

Session 1 · Righteous in Exile

Tobit 1 · Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants will discover, from the text itself, that Tobit's righteousness is not private piety but costly, public fidelity: worship in the right place, food kept holy in a pagan city, and the dead buried at the risk of his own life. They will also discover why this book is in their Bible, and be equipped to answer the first question anyone asks about Tobit.

Catholic Touchstone. The corporal works of mercy, and the canon of Scripture. Burying the dead is the one work of mercy modern people forget, and Tobit is its great biblical exemplar. And because Tobit is deuterocanonical, this session meets the canon question head-on, with the Protestant case given at full strength before the Catholic answer.

What You Need to Know

Tobit opens in the wreckage of the northern kingdom. In 722 BC Assyria crushed Israel and deported its people, and Tobit, of the tribe of Naphtali, was carried to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. Read that setting slowly, because it is the engine of the whole book. Every promise of God now looks broken: no land, no temple within reach, no king, no visible future. The question the book asks is the question your group members ask in their own exiles: is God still doing anything, or has he gone silent?

Chapter 1 answers by introducing a man who acts as if God is still God. Tobit tells us he alone went to Jerusalem for the feasts when his whole tribe followed the schismatic shrines of the north (1:4-6). He paid his tithes in full, three ways (1:6-8). In Nineveh he kept the food laws when everyone around him ate what was offered to them (1:10-12), and he says plainly why: because I remembered God with all my heart. Then comes the act the book is famous for. When his countrymen were executed and their bodies thrown behind the wall, Tobit buried them, secretly, under a king who had made burial a capital crime (1:16-20). He lost all his property for it and had to flee for his life. Righteousness in this chapter is not safely rewarded: Tobit does enjoy God-given favor for a season under Shalmaneser (1:13), but under the next king that favor evaporates and fidelity costs him everything (1:19-20). By the chapter's end, doing right has been punished. Do not soften that; the next two sessions depend on it.

Two background notes will save you mid-session. First, Ahikar (1:21-22) is Tobit's nephew, a high official who intercedes for him so that he can return to Nineveh. Ahikar was a famous figure of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, and his presence tells us the author writes with a wide literary horizon. For your purposes he is a small seed of providence: God has already placed a rescuer in the palace before Tobit needs one. Second, the narrator's voice: chapter 1 is told by Tobit himself, in the first person, like a testimony given at a prayer meeting. The book will later shift to the third person. Let the group feel that this is a man telling you his own story.

Finally, be ready for the question that will surface within ten minutes: why have I never seen this book before? Tobit is one of the seven deuterocanonical books, received by the Catholic Church and absent from most Protestant Bibles. This session takes that question seriously with a full build-then-press chain rather than a dismissive aside. Read that chain carefully before the session; it is the apologetic heart of the night.

OT Roots and Fulfillment

Tobit's fidelity is Torah-shaped at every point. His lonely pilgrimages to Jerusalem obey Deuteronomy 12, where God commands sacrifice only at the place the Lord your God will choose, and they silently condemn the calf-shrines Jeroboam set up at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:26-30). His refusal of Gentile food stands in the stream that runs to Daniel 1, where Daniel resolves not to defile himself with the king's food, written about a later chapter of the same story of exile, when Babylon deported Judah more than a century after Assyria deported the north. His burial of the dead answers a horror the Old Testament names repeatedly: to lie unburied is the curse of Jezebel (2 Kings 9:36-37) and the threatened shame of covenant-breakers (Deuteronomy 28:26). Against that backdrop, burial is not sentiment. It is a confession that this body belonged to a son of the covenant and that God has not finished with it.

The fulfillment line runs straight to the Gospel. The negative form of the Golden Rule appears in Tobit 4:15 before Jesus gives its positive form in Matthew 7:12. Laying up treasure through almsgiving (Tobit 4:8-9) becomes lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). And the burial thread finds its crown at the tomb: Joseph of Arimathea does for the crucified Jesus what Tobit did behind the walls of Nineveh: he claims and buries a condemned man's body under a hostile power (Matthew 27:57-60). John notes that he had been a disciple in secret "for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38). When the Church lists burying the dead among the corporal works of mercy, Tobit is the reason.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Polycarp of Smyrna · *Letter to the Philippians 10* (c. AD 110)

Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, urges the Philippians that when they are able to do good they must not put it off, because almsgiving delivers from death. He is echoing Tobit's teaching (4:10; 12:9) almost word for word within living memory of the apostles, strong evidence that the book was received and shaping Christian instruction in the earliest churches. When someone in your group wonders whether the early Church really used this book, here is a man taught by John drawing on it.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage · *On Works and Almsgiving 5* (c. AD 253)

Cyprian builds his great treatise on mercy directly on Raphael's words in Tobit 12, teaching that almsgiving joined to prayer and fasting purifies the soul and commends our petitions to God. For Cyprian, Tobit is not edifying background reading; it is the divine warrant for the Church's whole practice of care for the poor.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan · *On Tobit 1* (c. AD 380)

Ambrose wrote an entire treatise on this book and opens it by holding Tobit up as a prophet whose virtue shone brightest in captivity: faithful in worship, generous at table, and fearless in burying the slain even under royal threat. Ambrose then wields Tobit against the loan-sharks of Milan, proof that the Fathers read this book as a live moral authority, not a museum piece.

