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## Tobit's Penitential Prayer

*Tobitova spokorna molitev*

**Abstract:** The penitential prayer, first found in The Book of Ezra, belongs to a tradition that goes back to Deuteronomy, which describes how Israel found itself in the exile because of its sins and how salvation can come only through the repentance of the nation. The key element for understanding the development of the tradition of penitential prayer is found in the text 1 Kings 8 in which the author, by re-interpreting Deuteronomy, develops the idea that a penitential prayer is the answer to the given demand for repentance. This answer, which is especially focused on the absence of the temple, is adapted to and created for the exile circumstances, in which the temple gets a different role, namely, it becomes a place of prayer and not of sacrifice. Penitential prayer becomes a new, »institutional« form of penitence, which the nation has to undergo for their sins. The major stumbling block to this logic is the suffering of the righteous, for the righteous should receive God's blessing and not suffering. Tobit, who was a righteous man even according to Deuteronomistic notions, presents a serious challenge to the theory of the retribution or retributive justice. Despite his distress he claimed that God is righteous and through this act he proved to be a righteous man himself. The writer of the book does not consider righteousness as a state of being without sin, which is in fact an illusion, but sees the greatest virtue of the righteous in repentance and recognition of their sins. Repentance and recognition of sins, which have a crucial role in penitential prayers, enable the individual and the nation, which the righteous identifies with and represents, to receive God's mercy and thereby find a way out of suffering.

The survey on the development of the literary genre of penitential prayer is a summary of the theory presented by Werline in his book *Penitential prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (1998).

**Keywords:** penitential prayer, repentance, recognition of sins, sin, petition, suffering of the righteous, righteous, absence of temple, exile

**Izleček:** *Spokorna molitev, kakršno prvič najdemo v Ezrovi knjigi, spada v tradicijo, ki sega nazaj do Deuteronomija. Ta knjiga uči, da se je Izrael znašel v izgnanstvu zaradi svojih grehov in da odrešenje lahko pride, šele ko se bo ljudstvo pokesalo. Ključni trenutek za razumevanje razvoja tradicije spokorne molitve pomeni besedilo 1 Kr 8, v katerem avtor z reinterpreteracijo Deuteronomija razvije idejo, da je na predstavljeno zahtevo po kesanju mogoče odgovoriti s spokorno molitvijo. Ta odgovor, ki ima še posebno v mislih odsotnost templja, je prikrojen in ustvarjen za okoliščine izgnanstva. V teh okoliščinah tempelj dobi drugačno vlogo: postane kraj molitve (in ne darovanja). Spokorna molitev dobi novo, »institucionalno« obliko pokore za kazni, ki jo ljudstvo prestaja za svoje grehe. Tej logiki pomeni največjo spotiko trpljenje pravičnih, saj bi pravični morali uživati božji blagoslov, in ne trpljenja. Tobit,*

*ki je bil pravičen človek, celo po devteronomističnih predstavah (Tob 1), je teoriji pravičnega povračila postavljaj resen izziv. Kljub stiski je namreč izpovedal, da je Bog pravičen, s tem pa se je izkazal za pravičnega tudi sam. Pisatelj Tobitove knjige, ki je najverjetneje nastala v diaspori, pravičnosti namreč ne razume kot brezgrešnost, ki je v bistvu iluzija (1 Kr 8,46); največjo krepost pravičnih vidi v kesanju in v priznanju svojih lastnih grehov. Kesanje in priznanje grehov, ki imata v spokornih molitvah temeljno vlogo, omogočata, da posameznik in narod, s katerim se poistoveti in ga predstavlja pravični, prejmeta Božje usmiljenje – s tem pa najdeta pot iz trpljenja.*

*Teorija o razvoju literarne vrsti spokorne molitve je povzetek teorije, ki jo je predstavil Werline v knjigi Penitential prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution (1998).*

**Ključne besede:** *spokorna molitev, kesanje, priznanje grehov, greh, prošnja, trpljenje pravičnega, pravični, odsotnost templja, izgnanstvo*

## Introduction – the penitential prayer as a literary genre<sup>1</sup>

Rodney Alan Werline defines a penitential prayer as following: »Penitential prayer is a direct address to God in which an individual, group, or an individual on behalf of a group confesses sins and petitions for forgiveness as an act of repentance.« (2006, xv) The penitential prayer as a literary genre is found for the first time in the Bible in Ezra 9 on the lips of the scribe Ezra (Werline 1998, 11).<sup>2</sup> Despite Ezra's penitential prayer being counted as »classical«,<sup>3</sup> it arises without any argumentation, all of a sudden and without explication, when Ezra gets to know that the people of Israel »have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations...« (Ezra 9:1-2). Ezra thought that mixed marriages are the main culprit and reason for the current spiritual crisis of the people of Israel (Večko 2004, 249–269).

1 This article was written as a result of work within the research programme P6-0262: *Values in Judeo-Christian Sources and Tradition and the Possibilities of Dialogue*, co-funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

2 Werline (1998, 11) argues that »there is no instance of penitential prayer in the biblical literature prior to Ezra-Nehemiah«.

3 The penitential prayer in Ezra passes for »classical.« There is no consensus among scholars about which prayers may and which may not be on the list of penitential prayers (Večko 2005, 161).



Since the penitential prayer arises in the Bible for the first time without any explanation or clarification, it seems that the meaning and the practice of the penitential prayer was well-known to the contemporaries of the scribe Ezra. The penitential prayer was already an established religious institution for dealing with sin in time of formation of the book, i.e. in the time of the exile (Werline 1998, 11).

However, the formation of a new literary genre still raises several important questions. How and why did those prayers occur? Which traditions were transformed and included? Do the applied traditions in penitential prayers need a new definition? These and many more questions arise on the matter. We will try to answer those questions in the first part - following the theory, presented by Werline in his book *Penitential prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (1998) - where the development of literary genre of the penitential prayer on the example of the prayer from chapter 9 of Ezra will be presented. In the time of formation of The Book of Tobit, this development met a serious problem which will be presented in the second part of the article that deals with Tobit's penitential prayer.



