

Session 11 · A Hymn for the City of God

Tobit 13 · Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. Participants will read the hymn Tobit wrote with his healed eyes: autobiography turned into liturgy, personal mercy universalized into doctrine, and, at its summit, a vision of Jerusalem rebuilt in sapphire, emerald, and gold whose palette the group will find again, with their own hands, in Revelation 21. Along the way they will learn the Church's four senses of Scripture, using the Catechism's own chosen example: Jerusalem.

Catholic Touchstone. Christian hope: the theology of a heaven that does not anesthetize but energizes. The press meets the strongest secular objection to eschatology, that jeweled-city hope is escapism, with the witness of a book, and a Church, whose heaven-gazers built the hospitals.

What You Need to Know

Then Tobit wrote a prayer of rejoicing (13:1): the healed man obeys the angel's two commands at once, blessing God and writing it down, and chapter 13 is the result, the longest sustained praise in the book. Its opening couplet is the book's whole theology of suffering compressed to a breath: For he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades, and brings up again, and there is no one who can escape his hand (13:2). Notice what Tobit has done: the sentence he blessed God with privately at his healing, thou hast afflicted me, but thou hast had mercy upon me (11:15), has been promoted from autobiography to doctrine, from me to he does. This is what mature testimony is: personal history, weighed and found to be a window on God's ways with everyone. And the couplet has a family: Hannah sang it first, the Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up (1 Samuel 2:6), Mary will sing its Magnificat descendant, and the Creed walks its exact path: descended into hell; the third day he rose again. The group will trace that lineage tonight and should feel the vertigo of it: Tobit's hymn is humming the paschal mystery centuries early, because the down-and-up shape of his life is the shape of God's way with the world, and its deepest instance is Holy Saturday and Easter.

The hymn's second movement turns to the exiles: acknowledge him before the nations... he has scattered us among them (13:3), with the great conditional at its center: if you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will no longer hide his face from you (13:6). Exile, in Tobit's theology, is not abandonment but address: the scattering itself makes Israel God's witness among the Gentiles, a seed that flowers fully in next week's finale. Then the third movement (13:9-18): Jerusalem herself is addressed, afflicted for the deeds of her sons and promised mercy on the sons of the righteous; the nations will come from afar, bearing gifts in their hands, gifts for the King of heaven (13:11, and let the room hear the camels of Isaiah 60 and the Magi already on the road); and then the vision that furnishes Christian imagination to this day: the gates of Jerusalem will be built with sapphire and emerald, and all your walls with precious stones; the towers of Jerusalem will be built with gold... the streets of Jerusalem will be paved with beryl and ruby and stones of Ophir (13:16-17), and all her lanes will cry Hallelujah (13:18). Prepare the Revelation 21 discovery as the night's summit: when the group sets John's city, pure gold, jeweled foundations, gates of pearl, beside Tobit's, they will see that the Apocalypse paints heaven with Tobit's palette (both drawing on Isaiah 54:11-12), and that streets of gold, the phrase every Christian knows, walks through this book on its way to Revelation.

One catechetical gift belongs to this session: the four senses of Scripture, because the Catechism's own chosen example of the anagogical sense is Jerusalem (CCC 115-118; CCC 117 gives the anagogical Jerusalem). The tradition's classic fourfold Jerusalem runs: the literal city, the allegorical Church, the moral soul, and the anagogical heavenly city. Tobit 13 is a working demonstration: a real exile's real hope for the real city, which the Church has always also read as her own portrait and as heaven's. Teach the tool briefly and concretely; your group will use it for the rest of their reading lives.

OT Roots and Fulfillment

The hymn is woven from Israel's oldest praise: Hannah's song of reversal (1 Samuel 2:1-8), the Deuteronomy 30 promise of scattering and regathering upon return of heart, the psalms of Zion (Psalm 87, 122), and above all Isaiah's radiant city: O afflicted one... I will lay your foundations with sapphires... your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones (Isaiah 54:11-12), with the nations streaming to her light, bearing gold and frankincense (Isaiah 60:1-6). Tobit is singing inside that choir, an exile harmonizing with the prophets he trusts.

