

Dr. David deSilva, Apocrypha: Witness Between the Testament, Session 5, A Closer Look Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Bel and the Dragon

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 5, Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Bel, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. deSilva's lecture explores several books from the Apocrypha, including Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, and Bel and the Dragon. The lecture highlights Tobit's themes of Jewish life in the Diaspora, ethical instruction, and the importance of almsgiving and endogamy. **Susanna and Bel and the Dragon, additions to Daniel, are presented as stories challenging the abuse of power and ridiculing Gentile religious practices.** The Book of Baruch focuses on repentance, covenant loyalty, and the hope for restoration from exile while praising the Torah. **Finally, the Letter of Jeremiah is examined as an attempt to dissuade Jews from being drawn to Gentile religious practices, emphasizing the lifeless nature of idols.**

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 5 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → NT Introduction → Apocrypha).



**deSilva_Apocrypha_
Session05.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 5, Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Bel

Okay, here's a briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpts from Dr. David deSilva's Lecture 5 on the Apocrypha:

Briefing Document: Apocrypha Lecture 5 - Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Bel and the Dragon

Overview:

This lecture provides an overview of several books within the Apocrypha, focusing on their themes, historical context, ethical perspectives, and literary characteristics. The lecture explores the books of Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, The Letter of Jeremiah and Bel and the Dragon. These texts offer insights into Jewish life in the Diaspora, ethical considerations within Second Temple Judaism, the development of angelology and demonology, attitudes toward Gentile religion, and eschatological hopes.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Tobit:

- **Genre and Setting:** "Tobit, like Judith, is an edifying tale, a work of historical fiction..." Set in the context of the Northern Kingdom's exile in Assyria (Nineveh), though likely composed later in either Aramaic or Hebrew in Palestine.
- **Central Focus:** The book provides a window into Second Temple Jewish ethics and particularly emphasizes almsgiving and endogamy.
- **Almsgiving:** The book magnifies the virtue of giving to the needy, framing it as an investment with divine rewards. "It is better to give alms than to lay up gold, for almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin." Tobit's almsgiving is explicitly linked to God's intervention in his life.
- **Endogamy:** Strong emphasis on marrying within one's own ethnic group and even clan. The author considers marrying outside of the Jewish group as "a kind of fornication... because what's really important is to keep the line of Israel pure."
- **Golden Rule:** An early (negative) formulation of the Golden Rule is present: "what you hate, do not do to anyone."
- **Deuteronomistic Theology:** Affirms that obedience to the covenant brings blessing, while disobedience results in curses.

- **Angelology and Demonology:** Features angels (like Raphael) actively intervening in human affairs, alongside demons (like Asmodeus) also exerting influence. This represents a developed angelology, including "the seven angels that stand in God's presence."
- **Prayer:** Tobias' prayer on his wedding night provides a model for prayer that frames petitions within the context of God's purposes.
- **Eschatology:** Tobit predicts the future gathering of scattered Israel, but also holds out hope for Gentiles who will turn to God. "All the nations of the whole earth will turn and genuinely revere God. They will all leave behind their idols that have deceived them and led them into error."

2. Susanna:

- **Genre and Setting:** A courtly story, possibly originally independent, later associated with Daniel. Focused on life within the Jewish community in the Eastern Diaspora.
- **Main Idea:** Highlights the potential for abuse of authority and trust within the Diaspora Jewish community, specifically focusing on false accusations and the importance of discerning truth.
- **Martyrdom:** Susanna is presented as a "martyr figure" who chooses loyalty to God over temporary safety, even in the face of death.
- **Self-Governance:** Reflects the significant self-governance some Jewish communities had in the Diaspora, using the Torah as a civil and criminal law code.

3. Baruch:

- **Characterization:** Often regarded as a pastiche of Old Testament texts, its strength lies in its creative compilation of materials to address exile and foreign domination.
- **Structure:** Mirrors Deuteronomy's understanding of history and restoration through repentance and covenant loyalty.
- **Themes:** Combines liturgy, wisdom literature, and prophetic elements to address the situation of exile.
- **Torah:** Presents Torah not as a burden but as a gift and manifestation of God's favor. "She is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die."