## 1 The development of the literary genre of penitential prayer

Similar vocabulary and themes found in Ezra's penitential prayer and in Deuteronomy suggest that we will start the presentation with Deuteronomy,<sup>4</sup> chapters 4 and 30.<sup>5</sup> The mentioned chapters explicitly state that the chosen people should repent for their sins, but there is no trace of the so-called penitential prayer in the text itself. »While Deuteronomy explicitly states that the people must repent, it contains no penitential prayer, nor does it direct the people to offer a penitential prayer in order to enact repentance.« (Werline 1998, 11–12) The only instruction is given in the Deut 4:29: »From there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul.« But the text does not give any answer to the question of how should Israel seek its God. How should the repentance look like?

To understand and to fill the gap that occurs between the above-mentioned instruction from Deuteronomy and the penitential prayer in Ezra, we have to set out more Biblical passages. Passages from Deut, 1 Kings and

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4 Mark Boda in his monograph *Praying on Tradition* argues that the influence of the Deuteronomistic tradition on the development of the penitential prayer indeed could not be denied, but that this influence was transformed and upgraded in priestly spheres (P). As a primary source, from which the penitential prayer supplies, he establishes Lev 26 (Boda 1999, 47ff.). »Rodney Werline's 1998 consideration of the traditio-historical background of penitential prayer echoes the longstanding assumption that these prayers trace their origins to the Deuteronomistic stream of tradition. He focuses considerable attention on texts such as Deut 4 and 30 which outline the appropriate response of a people exiled for their sin, that is, the response of repentance. However, these texts are not adequate to explain the supplicatory dimensions of penitential prayer. For this Werline highlights the key role that a later phase of reflection, represented by 1 Kgs 8, played, with its reinterpretation of Deut 4 and 30 to show that 'the people could enact Deuteronomy's demand for repentance through penitential prayer'. A similar transformation of this Deuteronomistic theology is discerned by Werline in Jer 29:10–14. [...] Werline does not restrict his reflection to the Deuteronomistic tradition, but clearly emphasizes this stream of influence for the creation of the 'religious institution' of penitential prayer. [...] It is this Priestly stream that is highlighted in my 1999 volume on the penitential prayer in Neh 9. In a chapter investigating the traditio-historical background of the earliest penitential prayers, I argue that although Deuteronomistic idiom is obvious throughout these prayers, several features of these prayers 'move beyond classic deuteronomism'. I highlighted what I called evidence of 'Priestly transformations' within the Deuteronomistic idiom of the individual prayers and traced several features common to the prayer tradition to Priestly sources. In contrast to Werline, I placed far greater emphasis on the role of Lev 26 and Ezekiel on this prayer tradition and suggested that although 1 Kgs 8 is presently embedded in a 'Deuteronomistic' context, it is structured in Priestly formulations.« (Boda, Falk and Werline 2006, 23)

5 Jože Krašovec establishes the promise of reconciliation and restoration on Lev 26 and Deut 30: »The analysis of texts of Lev 26 and Deut 28; 30:1-10 first of all showed that there is a great accordance between them in themes, places and in the meaning in broader context, and in the structure; the difference in vocabulary and in style is not essential.« (Krašovec 1999, 225) For the entire analysis see chapter *Obljuba sprave in preнове [The promise of reconciliation and restoration]* (219–230).



Ezr will be introduced and compared to show a crucial turn in understanding of the relationship with God.

### 1.1 Deut 4

The theme of repentance is introduced right after Moses' prophetic announcement that the people will eventually abandon his Lord and break the Covenant. Moses, who experienced Israel's tendency to idolatry, strictly forbids making of idol(s) of any form (Deut 4:15ff.). He reminds the people that no one has ever seen God and that they must give total allegiance to Him. However, Moses knows that the people will break the instruction despite warnings (Werline 1998, 13).

The breaking of one of the most crucial commandments Israel has received has had, according to Deuteronomistic theology, a foreseen consequence, which is a punishment that God will send. Moses clearly predicts that the punishment will come in a form of an exile: »The LORD will scatter you among the peoples; only a few of you will be left among the nations where the LORD will lead you.« (Deut 4:27)

But Moses keeps hope. Despite the fact that the exile is inevitable, salvation is not impossible if the people repent and regret their deeds. With regard to their status, which is the exile, repentance and penance must take place »from there« (מֵשָׁם), i.e. from a foreign land of exile. Moses describes the moment of repentance as follows:

From there you will seek (וּבִקְשֶׁתֶם) the LORD your God, and you will find him if you search (תִּדְרֹשׁוּ) after him with all your heart and soul. In your distress (בְּצַר לְךָ), when all these things have happened to you in time to come, you will return (וּשְׁבַתָּ) to the LORD your God and heed him. (Deut 4:29-30)

Terms as שׁוּב (q. to return, to go back, to turn around), דָּרַשׁ (q. to seek, do research) and בִּקַּשׁ (pi. to look for, to try to get) metaphorically designate repentance. The context of the text portrays the image of Israel who will



seek God and return to Him after a great suffering (צַר).<sup>6</sup> In the context of the exile, the text speaks of how people can regenerate after the catastrophe in 538 BC (Werline 1998, 13–14).

## 1.2 Deut 29–30

The pattern presented in the previous chapter is very similar to the one we find in chapters 29–30. Moses here once again warns the people against the sin of idolatry (Deut 29:17–26) and announces anger and fury of the Lord: »The LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land [...]« (Deut 29:28) The connection between sin and punishment presented by Moses is clear (Deut 29:24–25):

[I]ndeed all the nations will wonder, »Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused this great display of anger?« They will conclude, »It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.«

Deuteronomy therefore clearly underlines the fundamental connection between the moral behavior of Israel and a well-being or a distress: sin renders punishment, while obedience leads to the well-being. The logic drives us to the conclusion that the chosen people suffer because of sin. Thus, only the repentance is a way to cancel the curse. Chapter Deut 30<sup>7</sup> reminds us of Deut 4:

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- 6 The original meaning of the word and the intention of the (biblical) author are – as a rule – evident from the context, and not from the word itself. This does not mean that the words themselves have no meaning, but that their meaning can fully be revealed only if we analyze them within the biblical text (context) from which we take them. Context provides the ultimate key to determining the meaning of words. Each time, it is necessary to ask about the role of words or concepts in relation to a specific context, which is the last criterion for determining the meaning of words. (Skralovnik 2021, 61)
- 7 »In Deut 30:1–10 the theme of conversion is even more evident as in Deut 4:29–31. [...] The conversion is a fundamental condition for the renewed Lord's benevolence. This causal connection is so emphasized that the author also with the root *shwb* (which occurs at the beginning (Deut 30:2a) and at the end (Deut 30:10b) in a usual meaning as a conversion) denotes the return of God to His people (Deut 30:2,3,9,10). The conditional formulation in Deut 30:1–2 is followed by the promise that God will change the destiny of His people, have mercy with them and re-raise them above all other people.« (Krašovec 1999, 225)