The fulfillment is threefold and ascending. Bethlehem: nations from afar bearing gifts for the King arrive as Magi with gold and frankincense (Matthew 2:1-11), Isaiah 60 and Tobit 13:11 kneeling at one crib. The Church: the pilgrim city already gathering the nations, singing Tobit's hymn in her liturgy of exile. And the End: John's New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, with the glory of God, radiant like a most rare jewel, wall of jasper, city of pure gold, foundations adorned with every jewel, street of pure gold, transparent as glass (Revelation 21:10-21), where the Hallelujah of Tobit's lanes becomes the Hallelujah of the great multitude (Revelation 19:1-6). Tobit's blind years taught him what to hope for; his healed eyes wrote it down; and John, in exile on Patmos, saw it finished.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ignatius of Antioch · *Letter to the Romans* 6 (c. AD 107)

Ignatius, on the road to martyrdom, begs the Roman church not to obstruct his passage home: it is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth... permit me to attain to the pure light; when I have arrived there, I shall be a man. Here is Tobit's exile-hope at full maturity: a citizen of the jeweled city so certain of home that Rome's arena looks like a gate. Hope of heaven did not make Ignatius passive; it made him unbreakable.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo · *The City of God* 22.30 (c. AD 426)

Augustine ends his greatest work describing the city Tobit sang: there we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. For what other end do we propose to ourselves than to attain to the kingdom of which there is no end? Twenty-two books analyzing every earthly empire's rise and rot, written to fix the Church's eyes on the only city with permanent foundations, and its last word is Tobit 13:18's word: praise.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

Pope Benedict XVI · *Spe Salvi* 2 (2007)

Benedict states the session's press and its answer in one stroke: the one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life. Christian hope, he argues throughout the encyclical, is performative, not informative: it does not merely tell us about a future; it changes how we act in the present. History bears him out: the centuries most saturated

in heaven built the hospitals, freed slaves within the household of faith (a transformation Benedict himself traces from Philemon to St. Josephine Bakhita, Spe Salvi 3-4), and tamed their conquerors. A hope that anesthetizes was never the Christian one.

Catechism Connection

CCC 115-118 teach the four senses of Scripture, and CCC 117 chooses tonight's very image for the anagogical: we can view realities and events in terms of their eternal significance, leading us toward our true homeland: thus the Church on earth is a sign of the heavenly Jerusalem. CCC 1044-1045 unfold the destination: in this new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men... the beatific vision, in which God opens himself in an inexhaustible way to the elect, will be the ever-flowing well-spring of happiness, peace, and mutual communion. And CCC 1049 delivers the press's answer from the Council itself: the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one, for here grows the body of a new human family which already is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age.

Thread Watch

THREAD WATCH

- 1. He afflicts and shows mercy.** The theology of Sessions 2 and 9, personal in 11:15, becomes universal doctrine in 13:2 and paschal in the Creed. Name the promotion explicitly; it is the study's suffering-arc landing.
- 2. Exile as address.** The scattering that opened Session 1 is revealed as mission: acknowledge him before the nations. This hands the baton directly to Session 12's finale; do not run the final leg tonight.
- 3. Write in a book.** Chapter 13 is Tobit obeying 12:20, and next week the group obeys it too: the final Live It assigns their own hymn. Seed the expectation tonight: come ready to write.

Session Goals

1. Participants can trace 13:2's lineage: Hannah's song behind it, the Creed's descent-and-rising ahead of it, and their own 11:15 moment inside it.
2. Participants have set Tobit 13:16-18 beside Revelation 21:10-21 with their own hands and can name the shared palette and its Isaiah source.
3. Participants can define and apply the four senses of Scripture using Jerusalem, CCC 117's own example.
4. Participants can answer the escapism objection: Christian hope is performative, and history's heaven-gazers built the hospitals.

Time Note (90 minutes)

Win 10 min · Build 58 min · Send 12 min · Live It and closing prayer 10 min. The Revelation 21 discovery (question 4) is the summit; give it 15 unhurried minutes and read both city-texts aloud in full. If you are running long, cut in this order: drop the Dig Deeper on the four senses (teach only the anagogical in passing), compress question 2 (the exile movement) to the 13:6 conditional alone, and fold the Magi note into the leader's framing rather than discussion.

A Hymn for the City of God

Tobit 13 · Discussion Guide · 90 minutes

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, God who lives for ever, who leads down and brings up again, whose hand none can escape and whose hand is mercy. Teach us tonight to sing what Tobit sang: our own histories promoted into praise, and our eyes lifted to the city whose lanes cry Hallelujah. Make our hope performative, and our homesickness fruitful. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win · Opening the Door (10 minutes)

W1. Show and tell: your rule of the triad from last week. What did you draft, and how did the first week of it actually go?

W2. Where in your life have you experienced homesickness for a place, a season, or a state of things, and what did that ache teach you about yourself?

