

Session 11 · A Hymn for the City of God

Tobit 13

What We Found

Tobit obeyed the angel's two commands at once, blessing and writing, and chapter 13 is the result. Its opening couplet promoted his autobiography into doctrine: what he said at his healing (thou hast afflicted me, but thou hast had mercy upon me) became he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades, and brings up again. Hannah sang the pattern first (1 Samuel 2:6), Mary's Magnificat would sing its fulfillment, and the Creed walks the same path: descended into hell, 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.

The hymn turned exile into assignment: acknowledge him before the nations, for he has scattered us among them, with the great conditional at its heart: turn to him with all your heart, and he will turn to you. And the nations answered early: bearing gifts in their hands, sang Tobit; gold and frankincense, said Isaiah 60; and Matthew 2 shows the down payment kneeling at Bethlehem.

Then the city. With our own hands we set Tobit's Jerusalem, built with sapphires and emeralds, walls of precious stones, gold towers, streets of beryl and ruby, lanes crying Hallelujah, beside Revelation 21's, pure gold, jeweled foundations, street of gold, and found that the Apocalypse paints heaven with Tobit's palette, both drawing on Isaiah 54. Three visions given to the exiled and afflicted show the same city, because the vision is given precisely to the afflicted: every gem is defiance, a promise that the empire's verdict on God's people is not final. We also learned the Church's four senses of Scripture (CCC 115-117), applied to the tradition's classic example: Jerusalem read literally, allegorically, morally, and anagogically, the tool that opens the whole Bible.

And we met the modern objection at full strength: that jeweled-city hope is escapism, pie in the sky that pacifies the afflicted. We conceded the abuses honestly, then pressed the evidence: the man singing of sapphire gates is the man who buried the dead at mortal risk and emptied his purse for the poor; history's heaven-gazers built the hospitals, copied civilization, and broke the chains; and the Church says it herself: the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one (CCC 1049). Christian hope is performative: the city is coming down, and its advance crews are recognizable by their shovels.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

On the road to martyrdom: 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. 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)*

The last words of his greatest work describe 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. Twenty-two books on the rise and rot of earthly empires, ending, as Tobit 13 ends, on praise.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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

The one who has hope lives differently. Benedict teaches that Christian hope is performative, not informative: it does not merely describe a future, it changes how we act in the present. History bears this out: the centuries most saturated in heaven built the hospitals and civilized their conquerors. A hope that anesthetizes was never the Christian one.

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.

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."

Before Next Session. Read Tobit 14. Bring something to write with.

Catechism CCC 117 · CCC 1044-1045 · CCC 1049