When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you. (Deut 30:1-3)

Beside the fact that chapters Deut 4 and 29–30 express the same idea that idolatry destroys the covenantal relationship and causes the punishment, which is sent by God in the form of an exile, they are also very similar in crucial terms used for the description of the dynamics mentioned. Krašovec states:

There is so great similarity between Deut 4:29-31 and Deut 30:1-10 that we can in both cases conclude that author is the same. The arrangement of texts in Deuteronomy cannot be coincidental. Deut 4:29-31 is at the beginning and Deut 30:1-10 is at the end of the central part of the book. So it is evident from this that the obedience and the conversion go together: because the obedience is always deficient, the most important message of Moses' testament must be the conversion. (1999, 224)

The accordance on the level of the vocabulary used implies that the phraseology used by Deuteronomy for the description of God's punishment or of »distress« and of »return« and of »search« of the people has already become formulaic (Werline 1998, 15–16).

Therefore, the main focus of all texts is on the repentance of the people, on which God still awaits. Until then Israel will stay in another land »as is now the case« (Deut 29:28). Deuteronomy tries to explain the state in which Israel finds itself, and to show how the people can change their destiny. Although Israel suffered the punishment, there were reasons for hope, which were grounded on the expectation of fulfillment of the God's promise that was given to the patriarchs: »Because the LORD your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them.« (Deut 4:31;



30:5) The hope was grounded on trust in God and his promise, but the promise itself has not brought the salvation. Repentance, the resumed obedience and fidelity to the covenant were requested as the first condition for the salvation (Werline 1998, 17-18). We can see clearly exposed sequence: distress, seek and return as the preparatory conception of the retribution logic – sin renders punishment, while obedience leads to the well-being – thus, requiring a repentance for reestablishment of the relationship with God.

### **1.3 1 Kings 8:22-61 (Solomon's prayer)**

Deuteronomy indeed calls the sinful people to repentance, but it does not say anything on how the repentance should be done. The ambiguity of the message of Deuteronomy forces the scholar to search for an answer to the question: How should people repent and atone for the committed sins? (Werline 1998, 18) The question has a considerable weight due to a fact that the temple was in ruins and that the institution (as well as the practice) which assured Israel of reconciliation for sins was destroyed and discontinued. Before the exile, the temple had a crucial role, but this role disappeared in 587 BC. When Babylon forcibly broke the old and established machinery of religious institutional practice, Israel was forced to find a »new way« of repentance and reconciliation for sin. The answer for the given questions is presented by the author of the so-called Salomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:22-61), which was written in the time of the exile. In the text, the author leans on the tradition and ideas that are typical of Deuteronomy. With vocabulary borrowed from Deuteronomy the author gives instructions to the people in exile for the correct form of repentance. Salomon indirectly teaches that the people must confess their sins in a penitential prayer. Therefore Salomon's prayer means a crucial information that fills up the missing link between the teaching of Deuteronomy and penitential prayer as a literary genre (and as a new religious institution) (Werline 1998, 18-19).





#### 1.4 Comparing Deut 4; 29–30 and 1 Kings 8: common vocabulary and common tradition

There are great similarities between Solomon's prayer (1 Kings 8:22–61) and Deut 4; 29–30.<sup>8</sup> Werline states that »numerous verbal similarities between 1 Kings 8 and Deuteronomy 4 and 30 indicate that the author of 1 Kings 8 has either a direct knowledge of Deuteronomy 4 and 28–30, or knows the same traditions as author of Deuteronomy« (Werline 1998, 21).

Therefore, we can conclude that the author of Solomon's prayer had in mind Deuteronomy and its message which he wanted to develop and upgrade. However, the differences in phraseology and in spelling (in Hebrew) indicate that those writings do not have the same author. The author of 1 Kings 8 adapted older tradition from Deuteronomy 4 and 29–30 for his own purposes. How and why?

The fundamental difference between Deuteronomy and Salomon's prayer is expressed in its (different) literary form. Salomon's prayer transforms the vocabulary of Deuteronomy into conditional clauses (casuistic law), which is the most important characteristic of Salomon's prayer. »Casuistic law, which consists of a conditional clause stating an action or a state of affairs and a clause that prescribes the legal consequences of the case, represents a social problem and its resolution in narrative terms – it contains the germ of a story.« (Bartor 2012, 293) The casuistic law is expressed in the conditional and can be recognized by a distinctive introductory word »if«. It bears this name because of the conditional form which designates specific juridical cases or is used for the description of a situation that could happen. In a sentence that follows the sanction is stated. Conditional clauses as written in Salomon's prayer strongly remind of conditional clauses in Lev 13:2.18.24.29.38.47. Hence it follows that the author of Solomon's prayer transformed the tradition from Deuteronomy (especially chapters 4 and 29–30) to conditional clauses to answer the question that was not answered by Deuteronomy to the people in exile:

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8 Paralleling of 1 Kings 8 and Deut 4 (28–30) in NRSV does not show the similarities of the vocabulary with all the evidence. For the comparison of the Hebrew text see Werline (1998, 19ff).



If they sin against you – for there is no one who does not sin – and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near; yet if they come to their senses in the land to which they have been taken captive, and repent, and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, »We have sinned, and have done wrong; we have acted wickedly«; if they repent with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies, who took them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their ancestors, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name; then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea[.](1 Kings 8:46-49)

The subject of the conditional law is usually a man, but the prayer in Solomon's prayer appeals with conditional clauses directly on God himself. That is, he stimulates God to act in accordance with the fact that the people has rightly repented. That means that God is, so to say, »forced« to do – when the sinful people in a foreign land will confess their sins, return and pray to him – as it is stated in the second part of the conditional clause, »then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea« (1 Kings 8:49).

