

Session 1 · Righteous in Exile

Tobit 1

What We Found

Tobit opens in the wreckage of exile: 722 BC, the northern kingdom destroyed, Tobit of Naphtali deported to Nineveh. Into a world where every promise of God looks broken, chapter 1 introduces a man who acts as if God is still God, in three costly fidelities.

First, worship on God's terms: while his whole tribe followed the convenient calf-shrines of the north, Tobit alone went to Jerusalem for the feasts, because Deuteronomy 12 says sacrifice belongs at the place the Lord chooses. Second, a holy table: in Nineveh he refused the food of the Gentiles, because I remembered God with all my heart, the same stand Daniel made at the king's table. Third, mercy to the dead: he fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and buried the executed of his people under a king who hunted down and put to death those who buried the slain (Tob 1:18-20; 2:8), and it cost him everything he owned.

We also met the question this book always raises: why is Tobit in the Catholic Bible? We were honest about the Protestant case, and we found the Catholic answer: the Greek Scriptures the apostles and the earliest Church used and handed on carried Tobit, and the early Church received it as Scripture; St. Polycarp, the apostle John's disciple, quotes its teaching that almsgiving delivers from death around AD 110; the councils of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) list it in the canon more than eleven centuries before Trent confirmed the same list; and the Dead Sea Scrolls yielded five manuscripts of Tobit, in Aramaic and Hebrew, from the Holy Land itself.

We traced Tobit's shovel forward: Joseph of Arimathea burying the crucified Jesus at the same kind of risk, the early Christians of Rome burying their dead together in the catacombs, and every funeral Mass, cemetery blessing, and All Souls Day since. When the Church buries her dead with honor, she carries forward the same work of mercy Tobit models at the cost of everything he owned.

And we let chapter 1 end as bluntly as it is written: Tobit does everything right and loses everything he owns anyway (Tob 1:20). The book is beginning a long argument about a providence that is real but hidden. Hold that tension. The whole study is the answer.

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. His words reproduce Tobit's teaching almost verbatim (Tob 4:10; 12:9), an early witness to Tobit's reception within living memory of the apostles, though Polycarp does not name the book.

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 the divine warrant for the Church's whole care of the poor.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

Ambrose wrote an entire treatise on this book, holding Tobit up as a prophet whose virtue shone brightest in captivity: faithful in worship, generous at table, fearless in burying the slain. He then wielded Tobit against the loan-sharks of Milan, reading it as live moral authority.

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.

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."

MY GUESS · SEALED UNTIL SESSION 8

Tobit has lost his property and his standing, and all of it came from doing right. Write one sentence: how do you think God will bring good out of what Tobit has lost, and what means do you think he will use?

Fold this section over, write your initials across the fold, and do not open it again until your leader tells you to in Session 8.

Before Next Session. Read Tobit 2:1-3:6.

Catechism CCC 120 · CCC 2300 · CCC 2447