



"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Time between the Testaments

LEADERS GUIDE



Tobias and his dog walk among angels as they return to Nineveh, where his parents, Tobit and Anna, count the days, awaiting his return. The story of this Naphtalite family tells us much about the beliefs and practices of God's people during the Time between the Testaments—both good and bad. In *Tobias and the Three Archangels*, Florentine artist Francesco di Giovanni Botticini (1446–98) illustrates the people's faith that the Lord and His angels were watching over them. As you read the stories of these Israelites, step into their shoes. Feel the pressure of persecution they experienced as well as the presence of the Lord's angels.



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COVER: The three archangels with Tobias, by Francesco Botticini. Art Archive, The/Art Archive, The

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His Body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (*Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 8.*) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer) using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (optional; the director may fill this role)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (*Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 55.*) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (*see p. 55*);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday-morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving five or ten minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week.

Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places, some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources and Worship

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxv–cx), and more than 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012. This study-Bible treatment of the Apocrypha includes an extensive introduction to the 400-year Time between the Testaments as well as maps, charts, illustrations, and extensive articles.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

Righteousness and Shame

Baruch; Letter of Jeremiah; Susanna

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

In God's righteousness, He deals with sin by disciplining His people. The child of God responds by confessing all sin and turning to the wisdom of God for direction. Forgiven, God's people rejoice in their restoration accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. seek the Lord in humility, confessing all sins and rejoicing in the full forgiveness won for them by Jesus Christ;
2. pray for others, especially leaders and the nation, that they might turn to the Lord and walk the path of wisdom; and
3. turn to the Lord in prayer and trust His Word when faced with trial or temptation.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Father, forgive us for our sins, washing us thoroughly in the blood of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Lead us today and always by Your Holy Spirit to live wisely, according to Your Word. Keep us faithful in all trial and temptation, wiping away the deception of the world and the darkness of sin. Lift up our eyes from the present troubles to the day when You call us home, filling us with the sure and certain hope of our resurrection to eternal life through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

"Not again!"

As the people of God felt the sting of defeat at the hand of a Gentile enemy and saw the desecration of their temple once more, they might have cried out, "Not again!" Jerusalem had fallen several centuries earlier to the Babylonians, who had destroyed the temple and carried off their ancestors to Babylon, hundreds of miles away. Jeremiah had eloquently expressed the peoples' grief in the Book of Lamentations. They learned their lesson. The faithful remnant returned from Babylon at the end of the sixth century BC and, with a little encouragement from Ezra and Nehemiah, remained faithful to God. Or so they thought.

The mid-fifth century BC marks the beginning of a "silent time" when no prophet from God appears to speak to His people. Yet, four long centuries later, the greatest prophet of all time would arise in the wilderness, preaching the kingdom of God and baptizing people for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 7:26–28). Between Malachi and John the Baptist, however, God seemed silent, even though His people faced terrible suffering and oppression.

In their day, a foreign enemy would once again devastate the city and defile the Holy Place, the temple of God. On the temple's altar, in 167 BC, Antiochus IV Epiphanes would sacrifice a pig—an animal unfit for sacrifice or human consumption among Israelites—to the pagan god Zeus. Antiochus would try to force the population to abandon their faith and adopt Greek reli-

gion and culture. He burned the Hebrew Scriptures and put their owners to death. He required people to eat “unclean” foods to demonstrate their compliance with the new laws and banned circumcision.

How had Israel come to this yet again?

1 Introduction (*Baruch 1:1–14*)

To explain the suffering during the Time between the Testaments, the author of *Baruch* looks back over four centuries to the time when Jerusalem fell to the forces of Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. The Babylonians had taken many of the best and brightest to Babylon in two earlier deportations (605 BC and 597 BC). Prophets like Daniel and Ezekiel (in Babylon) and Jeremiah (in Jerusalem) called people to repentance and renewed obedience, but their message fell on deaf ears. The city fell and sacrifices at the temple ceased.

The author of this first book takes on the persona of Baruch, secretary to Jeremiah. He may have intended his readers to understand that he wasn’t the real Baruch, whom Jeremiah tells us was in Egypt (see Jeremiah 43:1–7). This thought is reinforced when the fictional Baruch takes some of the temple’s vessels back to Jerusalem, where sacrifices would still be made. *Baruch* 1:10–18 even contains instructions to read the book in the “house of the Lord” (the temple) on a regular basis—hard to do, since the temple was destroyed in Jeremiah’s day (see 2 Kings 25).