Therefore, the (triple) confession of sin in verse 47, which is at the same time the fundamental element of a penitential prayer, is crucial for the national restoration. The prayer presupposes that the nation will achieve the benevolence of God with the confession and repentance. Krašovec makes a similar conclusion:

The Deuteronomistic theology as a cause for the return/punishment allows only one conclusion, i.e. the rebellious behavior of Israel to God. If sinfulness has caused the scattering to other nations then the repentance will cause the return to the Promised Land. (1999, 400)<sup>9</sup>

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9 Jože Krašovec in his work *Reward, punishment, and forgiveness: the thinking and beliefs of ancient Israel in the light of Greek and modern views* explores the reward, the punishment and the forgiveness in most of Old Testament books. To the question: What is the difference in an understanding of the reward, the punishment and the forgiveness between nations of an ancient Near East and Israel? he has found an answer in Israel's understanding of God, whose most surprising revelation



The gesture holds a special meaning in Solomon's prayer because of the context, i.e. the conditional clause that conditions God himself.

### **1.5 The shift in meaning/function of the temple from the sacrificial towards the penitential role in 1 Kings**

A house of prayer, as Jesus names it, was indeed inseparably connected to the prayer, but the people in time before Christ did not go there (primary) to pray but to sacrifice. The author of 1 Kings 8 develops his own understanding of the function of the temple in which he puts the prayer up on the first place (Werline 1998, 25-26).

In the text of 1 Kings 8 (28-30.33.35.38.42.44-45.47-49.52) it can be noticed that the author established a new connection between the terms »prayer« and »temple«. Salomon calls attention to the fact that God does not dwell in the temple and that the house he built cannot contain Him (1 Kings 8:30.34.36.39.43.45.49): »But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!« (1 Kings 8:27)

Only God's name is in the temple, not God himself:

Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, o Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, »My name shall be there,« that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; o hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive. (1 Kings 8:28-30)

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is the one of mercy and reconciliation. This is the only religion that does not only know the law of retribution for good and for bad, but after the defecation also includes an opportunity of repentance, forgiveness and a new beginning. The most profound reason for this is in God's creational and covenantal relationship with the humanity. God the Creator has a relationship of grace with his creation and in this relationship the punishment has its role, as well. Yet after the deepest defecation in the power of an eternal and an irrevocable love of God, the relationship of renewed covenant is indeed restorable. (1999, 847ff.)



Although some ideas are based upon Deut 12, where the role of the temple is described, the people should – by the order of Solomon – address on the temple their *prayers*, not their sacrifices as Deut 12 envisages (Werline 1998, 26–27). Both of the texts (Deut 12; 1 Kings 8) indeed share the idea that only God's name is present in the temple, not God himself. Thus, they both underline the transcendence and the sovereignty of God. But they very much differ in the function which they assign to the temple. The main concern of Deut 12 regarding the role of the temple are sacrifices, while the author of 1 Kings 8 in many passages connects temple to the (penitential) prayer (1 Kings 8:28-30.33.35.38.42.44-45.47-49.52). This is clearly illustrated in the following passage:

When your people Israel, having sinned against you, are defeated before an enemy but turn again to you, confess your name, *pray and plead* with you in this house, then hear in heaven, forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land that you gave to their ancestors.

When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, and then they *pray towards this place*, confess your name, and turn from their sin, because you punish them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel, when you teach them the good way in which they should walk; and grant rain on your land, which you have given to your people as an inheritance. (1 Kings 8:33-36)

It is obvious that in Deut 12, the temple is a place of sacrifice, and in 1 Kings 8 a place of prayer (Werline 1998, 27). If we want to understand why the author of 1 Kings 8 re-interpreted the function of the temple from a place of sacrifice to a place of prayer, we must consider historical circumstances in which Solomon's prayer was written.

Scholars agree that the text of 1 Kings 8 attained its final form in the exile. They claim so on the basis of the text itself, which in the form of penitential prayer addresses God to hear the chosen people in the land of their enemies (1 Kings 8:46.48). Thus, if the text of 1 Kings 8 was written in the time of the exile, the (penitential) prayer was adapted for the writer's *Sitz im Leben*. In new circumstances, the temple receives a new role. The



temple becomes a place of prayer, and not of sacrifice. This means that Israel could repent of its sins in the land of its enemies even without the sacrifice in the temple. For 1 Kings 8, the penitential prayer means the only possibility for the renewal of the scattered people. (Werline 1998, 28)

Solomon in the prayer focuses on the situation of Israel when Israel will stay without temple and will be in a foreign land suffering the consequences of the broken covenant. In his opinion, Israel will suffer because of its own sins. In terms of Deuteronomy, on which 1 Kings 8 depends, idolatry means the most fatal of all the sins, for which God will send the ultimate punishment – the exile. But there is hope; 1 Kings 8 shows the way to turn a new page in the history of the relationship with God. If the people repent and confess their sins, God will save them.

Therefore, the text of 1 Kings 8 means the missing link between undefined teaching of Deuteronomy, which indeed stresses the need of repentance, but does not explain what exactly it means, and penitential prayer as a new institutional form of repentance. So the author of 1 Kings 8 explained and upgraded the meaning of Deut 4 and 29–30 and therefore gave to Israel a new way or opportunity to achieve the reconciliation for its sins:

Moreover, the author (of 1 Kings 8) maintains that even without the Temple the people can continue to practice the activity for which Solomon dedicated it – prayer. Thus, Israel gains a way to expiate sin without Temple sacrifice: repentance and penitential prayer toward the temple. For 1 Kings 8, penitential prayer will restore exiled Israel. (Werline 1998, 28)

## **1.6 The function of penitential prayer in Ezra**

The presented biblical texts show the presence and a well-known and a well-accepted form of religious practice for the recipients of Ezra. Furthermore, the mentioning of ritual gestures of tearing garments (Ezra 9:3), fastening (9:4), etc. points out that a whole ritual of penitential prayer has been developed, and in its centre was the penitential prayer itself. It is significant that the penitential prayer is put on the lips of Ezra, the priest, which goes to show that the penitential prayer was not limited to the peripheral religious groups but it meant the heart of the religious



practice of Israel in the exile. This demonstrates that the penitential prayer functioned as a religious institution (Werline 1998, 63).

## 2 Tobit's penitential prayer

The concept that obedience is followed by a blessing of God and sin by a punishment (Deut 28) – which composes a thematic frame of the literary genre of penitential prayer – has been put under a serious challenge by the suffering of the righteous one. If the logic of Deuteronomy was fully true, the righteous one would enjoy blessing of God and not suffering. Hence the Deuteronomistic logic could not explain the suffering in all situations of life, and this forced some authors to adapt the source message from Deuteronomy to special instances, i.e. suffering of the righteous. Such an illustration is Tobit's penitential prayer (Tob 3:1-6) which adapts the Deuteronomistic tradition adequately.