Build · Into the Text (58 minutes)

Autobiography Becomes Doctrine

1. Read Tobit 13:1-2. Then flip back to 11:15 and read Tobit's words at his healing. What has Tobit done between those two verses, grammatically and theologically? A live discovery: someone find 1 Samuel 2:6-8, Hannah's song, and read it. Whose choir is Tobit singing in, and where does the Church's creed walk the same path?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

At his healing Tobit spoke in first person: thou hast afflicted me, but thou hast had mercy upon me. In the hymn the sentence is promoted to doctrine: he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades, and brings up again. Between the verses, testimony has matured: Tobit has weighed his own history and found it a window onto God's ways with everyone, which is precisely what a testimony is for. Hannah sang the pattern first, the Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up, and Mary's Magnificat will sing its fulfillment; and the Creed walks the exact path with a capital letter: he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again. The down-and-up of Tobit's life is the shape of God's way with the world, and its deepest instance is Holy Saturday and Easter. Every person in this room who has lived a descent is holding a stanza of this hymn; the question the study has been building is whether we will promote our verse from complaint to doctrine, from what happened to me to who God is.

Exile as Address

2. Read Tobit 13:3-6. Tobit tells the scattered exiles to acknowledge him before the nations, for he has scattered us among them, and plants a great conditional at the center: if you turn to him with all your heart... then he will turn to you. What is exile for, in this theology? And what does the conditional refuse to let the exiles believe about their situation?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exile, in Tobit's hymn, is not abandonment but assignment: the scattering itself positions Israel as God's witness among the nations, show his greatness there, where you are. And the conditional forbids the two despairs of every exile: that God's face is hidden permanently (it is not; turn, and he turns), and that the exiles' choices no longer matter (they do; the turning is theirs to do). The Church recognizes her own situation here: from the beginning she has understood herself as a pilgrim people dispersed through every culture, whose dispersion is the mission (the word parish itself comes from the Greek for sojourners). For your group: whatever exile you are in, geographic, professional, familial, the address has not changed, only the assumption that it was an accident.

The Nations on the Road

3. Read Tobit 13:11: many nations will come from afar... bearing gifts in their hands, gifts for the King of heaven. Keep a finger there and hear Isaiah 60:1-6 read aloud. Now: where does the Gospel show you the down payment on these prophecies, camels, gifts, and all?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Matthew 2: wise men from the East arrive following light, and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh, Isaiah 60's own inventory (gold and frankincense) carried to Bethlehem. The Magi are the first installment of Tobit 13:11 and Isaiah 60: the nations coming from afar with gifts for the King, except the King of heaven is lying in a feed trough, which is exactly the kind of joke this study has learned to expect from God's hiddenness. The full payment is still arriving: every convert from every nation since is Tobit 13:11 in motion, and next week the book will say so in so many words. Hold that thought; it is next session's finale.

The City

4. The summit. Read Tobit 13:16-18 aloud, the whole jeweled vision, sapphire gates, gold towers, streets of beryl and ruby, lanes crying Hallelujah. Then the live discovery: someone find Revelation 21:10-21 and read verses 18-21 aloud, slowly. What have you just discovered? And with a third finger in Isaiah 54:11-12, what is the relationship among the three texts?

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

John's city: pure gold, clear as glass, wall foundations adorned with every jewel, sapphire and emerald among them by name, twelve gates of pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold. The discovery: the Apocalypse paints the New Jerusalem with Tobit's palette, streets of gold, jeweled gates and walls, and both are drawing on Isaiah 54:11-12, where God promises the afflicted city foundations of sapphires and gates of carbuncles. Streets of gold, the phrase every Christian and half the culture knows, walks through the book of Tobit on its way to Revelation. Three exiles saw the same city: Isaiah's afflicted Zion comforted, Tobit blind in Nineveh, John banished on Patmos, and the vision is given precisely to the afflicted, because the jeweled city is not decor; it is defiance: every gem is a promise that the empire's verdict on God's people is not final. And the last line outshines the jewels: all her lanes will cry Hallelujah. The city's substance is praise; the gold is just paving.

DIG DEEPER

Tonight you have been using, without the labels, the Church's four senses of Scripture, and the Catechism's chosen example for the highest sense is this very city (CCC 115-118; the anagogical Jerusalem example is CCC 117). The literal sense: the historical Jerusalem, whose rebuilding Tobit

genuinely hopes for. The allegorical: the Church, the city already gathering the nations. The moral: the soul, in which God means to dwell and pave the ruined streets. The anagogical (from the Greek for leading upward): the heavenly Jerusalem, our true homeland, which is where Tobit's hymn and John's vision finally meet. The senses do not compete; the literal grounds the rest, and the medievals kept them in a couplet: the letter teaches events; allegory, what you believe; the moral, what you do; anagogy, where you are going. Take the tool home; the whole Bible opens differently with it.