In his introduction, the author of *Baruch* asks his readers to put themselves in the sandals of their ancestors. We might hear him say to his contemporaries, “Remember! Remember when the Gentiles destroyed our city and defiled our temple. Remember the sin of our ancestors and the justice of God. Remember the mercy of God as He forgave His penitent people and eventually restored to them their city and its temple. Remember and repent, come to the Lord with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and He will again forgive and restore.” His instructions to read the book regularly (1:14) challenge his readers to humble themselves before the Lord in the hope that He would forgive them and once again lift them up (see also James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

2 Confession and Prayer (*Baruch 1:15–3:8*)

Baruch repeats 1:15 at 2:6 to signal the approaching close of his confession before moving into a prayer for deliverance. Somewhat similar to Daniel’s prayer several

centuries earlier (see Daniel 9), the author portrays Baruch interceding for God’s people. Baruch affirms that the blame for all that has happened falls squarely on the people—none of it is God’s fault. By their disobedience, they have earned the curse of God as laid out in the Mosaic code (see Deuteronomy 28:15–68).

Baruch explains the sufferings of God’s people as a just punishment from God against sin. The Word of God would challenge this overly simplistic explanation of human suffering, both in the Book of Job as well as in the New Testament. In John 9, for example, the disciples ask Jesus if a man who was born blind suffered because of his own sin or because of his parents’ sin. Jesus answered that the man’s sufferings were not due to any specific sin but so that the works of God could be displayed in him (through the healing that Jesus was about to accomplish; vv. 9:1–7). Similarly, Peter tells us that God uses sufferings to purify and strengthen faith (see 1 Peter 1:3–9). Ultimately, God punishes all sin by taking upon Himself the curse of the Law in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead (see Romans 3:21–31; Galatians 3:13–14). He does, however, discipline His people (Hebrews 12:3–11).

In *Baruch* 2:27–3:8, the author “turns the corner” from a recounting of the past to addressing the present and appeals to God based on His promises and His name. Echoing Moses (Deuteronomy 30:1–6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:16–28), the fictional Baruch lays claim to God’s promise of forgiveness and restoration. He asks the Lord to forget the past sins and save the people to demonstrate His power and faithfulness to the world (note especially *Baruch* 3:5). By saving and restoring His people, the name of God will be glorified (as Jesus Himself says in John 12:28–32; 13:31–32; 17:1–5). As the New Testament people of God, we realize that only in Christ Jesus do we know God and only in His cross do we find the forgiveness Baruch seeks.

3 A Poem of Wisdom (*Baruch 3:9–4:4*)

Baruch’s poem on wisdom resembles the biblical teaching on wisdom but reflects his own specific definition in the end. For example, Job 28 records Job’s quest for wisdom in the midst of his own suffering. He ultimately concludes (v. 28) “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.” The phrase “the fear of the Lord” in the Bible reflects a much broader picture than modern readers might suppose. It includes the sinner’s fear of punishment by a righteous

God as well as the respect and awe the creature has for its Creator. More important, when described as a foundation for wisdom, it denotes saving faith in the one true God and a willingness to follow His directives (see also Psalm 130:4; Acts 9:31; 10:34–35).

The fictional Baruch offers a very clearly focused definition of wisdom as the written Word of God. Given only to Israel (Baruch 3:36), wisdom becomes Torah—the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Books of Moses (Baruch 3:37–4:1a). Baruch would say that the path of wisdom is utter and complete devotion to keeping the Mosaic Law (4:1b).

The biblical view of wisdom would certainly include the Scriptures, but it sees the broader picture behind that. We might say that in the Bible, wisdom is relational—it flows from a personal relationship with the Lord through His Word. Paul certainly takes us in that direction, traveling to the cross to find true wisdom. Christ Jesus is Himself the power and wisdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 1:18–25).

4 Encouragement for Israel (*Baruch 4:5–5:9*)

Drawing on Isaiah 40–66 and other Scriptures, the author of Baruch reaches out to his contemporaries with a word of encouragement and hope. Just as the exile to Babylon had ended with a return of God's people to Jerusalem and a rebuilding of the temple in the past (sixth to fifth centuries BC), so the Lord would bring to an end the present calamities and would restore the temple and Jerusalem. God used the exile and sacrilege Antiochus IV Epiphanes committed in 167 BC and the subjection of His people to the Gentiles to call His people back to Him.

Baruch challenges the reader to trust God for deliverance, a very difficult thing to do in the midst of hardship. We tend to look at the circumstances and don't see beyond the troubles of the present. As a result, we do not see the larger picture, nor do we experience the comfort and peace of knowing God is working all things for good, for the salvation of people (see Romans 8:28). Matthew 16:21–23 offers an excellent example of this human tendency. Having confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, Peter then rejects Jesus' plan and goal—the cross. He does not understand the real problem of sin; nor does he appreciate the radical solution: God Incarnate, crucified for the sins of the world.