- **Repentance:** Emphasizes the importance of acknowledging God's justice and owning sin as a starting point for restoration. "The Lord our God is in the right, but there is open shame on us today..."

4. Letter of Jeremiah:

- **Purpose:** To inoculate Diaspora Jews against the allure and social pressure of Gentile religious practices.
- **Strategy:** "The author engages in a kind of reduction to the absurd of Gentile religion by focusing on the statue, by focusing on the idol as the thing itself that's being worshipped." It dismisses idols as lifeless objects, contrasting them with the one true God.
- **Context:** Follows precedents in prophetic literature, offering similar arguments against idolatry.

5. Bel and the Dragon:

- **Genre:** A pair of tales ridiculing Gentile religious practices through detective stories and absurd scenarios.
- **Main Point:** Exposes the trickery of priests and the gullibility of Gentiles, reducing Gentile worship to a focus on physical idols (Bel and the Dragon/Snake).
- **Critique:** The lecture notes that this approach creates a "straw man argument," as Gentiles did not literally worship the statue or animal but saw them as representations of a deity.

Overall Significance:

These Apocryphal texts offer valuable insights into the diverse religious, ethical, and social landscape of Second Temple Judaism. They illustrate the challenges and opportunities faced by Jews living in the Diaspora and provide evidence of evolving theological ideas about angels, demons, and the relationship between God and humanity. They provide helpful context to understand the world in which Christianity developed.

4. Study Guide: deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 5, Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Bel

Apocrypha: Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Bel and the Dragon - Study Guide

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What is the setting of the Book of Tobit, and how does Tobit demonstrate his faithfulness despite the circumstances?
2. Describe the role of the angel Raphael in the Book of Tobit, including the different forms he assumes and the tasks he accomplishes.
3. Explain the significance of almsgiving in the Book of Tobit, according to the characters and narrative.
4. What is the main conflict in the story of Susanna, and what legal principle is highlighted?
5. How does Daniel expose the false accusations against Susanna, and what does this reveal about justice and truth in the Diaspora community?
6. What is the primary purpose of the Book of Baruch, and what Old Testament book does it mirror?
7. What does the Book of Baruch teach about the Law (Torah)?
8. What is the central argument of the Letter of Jeremiah, and what is its main goal?
9. How does the Letter of Jeremiah attempt to dissuade Jews from being influenced by Gentile religion?
10. Explain how Daniel exposes the priests of Bel and explain the second story about the dragon (or snake).

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Book of Tobit is set primarily in Nineveh, where Tobit, an Israelite from the Northern Kingdom, was taken captive by the Assyrians. Despite being in exile, Tobit remains faithful by adhering to Torah law, not eating Gentile food, caring for the needy, and burying the dead, even when it puts him at risk.

2. Raphael appears as Azariah, a human companion for Tobias, guiding and protecting him on his journey. He instructs Tobias on how to overcome the demon Asmodeus and cure Tobit's blindness, revealing his true identity as an angel only after these tasks are completed, emphasizing God's intervention in their lives.
3. Almsgiving is presented as a crucial ethical practice that reflects love for God and neighbor. Tobit's acts of charity are depicted as having brought him to God's attention and ultimately leading to divine intervention, emphasizing the idea that giving to the poor is an investment in one's spiritual future.
4. The main conflict in Susanna involves two elders falsely accusing her of adultery after she refuses their advances. This highlights the abuse of authority and the potential for injustice within the Diaspora Jewish community, particularly concerning the Deuteronomistic rule about two witnesses being enough to confirm a fact.
5. Daniel exposes the lie of the elders through cross-examination, asking each separately under what tree the alleged adultery took place, revealing their conflicting answers. This act demonstrates the importance of thorough inquiry in the pursuit of justice and underscores the value of wisdom in uncovering truth within the community.
6. The primary purpose of Baruch is to address the fact of foreign domination of the land and the existence of Jews as a scattered people. Its structure mirrors Deuteronomy's own understanding of history and its recipe for restoration, namely repentance and a return to covenant loyalty and observance.
7. The Book of Baruch teaches that the Torah is not a burden but a manifestation of God's grace and favor. It identifies the Torah as the embodiment of wisdom and emphasizes that adherence to its commandments leads to life and blessing, aligning with the wisdom tradition found in texts like Ben Sira.
8. The central argument of the Letter of Jeremiah is that idols are lifeless and powerless, thus unworthy of worship or reverence. Its main goal is to dissuade Jews in the Diaspora from being influenced by the religious practices of the Gentile majority, guarding against social pressure to conform to idolatrous practices.
9. The Letter of Jeremiah attempts to achieve this by ridiculing idolatry, emphasizing the material nature and helplessness of idols, such as gods of silver, gold, and