Catechism Connection

CCC 120 lists Tobit by name within the canon of the Old Testament received by the Church. CCC 2447 names burying the dead among the corporal works of mercy and grounds the practice of almsgiving in

Tobit 4:5-11. CCC 2300 teaches that the bodies of the dead must be treated with respect and charity in faith and hope of the resurrection, the very conviction that drives Tobit out the gate at night with a shovel.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

Three threads are planted tonight. Do not resolve any of them.

1. The works of God, hidden. The narrator knows things the characters do not. Train the group to watch what God is doing off-stage. This thread is named aloud by an angel in Session 10, so keep the phrase quiet for now.

2. Almsgiving as treasure. Tobit gives and loses everything. Whether charity is wasted is the question the whole book answers. Planted here, watered in Session 4, paid off in Sessions 10 and 12.

3. The seed in the palace. Ahikar (1:21-22) looks like a footnote. He is providence planted early. Mention him lightly; he returns.

The sealed guess is written tonight on Take-Home Sheet 1 and is not opened until Session 8. Collect nothing; participants keep their own sheets. Simply make sure everyone actually writes something and folds it.

Session Goals

1. Participants can retell the three fidelities of Tobit 1 (worship, food, burial) and say what each one cost him.
2. Participants can give a two-minute answer to why is Tobit in the Catholic Bible, including one piece of evidence from the early Church and one from Qumran.
3. Participants connect burying the dead to the corporal works of mercy and to Joseph of Arimathea.
4. Every participant writes and seals a guess about how God will redeem Tobit's losses.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Win 12 min · Build 58 min · Send 10 min · Live It and closing prayer 10 min. The canon steelman chain deserves 20 unhurried minutes; protect it. If you are running long, make these cuts in this order: drop the Dig Deeper on Ahikar (it is recovered in Session 9), compress question 4 to a single read-and-observe without discussion, and let the second Send question become the walk-out question people answer at the door.

Righteous in Exile

Tobit 1 · Discussion Guide · 90 minutes

Opening Prayer

Father, you kept Tobit faithful in a city that did not know your name, and you were working for him even when he could not see your hand. Open the Scriptures to us tonight. Give us eyes to find what you have hidden in this book for us, and hearts willing to be found by it. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win · Opening the Door (12 minutes)

- W1.** Tell us about a time you were the outsider: the new school, the new job, the place where nobody shared your faith or your background. What did you hold onto to stay yourself?
- W2.** When you do the right thing and it costs you, what is your honest first reaction toward God?

Build · Into the Text (58 minutes)

A Book You May Never Have Met

- 1.** Before we read a word: raise your hand if you have never read Tobit, or never even noticed it in a Bible. (Expect most hands.) Now open to it, right after Nehemiah in a Catholic Bible. Read Tobit 1:1-2 aloud. What concrete facts does the narrator give us, and what do those facts tell us about when and where this story lives?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The opening verses plant the story precisely: Tobit, tribe of Naphtali, taken captive from Galilee to Nineveh in the days of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. This is the catastrophe of 722 BC, when the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed and its tribes deported. Tobit is exile literature: a story for people living where the promises of God seem out of reach. That is why the Church has never stopped needing it, and why your group will find it strangely current.

The First Fidelity: Worship in the Right Place

- 2.** Read Tobit 1:4-8. Tobit says all my brethren and the house of Naphtali sacrificed elsewhere, but I alone went often to Jerusalem for the feasts. Why would going to Jerusalem matter so much? What is he refusing by going?

Live discovery. Do not answer yet. Send half the group to Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 13-14 and the other half to 1 Kings 12:26-30. Give three minutes, then have each half report what they found.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Deuteronomy commands that sacrifice be offered only at the place which the Lord your God will choose, which became Jerusalem. First Kings shows Jeroboam manufacturing rival worship, two golden calves at Bethel and Dan, precisely so his people would not go to Jerusalem. Convenient worship, king-approved worship, everyone-you-know worship. Tobit alone refuses it. His

pilgrimage is a confession that God, not the culture and not the crown, decides how he will be worshiped.

Let the group say the uncomfortable modern parallel themselves; it usually surfaces without help. Fidelity to worship on God's terms, at real cost in belonging, is where the whole book begins.