### 2.1 The place of penitential prayer within Tobit's narrative

The Book of Tobit<sup>10</sup> tells a story of a righteous Israelite, the descendant of Naphtali named Tobit, who was especially known because of his acts of charity:

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 ... For in his anger he put to death many Israelites; but I would secretly remove the bodies and bury them. (Tob 1:16-18)

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<sup>10</sup> The book emphasizes the value of good works, especially almsgiving (1:17; 2:2-4; 4:7-11) and deep respect for the dead (4:4; 14:12-13). Tobit almost excessively scrupulously venerates the attention to the rules of law, from pilgrimage to Jerusalem on great feasts (1:6; 5:14) to abstinence from forbidden food (1:10-12). But this scrupulous fulfillment of law is not something ossified as it is vivified by a true love for poor and outlawed (Cazelles 1979, 578).



For that reason, Tobit under sentence of death escaped from Nineveh together with his wife and son.<sup>11</sup> Only after Sennacherib's death and after an intervention of Ahikhar, the son of brother Hanael, he could return to Nineveh. But on the day of the return Tobit slept outside and lost his sight because of excrements of sparrows. From that moment on, the agony intensifies rapidly and reaches the top at the end of chapter 2, where Tobit's pious deportment and deeds are questioned even by Annah, his own wife (Tob 2:14).<sup>12</sup> Annah's words evoke the crucial question of The Book of Tobit: Does God truly bless those who are righteous?

Therefore, Tobit's penitential prayer, which is found at the beginning of chapter 3 (Tob 3:1-6) together with Sarah's prayer (Tob 3:11-15), signifies a breaking point of the narrative.<sup>13</sup> God sends Raphael<sup>14</sup>, whose name means »God Heals«, as an answer to the prayer with a task to heal both:

At that very moment, the prayers of both of them were heard in the glorious presence of God. So Raphael was sent to heal both of them: Tobit, by removing the white films from his eyes, so that he might see God's light with his eyes; and Sarah, daughter of Raguel, by giving her in marriage to Tobias son of Tobit, and by setting her free from the wicked demon Asmodeus. (Tob 3:16-17)

Although a mentioning of healing has a direct connection to what happened to both of the main figures – Tobit is blind and Sarah is obsessed with a demon – the choice of the word meets with God's answer in other

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11 The biblical story is set in the intertextual and theological framework of the Hebrew Bible. He sees and recognizes in God an absolute authority that requires obedience, even if this means disobedience to human authority (Avsenik Nabergoj 2020, 37).

12 Annah's reaction – »Where are your acts of charity? Where are your righteous deeds? These things are known about you!« (Tob 2:14) – is reminiscent of words said by Job's wife: »Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die!« (Job 2:9) Annah's words render the crucial question of The Book of Tobit: Does God truly bless those who are righteous?

13 »[M]ajor turning points in events are foreshadowed by someone praying. Such a literary technique is not strange to Tobit. In fact, the insertion of a prayer at a crucial point in the story is a characteristic of narrative writing in the OT. The book of Daniel and Esther offer several examples of this.« (Moore 1996, 138; Nowell 1999, 1003)

14 Special feature of The Book of Tobit is an emphasized doctrine on angels and demons. In no other Old Testament book does an angel have such a central role as the angel Raphael in Tobit's story. And in no other Old Testament book is an evil spirit mentioned in such a concrete outline and in such an active form as the demon Asmodeus here.



penitential contexts, in which healing is a metaphor for a salvation (Werline 1998, 33). In the context of the entire story, said prayers mean the first and the crucial step to the good denouement of both of the stories, Tobit's and Sarah's.

## 2.2 The structure of Tobit's penitential prayer

Tobit's penitential prayer (Tob 3:1-6) by the simplest division consists of three parts:<sup>15</sup>

- (3,1 introduction)
- 3,2 the doxology;
- 3,3-5 the confession;
- 3,6 the petition.

The prayer is introduced by verse 1, which describes Tobit's condition right before the prayer. Tobit has – as he states for himself – walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of his life. When performing acts of charity, that is, burying rejected dead bodies of his forcible killed fellow countrymen, he is met with blindness, which, apparently, is completely illogical blow of fate, if we take into account his model life (Tob 1). Blindness makes him useless and dependent on his wife Annah, who plunges Tobit into a new abyss of suffering and despair with her sarcasm: »Where are your acts of charity? Where are your righteous deeds?« (Tob 2:14) This leads him to implore God for death (Moore 1996, 138; Werline 1998, 162; Nowell 1999, 1003). His miserable condition is depicted by groans and weeps: »Then with much grief and anguish of heart I wept, and with groaning began to pray.« (Tob 3:1) This does not show lack of manliness but reflects a deep inner distress and suffering (Moore 1996, 138), which decisively paints the entire prayer (Werline 1998, 165).

The introduction to Tobit's prayer distances itself from already mentioned gestures of tearing the garments (Ezra 9:3-4; Dan 9:3; Neh 9:1); the

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15 »The prayer itself is divided into three distinct parts: 1) the doxology (v 2); 2) Tobit's recognition of his sins and those of his ancestors, as well as their deserved punishment (vv 3-5); and 3) his fervent petition to be released from his suffering, probably through death (v 6). There is no formulaic conclusion.« (Moore 1996, 141)





penitential prayers are usually said by the righteous ones, who solidarize with the unjust ones. In Tobit's prayer, the righteous one is the one who at the same time suffers, and the author wants to underline this.

### 2.3 The doxology<sup>16</sup>

Tobit (3:2) begins the prayer with words: »You are righteous (δικαιος), O Lord, and all your deeds are just; all your ways are mercy (ἐλεημοσύναι) and truth (ἀλήθεια).« Despite his distress, Tobit confesses that God is righteous. To depict God, he uses terms like righteous (δικαιος), mercy (ἐλεημοσύναι) and truth (ἀλήθεια), with which Tobit himself is labeled (Werline 1998, 163; Moore 1996, 138; Nowell 1999, 1003): »I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth (ἀληθείας) and righteousness (δικαιοσύνης) all the days of my life. I performed many acts of charity (ἐλεημοσύνας) for my kindred and my nation ...« (Tob 1:3)

With the confession of God's righteousness, Tobit is situated in a line with similar formulations in other penitential passages in the Old Testament, for example Ezra 9:15; Neh 9:33; Jer 12:1; Dan 9:14 and Bar 2:9 (Fitzmyer 2003, 142). Tobit does not regard his distress as a reflection of unjust self-will of the God. On the contrary, the comprehension of a righteous and true judgment of God enables him to see the solution, which is confrontation with his own deeds, i.e. sins (Večko 2007, 386). The praising at the beginning of Tobit's prayer spontaneously turns to the confession and ends with the petition.

