

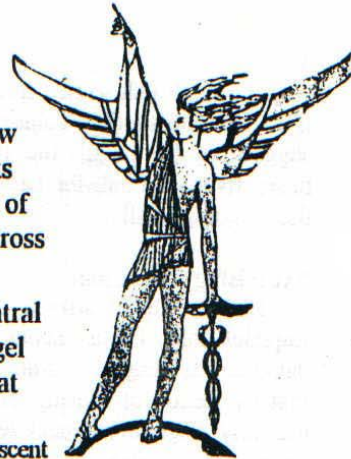
Healing among the ancient Jews

## Tobit and the Archangel Raphael

A notable feature of the Sanctuary of the Guardians in New Zealand is its ceiling-high altar screen at the east end of its Temple that divides the Holy Place from the central space of the Temple. A ceiling-to-floor veil is suspended from its cross beam on which are pillars bearing the letters י ה ו ה ,

Tetragrammaton . The pillars stand on either side of a central wood-carving of the Lord of the East, the Mighty Archangel Raphael. The cover picture of this issue is a drawing of that carving. The name Raphael, means *The Healing of 'El*.

The wings and upstretched arm of the Archangel are together reminiscent of the letter ו, the central letter of Pentagrammaton, ו ה ש ו ה .



**R**APHAEL, MICHAEL AND GABRIEL are the only three angels whose names are mentioned in the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures.

Raphael appears in the Book of Tobit. Although it was originally written in Hebrew in the 3rd century b.c.e., the oldest surviving manuscripts of the legend are in Greek. It contains an account of a Jewish elder living in Nineveh during the Captivity of the Jews that had taken place some four or five hundred years earlier. It illustrates the healing practices of the Jews in that era.

The name Tobit [Hebrew, Tobiyah] means "the goodness of Yahweh". In the original, both Tobiyah and his son bear the same name, but the custom arose of calling the father Tobit and the son Tobias.

Tobit was a devout and loyal Jew who, with his wife Hannah and their son Tobias, had been taken captive to Nineveh in the eighth century b.c.e. In Nineveh, he continued his good deeds, especially in almsgiving and in giving decent burial to those of his own race who were slain by the cruel King Sennacherib. When Sennacherib learned of this, Tobit had to flee, but after the King Esarhaddon came to the throne, he returned, with the aid of his nephew, Ashanani, who was the chief minister to the new king.

One night, after an act of burial had made him unclean, Tobit slept in the courtyard. As he slept, the droppings of sparrows fell into his eyes and blinded him. After being blind for four years, in despair, he prayed fervently for divine help.

### Sarah and the demon Asmodeus

At this very time, in another city, Ecbatana, Sarah, daughter of Raguel and Edna, also uttered a fervent prayer for deliverance from an unhappy plight in which her seven husbands had been successively slain in the bridal chamber by the evil and jealous demon Asmodeus.

The prayers of both Tobit and Sarah were heard by God, who dispatched the angel Raphael to aid them.

Tobit, believing that his time of death was near, planned to send Tobias on a journey to recover from a kinsman, Gabael, a sum of money (about \$120,000) which had been deposited with him years before. Raphael, posing as a dependable kinsman who knew the way, was employed to guide Tobias on the journey. In bidding them farewell, Tobit unwittingly prayed that God's angel might attend them.

The travellers set out, accompanied by Tobias' dog, and camped at the Tigris River,



### *Tobit and the Archangel Raphael*

where a large fish leaped from the water as if to bite the foot of Tobias. At Raphael's suggestion, he caught the fish and saved heart, liver, and gall for later use. They ate the rest of the fish.

#### **Exorcising the demon**

Before they arrived at Ecbatana, Raphael told Tobias about the attractive daughter of Raguel, Sarah, and indicated that by reason of kinship Tobias was now the only eligible husband left for her. He persuaded Tobias to marry her., and instructed him to exorcise the demon by burning the heart and liver of the fish on the incense fire in the bridal chamber.

After the arrival, exchange of greetings, and consummation of the marriage, Tobias carried out the instructions of the angel, and the smoke from the fire drove Asmodaeus away into Upper Egypt, where Raphael quickly followed and bound him.

Meanwhile, Raguel, fearing the worst and unaware of these happenings, had had a

grave dug during the night. But the next morning he was elated to find the young man alive, and at his insistence the wedding celebration was carried on for fourteen days.

During this time Raphael went on alone and obtained the money from Gabael, and Tobias grew anxious to return home.

Back in Nineveh, Tobit and Hannah were in despair at Tobias' long absence; but at last he returned with his wife and Raphael, and they were overjoyed.

Then Tobias, as Raphael had instructed him, placed the gall of the fish upon his father's eyes, and his sight was immediately restored.

In gratitude for everything, they offered Raphael half the money, but at this point the angel made his true identity known, bade them thank God for his mercies, and disappeared. Tobit then uttered a long prayer of praise and rejoicing.

The book includes the wisdom teachings and prophecies passed by Tobit to his son , and concludes by relating how both Tobit and Tobias lived to a good old age and were buried with honour after enjoying many blessings.■