The Second Fidelity: A Holy Table in a Pagan City

3. Read Tobit 1:10-12. In Nineveh, everyone else ate the food of the Gentiles, but I kept myself from eating it, because I remembered God with all my heart. What is the connection Tobit draws between his diet and his memory?

4. Where else in Scripture does a young exile make the same stand at the same kind of table? If anyone knows, let them find it: Daniel 1:8. What do Tobit and Daniel both understand that we tend to forget?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

For an Israelite, the food laws were a daily, bodily act of remembering who you belong to. Tobit's phrasing gives us the theology: the discipline is not the point, the remembering is. Daniel, facing the same test in the later Babylonian exile, resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food. Both men know that assimilation rarely announces itself; it arrives one comfortable meal at a time. Small bodily fidelities are how the heart keeps its citizenship.

The Third Fidelity: The Man Who Buried the Dead

5. Read Tobit 1:16-20 slowly. List everything Tobit does in these verses, and everything it costs him. Why do you think burial, of all things, is the act the king cannot tolerate?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Tobit feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and buries the executed and the exposed dead of his people, secretly, under Sennacherib. When he is informed on, he loses everything he owns and flees for his life. Burial enrages the king because exposure of corpses was the empire's final word of contempt: you are garbage, and your God cannot even give you a grave. Every body Tobit buries contradicts the empire's theology. It says: this was a child of the covenant, and God has not finished with this body. Burial is resurrection hope acted out with a shovel.

6. One more live discovery. Someone find Matthew 27:57-60 and read it. Who in the Gospel does exactly what Tobit does, for whom, and what might it have cost him? (See John 19:38 for a clue.)

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate for the body of the crucified Jesus and lays it in his own tomb. A condemned man's body, a hostile power, a righteous Israelite who will not let the empire have the last word over the dead. Christian readers have long seen in Joseph a righteous Israelite in Tobit's mold. This is why the Church counts burying the dead among the corporal works of mercy, and why Christians have built cemeteries since the catacombs: the body is not packaging. It is destined for resurrection.

DIG DEEPER

Trace the line all the way to your own parish. From Tobit's shovel to Joseph's tomb, the thread runs unbroken: early Christians, from the second century onward, dug the catacombs and gathered at the graves of the martyrs, the Church blesses cemeteries and consecrates ground, and every funeral Mass commends a body, not just a soul, to God in hope of the resurrection. All Souls

Day, prayers for the dead, the reverence given to relics of the saints, the ancient custom of burying the faithful facing east to meet the rising Christ: all of it is Tobit's conviction grown to full stature. When a Catholic prays for the holy souls or attends a funeral, they are standing in a ministry this book began. (CCC 958; 1032; 2300)

Build, Then Press: Why Is This Book Even in My Bible?

BUILD, THEN PRESS

The Strongest Protestant Case, Given at Full Strength

Someone in your group has a Protestant roommate, coworker, or grandmother, and the objection will come, so give it honestly and at full strength. It runs like this: Tobit is not in the Hebrew Bible that Jesus and the apostles used. The Jewish community that produced the Old Testament does not receive it as Scripture. St. Jerome himself, the greatest Bible scholar of the ancient Church and translator of the Vulgate, listed Tobit among the books outside the Hebrew canon and said the Church reads them for edification, not for establishing doctrine. The New Testament never once quotes Tobit the way it quotes Isaiah or the Psalms. And Rome did not infallibly define the canon with Tobit in it until the Council of Trent in 1546, which looks suspiciously like a counter-move against the Reformers. On this reading, Catholics added books; Protestants simply kept the Bible Jesus knew.

7. Before anyone answers: which parts of that case are actually true? Be honest. Then let's press on the parts that are doing hidden work. Start here: what Bible did the apostles actually hand to the Greek-speaking world, and what was in it?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

First, concede what is true, because honesty is our apologetic. It is true that Rabbinic Judaism does not receive Tobit. It is true that Jerome had doubts, and it is true that the New Testament contains no formula-quotation of Tobit. A steel man deserves a straight answer, not a dodge.

Now press. The Scriptures of the apostolic mission circulated in Greek, in the Septuagint tradition, and Tobit traveled within that tradition; the great early Christian codices of the Greek Old Testament include it. When the New Testament quotes the Old, it overwhelmingly quotes the Septuagint's text. The earliest Christians received their Old Testament from the apostles in that form, which is why St. Polycarp, John's own disciple, quotes Tobit as Scripture around AD 110, and why the Church's councils at Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) list Tobit in the canon, and Pope Innocent I confirmed the same list in a letter of 405, more than eleven centuries before Trent. Trent did not add Tobit in 1546; it solemnly confirmed, against a new challenge, the same list the Church had been reading at Mass for over a thousand years.