Can God's people trust Him to save them? Likely centuries before Christ would come, Baruch answers a re-

sounding "Yes!"—assuming they will repent and return to Him with a fresh commitment to keep His Law.

5 The Letter of Jeremiah

The purpose of this letter is to expose the utter folly of worshiping idols instead of the true God. God's people have always had to deal with the temptation to worship something or someone else other than the true God. In the past, these false gods took the form of idols made of wood or stone or precious metals. In present Western culture, false gods may take other forms: money, fame, power, social acceptance, even life itself. We can benefit from the point made by the author of this letter, even though the form and shape of the idols have changed.

In verses 2–7, the author warns of a long captivity—up to seven generations. The prophet Jeremiah had predicted the exile would last seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11–12; 29:10) and a remnant, perhaps as many as 50,000 people, did return near the end of the sixth century BC.

In verses 8–40a, the author paints a detailed picture of idols as helpless, inanimate objects that are unable to do the simplest tasks for themselves (compare Isaiah 44:9–20 as well as the apocryphal book *Bel and the Dragon*). Since idols cannot help themselves, how can they benefit their worshipers?

Modern readers should understand that pagans often distinguished between the god and the idol that represented him or her. A carved or crafted idol would be infused with a power or presence of the pagan god at a ceremony. The idol would then serve as a focal point for the worshipers. Two things, however, should be noted. First, people could and did come to see the idol as something of an extension of the pagan god or goddess. In a way, it could be considered alive (as in *Bel and the Dragon*). Second, it was sacred to the god or goddess it represented and, as such, would be assumed to have the protection of the god and something of its power. Biblical and extra-biblical denunciations of idols highlight the folly of this whole system.

Verses 40b–73 turn the reader's attention from the idol to the idol worshiper, describing a practice forbidden to God's people: cultic prostitution. Verse 43 presents the sad situation of a woman who is chosen for sexual intercourse with a stranger at the pagan temple and then gives the woman who was left alone a hard time for not being chosen. What sort of upside-down morality brags about prostitution and elevates it above chastity? One rooted in idolatry rather than family. Lord, have mercy.

Verse 73 of this letter emphasizes the main point of the whole work: a just man, idol-less, bears none of the reproach heaped upon idol worshipers.

6 Susanna

You find yourself between a rock and a hard place, through no fault of your own. If you tell the truth, you most certainly will face terrible consequences. If you give in, you will commit a terrible sin but perhaps save your life. What are you going to do?

This short dramatic story describes a woman in this very situation. Modern readers will appreciate this “first detective story” as Susanna rejects the easy way out and chooses to remain faithful to the Lord.

Joakim, an exiled Jew living in Babylon, and his very beautiful wife, Susanna, are met first: two faithful children of God who knew the Scriptures and lived by them. You remember the villains of the story, two elders (civic leaders), who find themselves drawn to Susanna and begin to lust for her. The author points out (v. 9) that they could have fought this temptation by turning to heaven (God) or remembering righteous judgments (the Commandments and the Law). But they give in to their lust and plot together how they might accost her.

But the celebrated character is Daniel. Susanna is silent, possibly because women were not allowed to testify in court. The circumstantial evidence and the testimony of the respected community leaders would carry the day—they would condemn Susanna to death (v. 41). But she breaks her silence with a desperate plea for help from God, who moves Daniel to intervene.

Heroically, Daniel exposes the lie of the two villains in verses 47–63. Separating and interviewing them individually (a technique still used today), he shows that the two stories do not match. It may be helpful to note that God receives the credit for the outcome (v. 55).

The Book of Susanna demonstrates the wisdom of trusting God and following His commands, even at the risk of losing life itself. Nothing, not even survival, is worth disobeying God and denying your faith (see Luke 9:23–26).

Conclusion

The failure of the elders to combat temptation (v. 9) should alert us to the value of turning to the Lord and immersing ourselves in His Word whenever we face temptation to sin. When we follow the path of God’s wisdom, we often face terrible risks, as did Susanna. When we follow Susanna’s example—choosing God’s way, even at the risk of our own lives—we will be okay, even if we would give up everything else in life. When we depart from the path of wisdom (as did Israel), the only solution is to repent and return in faith to the one true God. By the power and work of the Holy Spirit, we can learn from our folly and recommit to God’s Word and kingdom (see Matthew 6:25–33). These great lessons of faith carried Israel out of exile and back into their homeland, and also prepared them for more terrible and even greater things to come.

These works attributed to Baruch, Jeremiah, and Daniel bridge us from the days of Israel’s exile into those silent years between the Testaments, when prophets ceased to speak but Israel continued to work and pray and write. In our next session, we will meet another family in exile and explore the wisdom of the only writer in the Apocrypha whose real name we know.

