; (b) Israel's sin is seen as the root cause of exile; and (c) there is a firm acknowledgement of God's mercy. This thematic pattern makes it clear, therefore, that the hymn of Tobit is integrally related to the whole narrative of Tobit, and that it sums up the whole story of Tobit's experience as a basis for the eschatological hope of the restoration of the nation. This is what we shall discuss next.

3. Tobit's Experience as an Instance of Death and Resurrection

It has been argued that Tobit's subjection to misfortune and his ensuing restoration are an instance of death and resurrection.⁴⁰ Through the calamities that afflict him, namely, the exile, the loss of property, blindness, and his desire to die without seeing his descendants, Tobit suffers a kind of interior "death." God's restoration of his property and his sight, the marriage of his son Tobiah, and his ability to witness his many descendants, his fulfilled old age, and his peaceful death... all these constitute Tobit's experience of "resurrection."⁴¹ Since in his hymn, Tobit's

³⁹ W. SOLL, "Misfortunes and Exile", 224.

⁴⁰ G. ANDERSON, "Tobit as a Righteous Sufferer", 8.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

interior death is intricately connected to the "death" of his nation, Tobit celebrates his resurrection as a sure basis for the hope of the resurrection of his nation. Tobit prophesies the resurrection of his people.

We wish to explore, then, how Tobit's hymn gives us ground for making these thematic assertions.

According to J. Levinson, the concept of resurrection is present in the Hebrew Bible. This concept can be understood in the context of the notions of death and *Sheol*, which is considered to be the destination of the dead. In the Hebrew Scriptures, *Sheol* is presented as a place where "the dead have existence without life — an existence of unqualified and interminable unhappiness."⁴² It is a mode of existence characterized by hopelessness and gloom.

In texts that express the theme of lamentation and in the Psalms of Lament, however, individuals who are suffering distress describe themselves as being already in *Sheol* (e.g., Num 16:32-34; 2 Sam 22:8-19; Pss 9:14-15; 30; 40:3; 107:10-22). This is because for the ancient Israelites, death was not understood as a radical discontinuation with life. Rather, a "radical discontinuity lay between a healthy and successful life and one marked by adversity, in physical health or otherwise."⁴³ Thus, a gravely ill person was considered on the brinks of *Sheol* (Ps 30). In such situations, there was hope for God's miraculous intervention, a hope of reversal; and it was this hope that moved the suffering person to pray for God to act. A gravely ill person had two possibilities: either death as an irreversible state of misery, which meant going to the grave of the godless, the God-forsaken, namely, *Sheol*; or God's intervention and rescue from death through restoration to life and good health (cf. Ps 40:3).⁴⁴

Various images that the Hebrew Bible uses to describe *Sheol* reinforce this understanding. "Grave, pit, utmost bounds of the earth, engulfing waters, subterranean city, prison — all these metaphors communicate a mode of existence that, in fact, characterizes people who have not "died" in our sense of the term

⁴² J.D. LEVENSON, *Resurrection and Restoration of Israel. The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2006, 37.

⁴³ J.D. LEVENSON, *Resurrection*, 38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

at all...those endangered feel that they are in *Sheol* already; because they live lives of weakness, defeat, depression, vulnerability, and the like.”⁴⁵

The Hebrew Scripture, however, does not present *Sheol* as a universal destination of all those who die. On the one hand, there are those who die an evil, tragic, untimely and unnatural death, without descendants; and on the other hand, there are those who die in a content state, those who “sleep,” who are “gathered to their people.” These are not described as going to *Sheol*: “*Sheol* in sum, very often has to do with punishment; and those who die in God’s good graces, their lives fulfilled through his blessings, therefore, have no reason to think that they will be dispatched to [*Sheol*]... [*Sheol* is a] wholly undesirable existence in the dark and dank of the netherworld.”⁴⁶

Those who are on the brink of *Sheol* may experience God’s intervention, a reversal of their condition, “a replacement of despair with hope, of gloom with shining light.”⁴⁷ Thus, Abraham, Jacob and Job are prime examples of people who experienced God’s miraculous intervention while they were on the brinks of *Sheol*. The deaths of these exemplary righteous people did not lead to a wholly undesirable existence, the condition of those who go to *Sheol*. Abraham died old and in a state of contentment (cf. Gen 25:8). Jacob died old, fulfilled, surrounded by his many descendants (Gen 49:29-33). At the end of his life, Job’s life and his children were restored; and he died old and in a state of bliss (Job 42:17).⁴⁸ The deaths of God’s holy ones were not a negation of God’s abundant blessings; and so, they had no fear of *Sheol*: “They die with life fulfilled and certainly seem to face no future terrors or miseries whatsoever.”⁴⁹

