

Radiant and Unfading

Take-Home • Session 14: The Exodus Rewoven and the Missing Book • The Final Sheet

What We Found

The book's retelling of the Exodus reached its end. Egypt's darkness was made heavier by guilt, each conscience its own jailer, for fear is nothing but surrender of the helps that come from reason (17:12), while for the holy ones there was very great light. (The darkness was a real plague; guilt intensified it. This is not a description of clinical anxiety or panic, which are not moral surrender.) At midnight the all-powerful Word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed (18:14-15), Passover judgment in the letter, and in the Church's Christmas liturgy, the other midnight leap: the Word became flesh. We found the warrior Word once more at the Bible's end, riding from an opened heaven, his name the Word of God (Revelation 19:13). Aaron stood between the dead and the living with prayer and incense, the model of every intercessor since. And creation, refashioned and complying, carried the people through: in everything, O Lord, you have exalted and glorified your people; and you have not neglected to help them at all times and in all places (19:22).

Then we kept the promise of Session 1 and faced the question of whether this book belongs in the Bible. We gave the objection its full strength: the Hebrew canon, Josephus's count, Jerome's doubts, Athanasius's own list, the absence of a formula quotation in the New Testament, and the timing of Trent. Then we answered from what we had found over fourteen weeks: the Greek Scriptures the apostles most often quoted; the plot speech echoed at the cross; the word *apagasma* shared by Wisdom 7:26 and Hebrews 1; the whole armor of Ephesians 6; gold tested by fire in 1 Peter; Romans 1 beside Wisdom 13-14; a first-century pope drawing on this book; the local councils of Hippo and Carthage, whose lists the Latin Church received as one canon for both Testaments, the same lists that name the New Testament books Christians still use; Jerome's doubts, real, and held inside the Church's use; Athanasius quoting Wisdom as Scripture in *On the Incarnation*; and Trent confirming Carthage rather than inventing anything. Underneath it all lies the decisive point: no book of the Bible contains its own inspired table of contents. Recognizing the canon is therefore a judgment about which writings are Scripture, and the real question is what authority Christ gave his Church to make and receive that judgment. The Church discerned the list by apostolic Tradition, forty-six books and twenty-seven (CCC 120, 138), and this book is in it by name. We said in week one: read it, and let it prove itself. It did.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine • *On Christian Doctrine* II.8; *Against the Letter of Mani* 5.6 (late 4th to early 5th century)

His canon list in *On Christian Doctrine* includes Wisdom among the books received by the churches, and his rule is the foundation: follow the judgment of the weightier, apostolic churches. And in *Against the Letter of Mani* he pressed it home: I would not believe the Gospel itself, unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved me.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome • Prefaces and letters (4th-5th century)

The honest hostile witness: he preferred the Hebrew canon and distinguished these books, yet he also translated Tobit and Judith himself, cited Wisdom and Sirach in his own arguments, and acknowledged the Church's use of them. His reservations were real, but held inside the Church's use, not against it; a scholar's private doubt is not the Church's verdict.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales • The Catholic Controversy, Part II, Art. I (1590s)

By what rule do we know which books are Scripture? By the testimony of the apostolic Church, the same witness by which we receive the Gospels themselves. To put it in a modern image: whoever accepts the New Testament from the Church's hands has already trusted the librarian, and it is late in the day to dispute her about the shelf.

Live It: The Sending

- **Finish the book, alone, once.** Sometime this month, read Wisdom straight through in one or two sittings. You will be surprised how much more of it you understand after fourteen weeks.
- **Answer the friend.** Write, in one page, your own answer to the Session 1 challenge, with your three strongest pieces of evidence from this study. Someday, in a break room or a dorm hallway, you will be asked, and you will be ready.
- **Give it away.** Choose your person and invite them into this book: hand them a copy, share your Take-Homes, or walk them through your three favorite discoveries. A multitude of wise men is the salvation of the world (6:24).
- **Keep the morning prayer.** Of all this study's practices, keep this one: rise before the noise, once a day, and give thanks at the dawning of the light (16:28). She is radiant and unfading, and she is still sitting at your gates.

Memory Verse

"While gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne." (Wisdom 18:14-15)

The five questions we carried through the study, and where they ended. Who is Wisdom? Sealed as a guess in week one and answered from Scripture in week eight: fulfilled above all in Christ, with the Spirit's resonance the Fathers also heard. The righteous man, plotted against in week two and vindicated in week five: the pattern of Easter. Where death came from and where it goes, opened at 1:13 and closed at 5:15: God did not make death, and God has overcome it. The wood, first seen in Noah's ark at 10:4, called blessed at 14:7, and honored on Good Friday. And the question of the missing book, raised in week one and answered in week fourteen: it belongs on the shelf, received by the Church, where it has proved itself.

Where to go next: Sirach, Wisdom's older cousin; the Gospel of John with this study's eyes; or hand this study to someone and lead it yourself. Thank you for fourteen weeks. Go, and make friends of God.

Scripture We Opened

- Tonight's text: Wisdom 17:1-19:22
- The discovery: Revelation 19:11-16 (the Word of God, the rider from the opened heaven; the study's final discovery)
- Exodus 10:21-23 (darkness to be felt; Israel lit at home)
- Exodus 11-12 (the midnight of the destroyer)
- Numbers 16:46-48 (Aaron between the dead and the living)
- Psalm 107:20; Isaiah 55:11 (the sent word)
- John 1:1, 14 (the Word became flesh)
- 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 9:24 (the one mediator; the true sanctuary)
- 1 John 4:18 (perfect love casts out fear)
- Exodus 14-15 (the sea; chapter 19's consummated arc)
- Luke 10:16; 1 Timothy 3:15 (the Church's charge)