### 2.4 The confession

In verse 3, the prayer passes from the confession of God's righteousness to the confession of sins: »And now, O Lord, may you be mindful of me and look favorably upon me. Do not punish me for my sins or for my unwitting offenses or for of my ancestors.« (Tob 3:3)

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16 The Book of Tobit is preserved in two variants of Greek translation; in Codex Sinaiticus (S) and in Codex Vaticanus and Codex Alexandrinus (BA). NSRV used here is based upon Codex Sinaiticus (S).



However, in Tobit's prayer one can notice the absence of a direct confession of guilt in the first person singular. This form can be found in other penitential prayers. Tobit begins with the formal confession of sins in the third person plural: »They sinned against you and disobeyed your commandments.« (Tob 3:3c-4a) This somewhat deviates from the established practice where the prayer often uses the first person plural (Fitzmyer 2003, 143). However, it is true that Tobit confesses his sin, but only in the first person plural and not earlier than in v. 5.<sup>17</sup>

The transition from the third person plural to the first person plural indicates the principle of collective retribution, by which the prayer identifies with the sinful community; as from the viewpoint of sin committed by the community, as well as from the viewpoint of punishment, which is a consequence presented by sin (Tob 3:4b). Tobit accepts punishment as a righteous and true judgment (Tob 3:5). Self-awareness of fathers' sins and the willingness to identify with them in the punishment are also the main characteristics of piety from the time after the exile (Isa 59:12; Ezra 9:6-7; Neh 1:6; Dan 9:4-19, Bar 1-3) (Moore 1996, 139). When Tobit speaks of punishment that came upon the people of Israel because of disobedience, he follows the Deuteronomistic tradition<sup>18</sup> (Deut 28:1-30:20).<sup>19</sup>

Tobit confesses his sin in the first person plural in v. 5. For the confession of sins in verse 5 he uses the term *ἁμαρτιῶν* (»sins«, noun dative feminine plural common from *ἁμαρτία*), which in verse 3 he uses only for himself: »for my sins (*ἁμαρτίαις*)« (noun genitive feminine plural from *ἁμαρτία*). In verse 5 (LXT)<sup>20</sup> he expands it to his fathers: »my sins and my fathers

17 See also: »We have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances.« (Dan 9:5); »Because we have sinned before the Lord. We have disobeyed him, and have not heeded the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in the statutes of the Lord that he set before us.« (Bar 1:17-18)

18 »The Prayer's basic theology, especially in vv 2-5, is Deuteronomistic, i.e., Do good and prosper; do evil and be punished.« (Moore 1996, 142; Werline 1998, 164ff.; Fitzmyer 2003, 143)

19 The vocabulary used is reminiscent of Deut 28:37: »You shall become an object of horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the Lord will lead you.« See also 1 Kings 9:7; Jer 23:40; 24:9-10; 29:18. The scattering of Israel, which is the consequence of the violation of the law of Lord, also indicates an Deuteronomistic idea, expressed in Deut 4:27: »The Lord will scatter you among the peoples; only a few of you will be left among the nations where the Lord will lead you.« See also Deut 30:3. The experiences of spoil (Deut 28:29,31), slavery (Deut 28:41; Neh 1:2-3 etc.) and death are curses, typical for Deuteronomy.

20 LXT derive from LXX Septuaginta (Old Greek Jewish Scriptures) edited by Alfred Rahlfs.



(ἀμαρτιῶν).« Moreover, in the continuation of verse 5, Tobit repeats the confession of sins from verse 4 – »[they] disobeyed (παρήκουσαν)<sup>21</sup> your commandments (ἐντολῶν)« – with similar, but more accusatory formulation in the first person plural: »For we have not kept (ἐποιήσαμεν) your commandments (ἐντολάς)...« (Tob 3:5b)<sup>22</sup> These facts point to Tobit's increasing awareness of his own sins and sins of his fathers. Therefore the main reason for using the first person plural is a collective confession: »When a writer uses the first person plural, he includes himself and at the same time encourages his people to confess that the deflection is the source of its distress and simultaneously strives to persuade them to sincerely and spontaneously confess their sins.« (Krašovec 1999, 424)

Tobit concludes the confession of his own sins in the third person plural: »[We] have not walked (ἐπορεύθημεν) in accordance with truth (ἀληθεία) before you.« (Tob 3:5b) This is in a diametrical opposition with a passage from Tob 1, where Tobit's pious life is described: »I, Tobit, walked (ἐπορευόμεν) in the ways of truth (ἀληθείας)... all the days of my life.« (Tob 1:3) The confession of sins, his own and of his predecessors, at this point (Tob 3:5b) reaches its reality, which is in complete contrast to Tobit's image (Tob 1).

## 2.5 The petition (v. 6)

In penitential prayers, the prayer usually feels a strong guilt before the righteous God after the confession of sins. He knows that he has no right to ask for a change of situation. Therefore his petition is very humble (Neh 9:32.36-37; Dan 9:16-19) or even unexpressed (Ezra 9) (Večko 2007, 387). In our case, Tobit in the confession of sins indeed underlines the collective destiny as it was announced in Deuteronomy, but in the petition he focuses exclusively on his own distress, although this is not usual in penitential prayers. The »suffering« tint, with which the first line of chapter 3 is painted (»Then with much grief and anguish of heart I wept, and with groaning...«), remains present throughout the entire prayer: the conclusion

21 The term *παρήκουσαν* (to listen) indicates the mishearing, the rejection of the fact that something was heard, contrary to the term *ἐποιήσαμεν* (to fulfil), which is a derivative of the verb *ποιέω*.

22 In Old Testament, the Law, i.e. the commandments, does not simply mean a collection of regulations that a person must fulfill in order to enter into the covenant that God concluded with Israel, but represents the entire content of the covenant, that is a way of life. (Matjaž 2020, 54)



of the prayer (v. 6) forms the inclusion with the first introductory verse as it recalls the first verse (3:1 and 3:6). This means that through the entire text, the author stressed the fact that a pious individual who confesses his sins at the same time suffers because of acts of charity (Werline 1998, 164–165). Tobit expresses his petition in form of an ardent appeal for death:

So now deal with me as you will; command my spirit to be taken from me, so that I may be released from the face of the earth and become dust. For it is better for me to die than to live, because I have had to listen to undeserved insults, and great is the sorrow that attends me. Command, O Lord, that I be released from this distress; release me to go to the place of eternity, and do not, O Lord, turn your face away from me. For it is better for me to die than to see so much distress in my life and better not to listen to insults. (Tob 3:6).