A common element characterizes their deaths: they die old and fulfilled; they witness the realization of the divine promises at the end of their lives; and their lives, formerly characterized by either infertility or misery, are now the stage for a beautiful, hopeful,

⁴⁵ J.D. LEVENSON, *Resurrection*, 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

invigorating reversal. They leave behind many descendants; their fulfilled lives survive them, and continue to testify to their final felicity. Their fulfilled lives are prolonged through descendants, and their name/memory survives in their descendants.⁵⁰ According to Levenson, these are instances of a kind of resurrection in the Hebrew Bible. G. Anderson puts it this way: "If there an equivalent to beatific vision in the [Hebrew Scripture] it is the opportunity to live to a ripe old age and to be given the privilege of seeing one's extended family gathered around one at the point of death."⁵¹ Thus, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Job experienced a kind of resurrection according to one collage of meanings that scholars have unearthed in the Old Testament.⁵²

⁵⁰ J.D. LEVENSON, *Resurrection*, 77.

⁵¹ G. ANDERSON, "Tobit as Righteous Sufferer", 9.

⁵² The editor notes that this particular interpretation of resurrection does not preclude an Old Testament understanding that God may destine a human being to a resurrection of the body after physical death. A canonical exegesis that focuses on resurrection in the OT alerts us precisely to this conviction about bodily resurrection and the beatific life that follows it. Just to cite three examples: (A) On the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:24-31, St. Peter – acting according to his new identity as the Vicar of Jesus Christ – cites Psalm 16:8-11 *not* as a verse that is now subject to a New Testament re-interpretation in the light of Jesus' resurrection but rather as a verse that indicates that King David anticipated his descendant's bodily resurrection. In other words, an Old Testament figure already foresaw a resurrection of those who have died physically. (B) The same Old Testament conviction of a bodily resurrection seems to have been present in the mind and heart of Abraham – just as the Letter to the Hebrews attests in 11:17-19. The reading of Genesis 22 certainly indicates that Abraham understood God's directive in terms of an actual sacrificial death on the part of his son Isaac. The chapters leading up to Genesis 22 certainly indicate that Abraham understood himself to be the father of many descendants precisely through Isaac – something that had not happened yet at the time of the sacrifice. Hence Hebrews seems to be giving an accurate perception that Abraham must have believed in a bodily resurrection, even if "by way of parable" Isaac did not need to endure physical death but rather was restored to Abraham as someone who was living a new lease on life. (C) An Old Testament Scripture, 2 Kings 2:1-13, depicts the prophet Elijah as someone who never died. While this phenomenon differs from that of a bodily resurrection it does indicate an Old Testament understanding that the body can live in an incorruptible state within a heavenly realm that does not correspond to the state of the human being as we experience it in our earthly existence. Elijah, in other words, entered into

Tobit's experience reflects this understanding. Tobit's misfortunes can be understood as a gradual death, namely, a gradual descent into *Sheol*, stage by stage. In the first stage, Tobit's exile, together with that of his fellow Israelites implies that he is separated from the promised Land, from the Temple, and from the due observance of the Torah (cf. 1:10). Moreover, Tobit's 'exile within the exile' separates him from his family; he is deprived of material property, and his very life is in danger (1:19-20). Thus Tobit sinks deeper into miseries, coming closer and closer to the brinks of *Sheol*. When he is restored to his family and property, he can no longer enjoy them; for he recognizes the magnitude of the misery that had overtaken him personally and on a larger scale, the entire nation (2:5-6). Tobit interprets this as an experience of God's judgment. As we have seen, this is precisely the condition of those in *Sheol*: they are understood to be experiencing God's judgment.⁵³

The next stage of this descent towards *Sheol* is Tobit's blindness, a calamity that incapacitates him to an even more severe degree because he can no longer practice acts of charity and almsgiving. He endures the taunts of his neighbours and of his wife; he suffers ridicule and shame (2:14, 3:6). This seems to be the nadir of his misery. Tobit is on the brinks of *Sheol*. He prays for death, that is, he prays that God send him to *Sheol* as his final destination where he will rest from the taunts of his neighbours. For Tobit, these taunts are more painful to bear than his blindness, for he understands that his misfortune comes from God. When Tobit prays to God that he may die (3:1-6), he thinks that his present condition is worse than *Sheol* – he has become a very discouraged man. He cannot take it any longer. In very touching fashion, Tobit implores God (v. 6):