Build, Then Press: Pie in the Sky

BUILD, THEN PRESS

The Escapism Objection, Given at Full Strength

This is the modern world's most sincere objection to everything chapter 13 loves, so give it full strength: jeweled-city hope is a narcotic. Promise the poor streets of gold hereafter and they will tolerate mud streets forever; heaven is how the comfortable pacify the afflicted, pie in the sky when you die. A serious adult, says the objector, spends his finite compassion on the one world that verifiably exists: cure the diseases, feed the hungry, fix the city you can see. Every hour spent gazing at an imaginary Jerusalem is an hour stolen from the real one, and history's religions have blessed too much misery with the promise of later. If your hope makes you patient with evil, your hope is part of the evil.

5. Concede the objection's honest core first: when has heaven-talk actually been misused that way? Then press it against the evidence, starting with the singer of this very hymn: what did Tobit's heaven-hope produce in his conduct, chapters 1 through 12? Then widen the sample: historically, what did the people most saturated in the New Jerusalem actually build? Finish with the Church's own words, CCC 1049.

ANSWER · SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Concede without flinching: heaven-talk has been misused as a sedative, masters have preached patience to slaves for the masters' benefit, and every Christian should hate that abuse as blasphemy against hope, using God's promises to protect injustice from God's demands. The objection's conscience is right.

But press it against this book's own evidence, because the objection predicts a Tobit who never existed. The man singing of sapphire gates is the man who left his dinner to bury the dead at capital risk, emptied his purse for the poor, and taught his son that turning your face from any poor man turns God's face from you. His heaven did not anesthetize his charity; it financed it: he gave at a loss for chapters precisely because he believed the ledger heaven keeps. That is the pattern, not the exception. Run history's actual experiment: the people most drunk on the New Jerusalem built the first hospitals (Basil, whose almsgiving homily you met in Session 4, built a whole city of care for the poor and lepers); heaven-obsessed monks copied civilization through the dark centuries; the abolitionists sang of Canaan while breaking chains; and the modern hospice movement, calmly furnishing rooms for the dying, is eschatology with a nursing staff. Meanwhile the twentieth century's great experiments in heaven-free compassion, which promised to fix the only world there is, dug graves at industrial scale. The evidence runs opposite to the prediction: it is the people sure of the future city who find present misery intolerable, because they have seen the standard.

The Church states the logic herself: the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one (CCC 1049, quoting the Council), and Benedict XVI

gives it a name: Christian hope is performative, the one who has hope lives differently. Why? Because hope re-prices everything: if the jeweled city is real, then the poor man is a future citizen of it and cannot be abandoned; if death loses, then no cause of mercy is ever wasted; if all her lanes will cry Hallelujah, then every act of justice now is early construction. Pie in the sky was always a caricature of a doctrine that actually reads: the city is coming down (Revelation 21:2), heaven descending to renew earth, not souls escaping it, and its advance crews are recognizable by their shovels. Tobit carried one.

Send · Taking It Out the Door (12 minutes)

S1. Tobit promoted his story to a hymn: he afflicts, and he shows mercy. Name the descent-and-rising in your own history that most deserves promotion, and say the doctrine-version of it out loud, in third person, right now: he...

S2. If the jeweled city is real and its standard is fixed, what present misery within your actual reach have you been too patient with, and what would early construction look like this month?

Live It This Week

1. Keep working your rule of the triad, and add one act of early construction: a concrete blow against some misery within your reach, chosen because the city is coming.

2. Pray Tobit 13 aloud once this week as your own prayer, substituting your exiles and your city where they fit. Notice which lines you cannot yet say honestly, and tell God so.

3. Read Tobit 14 before the final session, and come ready to write: bring something to write with and on. The angel said write in a book, and next week we obey him.

Closing Prayer

God who lives for ever, who leads down to Hades and brings up again: receive our histories as hymns. Fix our eyes on the city with sapphire gates and Hallelujah lanes, and let the sight make us builders, not bystanders, until the day you bring the city down and wipe every tear from every eye. Through Christ our Lord, firstborn from the descent, king of the city. Amen.

Scripture Memory · Tobit 13:2 (RSV2CE)

"For he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades, and brings up again, and there is no one who can escape his hand."

Leader Reference Card

Every passage in order of use

Q1 Tobit 13:1-2 with 11:15 · autobiography promoted to doctrine

Q1 live discovery 1 Samuel 2:6-8 · Hannah's song; the Creed's descent and rising

Q2 Tobit 13:3-6 · exile as address; the great conditional

Q3 Tobit 13:11 with Isaiah 60:1-6 · Matthew 2:1-11 · the Magi

Q4 Tobit 13:16-18 · the jeweled city

Q4 live discovery Revelation 21:10-21 · Isaiah 54:11-12 · the shared palette

Dig Deeper CCC 117 · the four senses, Jerusalem as example

Steelman answer CCC 1049 · Spe Salvi 2 · Revelation 21:2

Memory Tobit 13:2

Catechism CCC 117 · CCC 1044-1045 · CCC 1049