The petition thematically reminds us of some known events from the history of Israel; just before the event of consecration of seventy elders who bore the burden of people together with him, Moses experiences his role of a leader as a big misfortune and a burden too heavy for him: »If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once – if I have found favor in your sight – and do not let me see my misery.« (Num 11:15) The prophet Jonah spoke out similar words: »And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.« (Jon 4:3) (Moore 1996, 140; Fitzmyer 2003, 144; Nowell 1999, 1004).<sup>23</sup>

Appeals for death do not signify the beginning or hope for an eternal life. Prayers simply ask to be redeemed of suffering and distress that they experience in a given moment. The same is true for the petition of Tobit, who has not in mind the afterlife or the resurrection from the death.<sup>24</sup> The

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23 Job, a righteous man suffering, also deals with the question of retributive justice and feels such a desire for a death (Job 3:3-26). See: Burns, John Barclay. 1993. Cursing the day of birth. *Proceedings* 13: 11–22. Barbiero, Gianni. 2015. The Structure of Job 3. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 127/1: 43–62.

24 In accordance with the blessing promised to Abraham, man could expect happiness on earth (Cazelles 1979, 578). The faith in the afterlife and in resurrection of death is showed and begins to develop in the Old Testament texts only in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, but the general consensus cannot be traced even in the time of Jesus and in the first Christian communities (Mk 12:18-27; Acts 23:6-10) (Nowell 1999, 1004).



author of Tobit's prayer does not believe in resurrection, but in Sheol, which is the place where souls of the dead go after death. This is the place that indicates God's absence and the place without pain and without joy (Job 3:11-19). Tobit labels it as Hades (Tob 3:10), which is below (4:19) in the lowest regions of the earth (13:2). However, its master is God, so the righteous ones can still expect the salvation (Ps 49:15: »But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol...«). But in terms of Deuteronomistic nature of the book, one can preserve hope of a reward (or a punishment) only in time of his earthly life (Moore 1996, 140).

Tobit, oscillating between a distress and hope, is not consistent in his petition.<sup>25</sup> Because of a distress he is experiencing, he wants his life to be finished. Despite this, he preserves hope of the righteous. Although Tobit recognizes the judgment as rightful, he acknowledges God as the gracious and merciful. The phrase »do not, O Lord, turn your face away from me« (Tob 3:6) is of great importance and reminiscent of 2 Chr 30:9: »For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.« (2 Chr 30:9) It reveals the fundamental paradigm that God indeed does not hide his face from the righteous ones (Ps 22:25) (Fitzmyer 2003, 145). However, as the denouement of events is hidden from Tobit until chapter 12 (Moore 1996, 142), his words in verse 6 verge dangerously towards lamentation (Werline 1998, 165).<sup>26</sup> Tobit comes close to it when he states that he has heard false insults, i.e. undeserved and fictitious accusations (Werline 1998, 165), which very likely rely on mordant words of his wife Annah in Tob 2:14 (Moore 1996, 140). Despite the temporary suffering, Tobit believes that his virtues, his righteousness and repentance will prevail in the end (Moore 1996, 142; Nowell 1999, 995; Fitzmyer 2003, 46ff.; Cazelles 1979, 577). However, the truth stays undiscovered until chapter 12, where God reveals Himself

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25 »Tobit's petition in v 6 is admittedly inconsistent, alternating as it does between hope and despair. [...] Or, as Montague so aptly put it, 'Tobit's response to his affliction is a prayer for death, which reflects in some ways Job's disenchantment with life and yet has more peace and resignation - a mixture of confusion and confidence and a request to be spared the agony of continuing to live.'« (Moore 1996, 141)

26 Obvious examples of lamentation can be found in some Psalms, as in Ps 13:2-3: »How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?«



through the archangel Raphael and confirms Tobit's righteousness and heals him (Moore 1996, 142).

## 2.6 The interdependence of Tobit and the destiny of Israel

Tobit's narrative is a proof that repentance expressed through penitential prayer can change the flow of events in a life of every individual. The question arises: what is the significance of Tobit's destiny for Israel as a nation. G. W. E. Nickelsburg and C. A. Moore are certain that Tobit's story is the proof for the interdependence of Tobit's fate and fate of the nation: as Tobit was indeed punished for his sins, and after repenting, he received charity and was saved, so according to same pattern, the punished Israel could receive charity, if he repents of his sins (Tob 13:5). In chapter 13, the author with the characteristic language of Deuteronomy reminds people to repent. He reminds Israel that God is the one who scattered Israel among pagans (Tob 3:4; 13:3; 14:4; Deut 4:27; 30:3) and that God is the one who will gather them again (Tob 13:5; 14:5; Deut 30:3-4). This course of events will only be possible when Israel – speaking in language of Deuteronomy (Deut 5:29-30) – will turn and search for God with all the heart and all the soul: »If you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will no longer hide his face from you.« (Tob 13:6) The effect of repentance corresponds to the final verse of Tobit's penitential prayer (Tob 3:6) as God will no longer hide His face (Tob 3:6 and 13:6). Chapter 13 indeed does not contain a penitential prayer, but it contains an appeal to repentance, which leads the reader organically to chapter 3; if the people respond to their sins as Tobit did, the new epoch will begin for them as it is written in Tob 13:9-17 (Werline 1998, 166).<sup>27</sup>

## 2.7 The function of the penitential prayer in The Book of Tobit

The questions of origin and dating of The Book of Tobit leave researchers without reliable answers up to nowadays. The events as described by the writer take place on a historical background framed by the Assyrian slavery

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27 The main dividing point for chapters 3 and 13 is that chapter 13 does not create a tension between themes of suffering of the righteous and of law of Deuteronomy. By belief of Deuteronomy (Tob 13), Israel undoubtedly experiences the exile because of his sins.