Command my spirit to be broken up, that I may depart and become dust. For it is better to die than to live, because I have heard false

a beatific vision, a beatific life, that transcends any form of life that we experience while still in the body before physical death. Throughout all this discussion, one cannot fail to forget the Old Testament conviction that physical death did not have a foothold in God's original plan for the human being: the human person would have been immune from bodily death had he not sinned (see *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 18; Wis 1:13; 2:23-24).

⁵³ Cf. J.D. LEVENSON, *Resurrection*, 72.

reproaches, and great is the sorrow within me. Command that I now be released from my distress to go to the eternal abode; do not turn thy face away from me.

Tobit is ready to die without seeing his descendants and indeed without the assurance that his son Tobiah will ever marry. His situation becomes even more ambiguous when he sends his son away to the unknown. Just as Levenson has suggested, if Tobit were to die in these dark and uncertain circumstances, he would fit the picture of those who go down to *Sheol* and suffer the fate of a pre-mature death, of an unfulfilled life, of a death without seeing one's own descendants.⁵⁴ However, hidden within this picture, there is a glimmer of hope: the hope that emanates from this prayer harbours within itself a deep faith and persevering loyalty to God. Tobit is confident that God is going to grant him his prayer, and that is why he makes his final arrangement for his son (chapter 4). God indeed does answer his prayer, but in a manner that Tobit may not expect.

God intervenes through a dramatic reversal of Tobit's misfortunes. God acts by rescuing him who is on the brink of *Sheol* (cf. 2:16 ff). Tobit's descent towards his death now becomes a transforming movement of a gradual ascent from the pit to life, an experience of resurrection occasioned by God's miraculous and unexpected intervention through the instrumentality of the angel Rafael, disguised as Azariah.

This intervention take place in stages. First, the angel Raphael, disguised as Azariah, accompanies Tobiah on his journey and thus ensures his safety (chapter 6). Next, Sarah is healed. Tobiah marries her and at the same time inherits a fortune (chapter 8). Azariah/Raphael recovers Tobit's property from Gabael in Rages (chapter 9). The climax of this series of miraculous events is the restoration of Tobit's sight. Not only can he see his family again, but he can also lay his eyes upon his daughter-in-law, Sarah. Tobit immediately recognizes this as an act of God; hence he praises the all-powerful, all-merciful Lord: "Blessed art thou, O God, and blessed is thy name for ever, and blessed are all thy holy Angels. For you have afflicted me, but you have had mercy upon me; here I see my son Tobias" (11:14-15)

⁵⁴ J.D. LEVENSON, *Resurrection*, 77.

As the angel reveals to Tobit what has transpired, Tobit celebrates his resurrection – his new lease on life – in his hymn of praise (Tobit 12; 13). His resurrection experience continues as he sees his many descendants, seven of them, which may be symbolic of his full restoration (14:3ff). Tobit enjoys a beatific life (according to one of the OT nuances of the word “beatific”) at the summit of his earthly existence. He lives a long life, he sees his many descendants and he dies fulfilled, content, assured of the endurance of his name and memory through his many descendants. His death is presented as that of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Job and thus Tobit experiences a certain form of a beatific life that one may ascribe to the Old Testament patriarchs.

Since what Tobit experiences throughout the narrative is inextricably intertwined with the experience of the nation, Tobit’s experience of resurrection has implications for the nation’s restoration. The theological principle is that God never exercises his justice independently of his mercy: if according to his divine justice, God exacts punishment, he nevertheless manifests his tender love and mercy as “greater” than justice, greater in the sense that it is primary and fundamental. In God love conditions justice; justice is always in the service of love. In the OT – and also in the NT – God reveals the primacy and superiority of his love vis-à-vis justice precisely through mercy.⁵⁵ If God’s justice does at times seem stern, Tobit, the patriarchs and the people of Israel anchor themselves in the conviction that God reveals his justice from within the milieu of his original choice to link himself as Creator to his creatures with a unique, irreplaceable, irreducible love. God reveals himself as love and mercy to Tobit; and God will reveal himself as love and mercy to the nation (14:5, cf.13:6). According to Anderson,

