The Angel’s Self-Revelation in Tobit 12

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The archangel Raphael is one of the most important characters in the book of Tobit. He appears first at Tob 5:4, to accompany Tobias in his journey. The presence of the angel has a special significance in the development of the events in the following chapters. Before leaving the scene when his mission has been accomplished, Raphael calls Tobit and Tobias and gives a long farewell discourse (12:6b–15, 17b–20a). In his speech delivered within the innermost circle of the three most important characters of the book—Tobit, Tobias, and Raphael himself—the angel interprets his own figure both implicitly and explicitly: his claims depict an angelic being with a very complex scope of duties.

In this study, offered in honor of John Collins, an exemplary scholar and a preeminent man, I examine the special multifunctionality of Raphael’s character. In my view, Tob 12 presents a kind of summary of the angelology of Palestinian Judaism of the last centuries B.C.E. First, in a predominantly technical section, I give an overview of the pericope. Then, in the second part, I evaluate the data concerning the character and work of the angel in question.

1 Comments on the Text of the Pericope

Structurally, ch. 12 of the book of Tobit is the closing section of the central part (4:1–12:22) of the work. It consists of three main units: an introduction (12:1–5), in which Tobit and Tobias talk about the remuneration of the latter’s

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2 As the basic text of this study, I have used the longer, Greek version of the book of Tobit (GII) which is to be found in the Codex Sinaiticus. See the recent commentary of Robert J. Littman, Tobit: The Book of Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus (SCS; Leiden: Brill, 2008). For the Greek texts of the book, the two most important publications are Robert Hanhart, Tobit (Septuaginta VIII/5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) and Hanhart, Text und Textgeschichte des Buches Tobit (AAWG 3.139; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984). See also Stuart Weeks, Simon Gathercole, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, The Book of Tobit: Texts from the Principal Ancient and
fellow traveler; this is followed by a long speech (12:6–20) in which Raphael reveals his true identity (cf. Tob 5:13, where Raphael claims that he is “Azariah, son of the great Hananiah”); and finally, the chapter ends with a short passage (12:21–22) presenting the reaction of the earthly protagonists after the angel has ascended to heaven.

The reaction of Tobit and Tobias to the revelation of the angel in vv. 16–17 divides Raphael’s speech into two parts. In terms of content, the entire episode can be divided into three main sections:

A. Vv. 6b–10: a didactic speech with sapiential elements
B. Vv. 11–15: the revelation of the angel
C. Vv. 17b–20a: a comforting farewell speech

The internal coherence of these sections is established through the repeated use of certain specific verbs. Sections A and C are connected by the recurrence of the verbs “bless” and “magnify” (εὐλογέω and ὑμνέω) as well as the term “confess” (ἐξομολογέω). In case of sections A and B, this same effect is achieved by the verb “declare” (ὑποδείκνυμι) and the adjective “good” (καλός), as well as the quasi-identical meshalim in vv. 13a and 19a. Finally, sections B and C are linked by the verb “send” (ἀποστέλλω) and, in vv. 13a and 19a, by the theme of “eating.”

1.1 The First Section of the Passage
The tone of the first section is that of an admonition in a paraenetic style, gradually introduced by the recurrence of verbs in the imperative form. The section starts with a call to glorify God (12:6b):

τὸν θεόν εὐλογεῖτε
καὶ αὐτῷ ἐξομολογεῖσθε ἐνώπιον πάντων τῶν ζώντων ἃ ἐποίησεν μεθ᾽ ὑμῶν
ἀγαθὰ τοῦ εὐλογεῖν καὶ ὑμνεῖν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ

Bless God,
and before all the living acknowledge him for he has done for you.
Good is to bless, and to sing praise to his name.

Mediaeval Traditions (FoSub 3; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004). Translations of Tobit by Alexander Di Lella have been adopted from the NETS.