

Session 3 · Two Prayers, One Answer

Tobit 3:7-17

What We Found

The camera left Tobit mid-grief and landed on a stranger: Sarah of Ecbatana, who had lost seven bridegrooms to the demon Asmodeus and now bore her maids' cruel accusation on top of her grief. At the edge of despair, what held her was a face: she would not bring that sorrow on her father. The text's answer to the darkest hour is not an argument but a bond, and her next move is the book's whole theology of prayer: she carried the anguish itself to God at the window (Tobit 3:11), a posture that recalls Solomon's outstretched hands at the temple dedication (1 Kings 8:22) and Daniel praying at his open windows toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10).

Her prayer stood beside Tobit's with equal dignity: both honest to the bottom, both handing the verdict to God, and hers bending from death toward mercy as it rose. Heaven's intake desk has no hierarchy of importance.

Then the hinge of the whole book: the prayer of both was heard in the presence of the glory of the great God, and Raphael, whose name means God heals, was sent to heal the two of them. Two prayers from strangers three hundred miles apart, prayed the same day, answered as one case with one plan that neither pray-er asked for and both needed. From here on the reader knows what no character knows, and that gap is the book's doctrine of providence: we live at window level, mid-story, while answers we cannot see are already on the road.

We also faced the critical objection that Tobit is edifying fiction and therefore not inspired. We conceded the text's literary artistry and historical seams, then pressed the hidden premise: truth travels in genres, and the Church teaches (Dei Verbum 11-12) that Scripture teaches without error the truth God wanted recorded for the sake of our salvation, expressed according to each book's literary form. What Tobit asserts for our salvation, that providence governs the exile, that prayer is heard, that angels minister and demons lose, it asserts without error, and the rest of Scripture countersigns each of those claims.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

Origen · *On Prayer* 11 (c. AD 233)

Origen, among the most learned teachers of the early Church, cites Raphael's own testimony later in the book (Tobit 12:12), that he presented the prayers of Tobit and Sarah before the Holy One, as proof that the angels are not spectators of our prayer. What Tobit 3:16 narrates from heaven's side, Raphael confirms from his own. When we pray, we never pray alone.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Damascene · *On the Orthodox Faith* 3.24 (c. AD 740)

The Damascene gives the Church her classic definition: prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God. What makes prayer is not composure but address. Tobit's plea and Sarah's anguish both qualify fully, and both are heard.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Francis de Sales · *Introduction to the Devout Life 4.13-14 (1609)*

The gentle Doctor teaches that desolation, when prayer feels useless and heaven feels shut, is a normal weather of the interior life, to be met with patience and refusal of despair, because fidelity in dryness, patiently borne, is no less pleasing to God than fervor in consolation. Sarah at her window is his teaching in a single picture.

Live It This Week

1. Choose your longest-unanswered prayer and pray it once more this week, but end it differently: thank God that it has been heard, before you see anything. That is not pretending; it is Tobit 3:16-17 applied.
2. Send the message, make the call, or write the note to one person who may be at a window. Do not evaluate whether they need it. Tethers of love are built before the dark hour, not during it.
3. Read Tobit 4 before next session: a father who thinks he is dying gives his son everything he knows. Come ready to say which sentence of the advice you would steal for your own life.

Scripture Memory · Tobit 3:16-17 (RSV2CE)

"The prayer of both was heard in the presence of the glory of the great God. And Raphael was sent to heal the two of them."

Before Next Session. Read Tobit 4.

Catechism CCC 2559 · CCC 2282-2283 · CCC 302-303 · CCC 391, 395