Tobit’s life runs parallel to that of the nation Israel. The book of Tobit, it turns out, is really a pairing of two stories: at one level we see the suffering of Tobit and his eventual resurrection, but at another level the suffering of the nation and its hope of restoration. The key

⁵⁵ The author is enunciating a cardinal principle that is operative throughout the entire OT. See, for example, Wisdom 11:23–12:2. St. John Paul II’s Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* highlights this principle (Editor’s note).

difference between the two stories is also the point of tension that probably led to the composition of the book itself: while the 'resurrection' of Tobit was an accomplished fact, the restoration of Israel remained a living but fragile hope.⁵⁶

Tobit foresees the restoration of his people in their return from exile, the rebuilding of the Temple and Jerusalem, and God's intention to give Israel an even greater splendour and glory. This constitutes the resurrection of the nation (14:5). It includes all Israel, with Jerusalem as the centre of worship, clothed in extraordinary elegance and honour (13:16-17). This restoration will be the occasion for an overflow of joy and happiness, a superabundance of God's blessings for the whole nation (13:18).

Indeed the restoration of Israel and Jerusalem will have universal significance, for "many nations will come from afar to the name of the Lord God, bearing gifts in their hands, gifts for the King of heaven" (13:11; cf. Isa 60:6). The basis of this hope is Tobit's own experience, i.e., the experience of what God has done in his life: "Tobit's certainty in chapter 13 that Jerusalem would have a glorious recovery was dependent upon the restoration of his sight and Tobiah's newly acquired wealth. If God has done all that for Tobit and his family, how much more, concludes Tobit, will GOD do for his people and holy city? A partial answer for the question will be provided in chapter 14."⁵⁷

Tobit firmly grounds this hope in the conviction that God intends to remain faithful by fulfilling what he has promised through the prophets. This is Tobit's disposition when he declares: "Everything that was spoken by the prophets of Israel, whom God sent, will occur. None of all their words will fail, but all will come true at their appointed times for I know and believe that whatever God has said will be fulfilled and will come true; not a single word of the prophecies will fall" (14:4G).

Tobit prophesies the commencement of the fulfilment of God's promise – the resurrection of the nation. This resurrection involves all the Twelve Tribes of Israel, a re-uniting of Israel (14:4, 7, 15): this is why he warns his son Tobiah to flee from Nineveh. Tobiah bears witness to the fact that this hope has come to partial

⁵⁶ G. ANDERSON, "Tobit as Righteous Sufferer," 11.

⁵⁷ A. MOORE, *Tobit*, 284.

fulfilment: he hears of the destruction of Nineveh, and he interprets it as the beginning of God's restoration of the nation (14:15).

This understanding explains the significance of the eschatological tone of the second part of the hymn of Tobit. God's restoration of an individual has implications, for indeed it blossoms forth into a new and certain hope for the national restoration.

Conclusion

We commenced our essay with a redaction criticism of Tobit 13 by pointing out some peculiarities of the text of Tobit's hymn. These features seem to raise the question of the relationship of this hymn with the rest of Tobit's narrative, which, in turn, provokes an issue concerning the unity of the Book of Tobit.

Although the question about the unity of the text has been beyond the scope and limit of this essay, we have attempted nevertheless to address some of these concerns by examining how the hymn is related to the rest of the narrative: we have explained that Tobit's experience is inextricably intertwined with the nation's tragedy, that of the exile. The themes, therefore, that course their way through the narrative coalesce neatly, as a kind of summary, in the hymn of Tobit: God is righteous and merciful.

We have elaborated upon the fact that Tobit understands his own distress in terms of the nation's suffering. Hence Tobit takes upon himself the sin and the punishment of his people and in the hymn expresses his wholehearted gratitude in general terms, i.e., in terms that do not apply exclusively to himself. Tobit understands his own upsetting misfortunes and his ensuing restoration in terms of his nation's distress and hope for a restoration. Realizing this, we have read Tobit's experience within one particular attempt – that of Levenson – for grasping the meaning of death and resurrection in the Hebrew Bible. From this point of view, Tobit's experience is an instance of death and resurrection that resembles the experience of death and resurrection on the part of exemplary righteous patriarchs: Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Job. Tobit's experience grounds the hope for a national restoration, which includes all of Israel's twelve tribes. This national restoration has universal implications.