wood paraded on the Babylonians' shoulders. It argues that idols cannot protect themselves or their worshippers, making it foolish to fear or revere them.

10. Daniel spreads ashes throughout the temple of the idol Bel, exposing the priests' nightly secret feasts. The king finds footprints, proving the priests' deception. In the second story, Daniel feeds a dragon (or snake) a lethal concoction of fat, hair, and pitch, causing it to explode and revealing that this "god" is not truly divine, but can be easily killed.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the role of divine intervention in the Book of Tobit, focusing on how God uses angels and seemingly coincidental events to bring about healing and restoration. How does the book portray the relationship between human actions and God's providence?
2. Analyze the portrayal of ethical living in the Book of Tobit. How does the book balance the importance of adherence to religious law, acts of charity, and personal morality? In what ways does it reflect or challenge traditional Old Testament ethics?
3. Compare and contrast the themes and purposes of the stories of Susanna and Bel and the Dragon. How do these narratives serve to reinforce Jewish identity and values in the Diaspora, and what do they reveal about Jewish-Gentile relations during the Second Temple period?
4. Examine the eschatological hopes expressed in the Book of Tobit and Book of Baruch. How do these hopes reflect the challenges and aspirations of Jews living in the Diaspora, and what do they reveal about the development of Jewish messianic thought in the intertestamental period?
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of the Letter of Jeremiah and the stories in Bel and the Dragon as strategies for combating the allure of Gentile religion. What are the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches, and how do they compare to other forms of Jewish apologetics in the Second Temple period?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocrypha:** Books or passages of scripture that are included in the Septuagint and Vulgate but not considered canonical by Protestants and Jews.
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of Jews beyond Israel, particularly after the Babylonian exile.
- **Torah:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible; also refers to Jewish law and teaching more generally.
- **Gentiles:** Non-Jewish people.
- **Second Temple Period:** The era in Jewish history between the rebuilding of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (c. 516 BCE) and its destruction by the Romans in 70 CE.
- **Eschatology:** The study of end times, dealing with final events in history, the ultimate destiny of humanity, and the world.
- **Angelology:** The theological study of angels.
- **Demonology:** The theological study of demons.
- **Endogamy:** The practice of marrying within a specific ethnic, religious, or social group.
- **Deuteronomistic Theology:** The theological framework found in the Book of Deuteronomy, emphasizing that obedience to God's commands brings blessings, while disobedience brings curses.
- **Almsgiving:** The act of giving money or goods to the poor; a form of charity.
- **Liturgy:** A prescribed form or set of forms for public religious worship.
- **Homily:** A sermon or discourse on a moral or religious topic.
- **Canon:** A collection or list of books accepted as genuine scripture.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.

5. FAQs on deSilva, Apocrypha, Session 5, Tobit, Susanna, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Bel, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Here is an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source material:

FAQ

- **What is the Book of Tobit about, and what does it tell us about Jewish life in the Diaspora?**
- The Book of Tobit is an edifying tale, a work of historical fiction set primarily in Nineveh (Assyria), focusing on the life of Jews in the Diaspora after the Assyrian invasion. It tells the story of Tobit, a righteous Israelite who remains faithful to God's law despite being in exile. The narrative involves themes of piety, charity, family, and divine intervention through angels. It provides valuable insights into Second Temple Jewish ethics, particularly regarding charity towards the needy, the importance of endogamy (marrying within one's ethnic group), and the affirmation of Deuteronomy's understanding of history where obedience brings blessing and disobedience brings curse. It also reflects the growing interest in angels and demons during this period.
- **What is the significance of almsgiving in the Book of Tobit?**
- Almsgiving is a central ethical practice promoted in the Book of Tobit. Tobit diligently practiced charity towards the needy, and he instructs his son Tobias to do the same. The book emphasizes that giving assistance to the poor is a good gift in the sight of God, rescues a person from death, and keeps them from going down into darkness. The angel Raphael reinforces the idea that giving alms is a way of laying up treasure for the future because of God's positive view of charitable acts. The book suggests that Tobit's almsgiving brought him to the notice of God's court, leading to divine intervention and healing for his family.
- **How does the Book of Tobit reflect the value of endogamy?**
- The Book of Tobit strongly promotes the value of endogamy, that is, marrying within one's race, ethnic group, tribe, or clan. Tobit instructs his son Tobias to marry a woman from their own lineage, viewing marriage outside the Jewish ethnos as a kind of fornication that threatens the purity of the Israelite line.

- **What are the key themes and messages in the story of Susanna?**
- The story of Susanna, found as an addition to the Greek version of Daniel, highlights the importance of loyalty to God over temporary safety, even when facing false accusations and the threat of death. It reflects on the right of self-governance enjoyed by some Jewish communities in the Diaspora and their use of the Torah as a civil and criminal law code. The story exposes the potential for abuse of authority and trust within the Diaspora Jewish community and emphasizes the need for thorough inquiry to detect false witnesses, reinforcing the importance of justice and righteousness.
- **What is the main purpose of the Book of Baruch, and how does it achieve this?**
- The main purpose of the Book of Baruch is to address the plight of Israel in exile and foreign domination. It achieves this by bringing together a wide variety of traditional materials from the Jewish scriptural heritage, structured according to Deuteronomy's understanding of history and its recipe for restoration (repentance and return to covenant loyalty). The book combines liturgical prayers of confession and repentance with wisdom poems that identify Torah as the fount of wisdom and prophetic promises of restoration for Jerusalem and the gathering of scattered children. By emphasizing the doctrine of the law of the Torah as a manifestation of God's favor, the book seeks to encourage covenant loyalty and maintain hope for restoration.
- **How does the Letter of Jeremiah attempt to dissuade Jews from being influenced by Gentile religious practices?**
- The Letter of Jeremiah attempts to dissuade Jews from being influenced by Gentile religious practices by undermining the attraction and awe surrounding Gentile religion. It does so by focusing on the idols themselves as lifeless pieces of metal, stone, or wood, reducing Gentile religion to the absurd. The author emphasizes that idols cannot move, help themselves, or protect themselves, portraying Gentiles as foolish for praying to such helpless objects. By constantly refraining "clearly, they're not gods, so don't revere them," the letter aims to insulate Jews against the social pressure of participating in the majority culture's religious practices.

- **What is the main message of the stories of Bel and the Dragon, and how do they convey it?**
- The stories of Bel and the Dragon, additions to the Book of Daniel, ridicule Gentile religious practices. The story of Bel shows how priests deceive people into believing that Bel consumes offerings, when in reality they eat the food themselves. The story of the Dragon shows Daniel killing a snake worshipped as a god by feeding it hairballs, leading to its demise. These stories convey the message that Gentiles are lulled into believing in false gods through trickery or by worshipping creatures that are not divine. They argue their case by reducing Gentile worship practices to the absurd, creating straw man arguments.
- **How do the prayers in the Book of Tobit reflect Jewish liturgical tradition?**
- The prayer that Tobias prays on his wedding night provides a paradigm for prayer that has had a lasting impact on Christian liturgy in many churches. The form of the prayer begins with a common liturgical expression of blessing God, followed by attention to God's purposes. The prayer names the divine purposes that are implicitly jeopardized if the prayer is not answered, specifically, God's purposes for marriage and family. It's only after affirming alignment with God's purposes that Tobias makes his request for survival and the fulfillment of God's plan. This model of praying according to God's will influenced the development of prayers in various Christian traditions.