Press on the Hebrew canon argument too, because it hides two assumptions. It assumes there was one settled, universally received Jewish canon in Jesus' day. In fact the edges of the collection were still contested; rabbinic sources record later disputes even over books like Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, and the list that excludes these books reached its final rabbinic form only in the generations after Church and synagogue had parted ways. Scholars debate the details, but no one can produce a closed canon that the apostles simply inherited and Catholics later violated. It also quietly assumes the synagogue, not the apostolic Church, has the authority to fix the Christian Old Testament. And here modern discovery is unkind to the old objection: among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran were found five manuscripts of Tobit, four in Aramaic and one in Hebrew. The book Jerome could only find in Aramaic was being copied and treasured in the Holy Land in the very generations before Christ.

As for the New Testament's silence, it is not as silent as claimed: Tobit 4:15 gives the Golden Rule in its negative form before Jesus gives it positively, Tobit 4:8-9 lays up treasure with God before Matthew 6:19-20, and in Session 10 we will meet Tobit's seven holy angels who stand in the presence of the Holy One and present the prayers of the saints (12:15), and find their echo in Revelation 8, where seven angels stand before God (8:2) and the prayers of the saints rise before the throne (8:3-4). Note also that several undisputed Old Testament books (Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) are likewise never quoted in the New Testament, so quotation cannot be the test of canonicity. Finally, on Jerome: hold him honestly. He doubted, and he also submitted, translating Tobit at his bishops' request and deferring, in his own words, to the judgment of the churches. That is a very Catholic ending to the story.

DIG DEEPER

St. Athanasius, in his famous Easter letter of 367 that lists the New Testament's 27 books, placed Tobit among books appointed by the Fathers to be read to new Christians. Even where an individual Father hesitated on Tobit's exact rank, the book was in the Church's hands and on the Church's lectern from the beginning. The question was never whether to read Tobit; it was how highly to rank it, and the Church answered through her councils. Also worth knowing: Ahikar, mentioned in 1:21-22 as Tobit's protector at court, was a celebrated wisdom figure across the ancient Near East. Scripture is not embarrassed to plant its story in a world its first readers knew well.

Reading the Narrator

8. Step back from chapter 1 as a whole. Tobit worships rightly, keeps the law, buries the dead, and by verse 20 he has lost everything and is running for his life. If this were the only chapter you had, what would you conclude about how God treats his faithful ones? Say it as bluntly as the text allows.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Bluntly: righteousness in this chapter is punished. The convenient theology that says faithfulness leads quickly to blessing dies on page one of Tobit, exactly as it dies in Job and at the cross. The book is beginning a long argument that God's providence is real but hidden, and that the space between doing right and seeing it vindicated is where faith actually lives. Do not resolve this tonight. The whole study is the resolution.

Send · Taking It Out the Door (10 minutes)

S1. Tobit had three fidelities that kept him himself in Nineveh: worship, the table, and mercy to the dead and the poor. Which of your fidelities is currently eroding one comfortable compromise at a time, and what would the Tobit version of holding it look like this week?

S2. Someone will eventually ask you why your Bible is bigger than theirs. From tonight, what is the one piece of evidence you would actually remember and use?

Live It This Week

1. Perform one corporal work of mercy that costs you something real: time, money, or comfort. If you can, let it touch the forgotten one: pray by name for someone who has died and has no one to pray for them, or visit a grave.

2. Practice your two-minute canon answer out loud once, to a mirror, a friend, or a patient spouse. You keep what you rehearse.

3. Read Tobit 2:1-3:6 before next session, and notice what happens to Tobit at the very moment he is doing something good.

Closing Prayer

Lord God of our fathers, you saw Tobit when the king's men did not, and you counted every act of mercy he thought was hidden. Give us his stubborn fidelity: worship on your terms, holiness at our tables, and mercy that does not calculate the cost. And when doing right costs us, keep us from concluding that you have looked away. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory · Tobit 1:3 (RSV2CE)

"I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life, and I performed many acts of charity to my brethren and countrymen."

Leader Reference Card

Every passage in order of use

Opening Tobit 1:1-2 · setting and exile

Q2 Tobit 1:4-8 · pilgrimage and tithes

Q2 live discovery Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 13-14 · the place the Lord will choose

Q2 live discovery 1 Kings 12:26-30 · Jeroboam's calves at Bethel and Dan

Q3 Tobit 1:10-12 · food of the Gentiles refused

Q4 Daniel 1:8 · Daniel's resolve at the king's table

Q5 Tobit 1:16-20 · burying the dead under Sennacherib

Q6 live discovery Matthew 27:57-60 · Joseph of Arimathea

Steelman chain Tobit 4:15 with Matthew 7:12 · the Golden Rule

Steelman chain Tobit 4:8-9 with Matthew 6:19-20 · treasure laid up

Dig Deeper Tobit 1:21-22 · Ahikar at court

Send / memory Tobit 1:3 · ways of truth and righteousness

Catechism CCC 120 · CCC 2300 · CCC 2447