(722–681 BC) on one side and the fall of city of Nineveh (year 605 BC) on the other. The writer does not describe events with historical accuracy, because chronological consistence and scientific accuracy are not his primary concerns. As the book does not mention events from the period of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, possible dating is limited to time before 175 BC (Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled in years 175–164) (Fitzmyer 2003, 51; Werline 1998, 166–167; Nowell 1999, 977). Within these data, scholars has set up the origin of The Book of Tobit in period which extends from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.<sup>28</sup> Because of the nature of the story, which happens abroad, some researchers think that Tobit arose in diaspora. If that is true, the author of The Book of Tobit gives his addressees instructions as how to confront potential suffering, despair and torments (in exile).<sup>29</sup>

With acknowledgement that the pious and the righteous ones can also experience suffering, Tobit's penitential prayer creates a tension between the theme of innocent suffering and the Deuteronomistic theme of the righteous retribution in a manner that it rejects neither the first nor the second. The Book of Tobit conceptually relies upon Deuteronomy, in context of which the righteous cannot suffer, and on the other side points out the fact that the innocent righteous one suffers because of acts of charity done. With the junction of those two contradictory presumptions – the fact of suffering experienced by the righteous one and the theory that is opposed to this – the author presents a new message. Tobit presented as a model of the righteous life according to Deuteronomistic notion (Tob 1) teaches that pious and righteous individuals must not presuppose that they are without sin, but must realize that the highest virtue is repentance. The ability to repent, and not sinlessness, is the quality of the righteous ones that differentiates them from the others and makes them able to receive the charity of God.

Therefore, Tobit's story speaks about hope. Tobit prays to God who is not only righteous but also gracious and merciful; despite the horror

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28 Fitzmyer dates the origin of The Book of Tobit between years 225 and 175 BC (2003, 50–52), but Nowell suggests the most likely period be 200–180 BC (1999, 977).

29 If Tobit, even when tested, stays faithful, God will abundantly repay him. The writer encourages compatriots to be obedient to the law. Even if they live scattered in a foreign land, God will not cease to protect them, provided that they will stay obedient despite difficulties in which they live (Cazelles 1979, 577; Werline 1998, 166–167).



of Israel's sins, the opportunity to regret and to repent and to secure the charity of God was offered to the people to which The Book of Tobit was addressed (Werline 1998, 167-168):

He will afflict you for your iniquities, but he will again show mercy on all of you. He will gather you from all the nations among whom you have been scattered. If you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will no longer hide his face from you. (Tob 13:5-6)

Tobit believed in the theory of retribution according to Deuteronomistic law;<sup>30</sup> he did not experienced success in life and happiness as a consequence and a merit of his own deeds (Deut 8:17-18; 9:4-6), but as a gift of God, for which he himself did not took credit. But in accordance with the theory of retribution, he preserved faith that momentary suffering is not a punishment but rather a »test« of his faith, which he can successfully undergo with penitential attitude (Moore 1996, 142; Nowell 1999, 995; Fitzmyer 2003, 46ff.; Cazelles 1979, 577). »Tobit realizes that his suffering in not a punishment but a test of his fidelity.« (Fitzmyer 2009, 46) This test is for the purposes of discovering the peoples' fidelity (Nowell 1999, 995).

## Conclusion

Tobit's basic theology is Deuteronomistic, i.e. »do good and prosper; do evil and be punished« (Moore 1996, 142). This theory as a reason for retribution allows only one decision, i.e. sinfulness. Book of Tobit depicts Tobit as a model of a righteous life according to Deuteronomistic notions (Tob 1), but at the same time underlines his misery, distress and suffering (Tob 3:1.6). The theory of retribution – as Tobit's life story bears witness to that – could not clear up the suffering in all of life's situations. That

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30 For more on retribution theory/retributive justice in Deuteronomy see McConville 2015, 288-298. Krašovec argues that any intent to investigate the concept of justice in all dimensions implies cross-comparison of the concept on diachronic and synchronic levels in relation to various religions and cultures. The complex notion of justice indicates that there are two interdependent dimensions of justice: the justice of the soul within the human personality and the justice of the community as the symbol of a relationship within society (2014, 17-31).





forced the author of *The Book of Tobit* to adapt the original concept of the Deuteronomistic theory of retribution without dropping it.

Tobit's penitential prayer forms apparently incompatible tension: suffering of the righteous one in confrontation with Deuteronomistic retribution logic. In the first place, the author wants to emphasize this with a description of Tobit's great distress which gradually leads Tobit to a confession. This is diametrically opposed to what is described in Tob 1, where Tobit is as an ideal of the righteous, while in the penitential prayer, he is as a sinner in the midst of sinful people. At first, Tobit confesses sins in the third person plural; however, this is not standard in penitential prayers where a prayer usually uses the first person plural as a rule. The leap from the third person plural to the first person in Tobit's penitential prayer at first indicates Tobit's solidarity to sinful people in punishment, and only after that, it indicates the confession of his sins together with people (v. 5). In verse 5, the increasing intensity of the experience of distress and Tobit's realization of his own sins and sins of his fathers reaches the culmination, which is followed by a petition, in which Tobit beseeches God to finish his life. In the petition, Tobit centers exclusively on his own distress, which is also not usual in penitential prayers.

Despite the suffering, Tobit declares that God is righteous, and confesses his sinfulness and of his fathers. In accordance with the basic doctrine of Deuteronomy (Tob 13:5-6), he opens to God's charity and he is saved (Tob 12). For the author of *The Book of Tobit*, which was most probably written for Jews in diaspora, the act of repentance and confession of his own sins was the greatest virtue and quality of the righteous. This virtue qualifies the righteous to receive God's charity and so his destiny turns round. With the junction of two different presumptions – the fact of suffering experienced by the righteous and the theory opposed to that – the author underlines the necessity of penitential attitude.<sup>31</sup>

Tobit's narrative, which is a proof that repentance expressed through penitential prayer can change the course of events in individual's life, wants

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31 »Conversion is not a demonstration of a human 'virtuous decision' but the humble acceptance of the gift of the Spirit who purifies as fire and renews the perception of human hearts (cf. Isa 4,4).« (Celarc 2020, 90-91)



to show to mutual interdependence of Tobit's fate and the fate of nation, and thereby to lead the nation to penitential attitude. Despite the horror of Israel's sins, the possibility of regret and repentance and the assurance of God's mercy (Tob 13:5-6) were offered to people which The Book of Tobit was addressed to.<sup>32</sup>

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32 The article was published for the first time in the Slovenian language (*Bogoslovni vestnik* 71/2: 181-199). It is published in agreement with dr. Robert Petkovšek, editor-in-chief. The English article is a supplementary version of the Slovene article.



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