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 2.

Gloriously Reveal the Works of God

Tobit; Ecclesiasticus 1:1–6:17

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

All good gifts come from God (James 1:17), though God's people also experience suffering in this sin-broken world.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. appreciate God's gifts and thank Him for them daily;
2. understand better the value of suffering for God's people; and
3. see the importance of wisdom and the third use of the Law as guides in daily life.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 57.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Father, grant us wisdom to know and do Your will. Help us to do this out of gratitude and love for You, not for selfish gain. By the gift of Your Spirit, enable us to deny ourselves daily and follow Your Son, our Savior and Lord, so that Your love for others shines brightly through us. Rescue us from every trial, strengthen us

against every temptation, and deliver us from all evil. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Introduction

Comic books offer readers a simple story with plenty of action and an eventual victory of good over evil. In their fictional world, they depend on a superhero to defeat the villain (usually a super-powerful enemy in his or her own right). In the struggle between good and evil, the comic book encourages its readers to imitate the hero and adopt similar positive virtues and ethics. For this week, you studied what might be called an early comic book, comical in some of its content and a comedy in which the Lord guides His people to a happy end.

1 Two Stories (Tobit 1:1–20)

In Tobit, two stories intertwine—that of Tobit, a middle-aged Israelite man living in Nineveh (near modern-day Mosul, Iraq), and that of Sarah, a young Israelite woman living with her parents in Ecbatana, Media (southeast of Nineveh, near modern-day Hamedan, Iran).

The author tells the story of these two pious and faithful Israelites as they face terrible challenges. Their piety, however, results in their rescue. The angel Raphael employs "superpowers" to free Sarah from the demon Asmodeus and cure Tobit of his blindness. Almsgiving (gifts to the righteous poor), tithing, prayer, proper care for aging parents, and burial of dead Israelites move God to bless Tobit and Sarah in accordance with the author's understanding of Deuteronomy 28–32. From the story, the reader understands that the road to similar blessings from the Lord is the path of piety and prayer modeled by Tobit and Sarah.

Historical and geographical details may indicate the author wanted his readers to understand the book was fictional. For example, Tobit says that he was a young man when Naphtali (and the other nine northern tribes) seceded from Jerusalem (Judah) in 1:4. He then adds that he was taken captive to Nineveh when the Assyrians conquered the northern ten tribes (Israel) and deported the population. Almost two hundred years passed be-

tween Israel's secession from Judah and Assyria's victory over Samaria, yet Tobit claims to have been a young man at the time of the secession and only middle-aged by the time of the deportation! So the work is obviously fictional.

The geography of Tobit offers a second hint that the book is fiction. Tobit's son, Tobias, travels southeast from Nineveh to Ecbatana to meet Sarah. Along the way, he stops by the banks of the Tigris River to wash his feet at the end of the first day and catches a fish (Tobit 6:2–4). This must have been a remarkable journey, since Nineveh sits on the east bank of the Tigris River. Thus, an eastern journey would never cross the Tigris, since the eastern bank of the Tigris served as the starting point of the journey. Such a glaring "error" would tell the reader that the book was not historical. The author makes his point with larger-than-life characters who live exemplary lives and are rewarded by rescue from God through a hero (Raphael) with "superpowers." If Israel imitated Tobit, they might receive a similar restoration.

Tobit lists the virtues his readers will want to adopt as their own:

- Unlike other northerners, he remained faithful to God by traveling to Jerusalem for sacrifices and festivals.
- He did not merely tithe (give 10 percent for the support of the priests); he triple-tithed, giving the third tithe to widows and orphans (compare James 1:27).
- He married within the extended family (see Genesis 26:34; 28:8, 9).
- He ate only kosher food, even in Gentile lands (as did Daniel in Daniel 1).
- He provided support for those in want (an act cited as a demonstration of faith in Matthew 25:31–46).
- He buried the Israelite dead (to remain unburied was a terrible thing, as reflected in Deuteronomy 21:23).

And yet, for all this, Tobit ends up broke and on the run from the law. Tobit teaches it is important for the believer to be willing to endure hardship in the short run for God's blessings in the long run. As we consider the story and teachings of Tobit, we will compare it with the stories and teachings in Scripture.

1 The Problems and Prayers of Tobit and Sarah (*Tobit* 1:21–3:17)

Like Job, Tobit loses all his wealth in the first stage of faith-testing (see Job 1:13–22). He loses his health and his social standing (see Job 2:7–8). Tobit's nephew supports him—until the nephew relocates. At that point, the family depends on Tobit's wife, Anna, for their support. Tobit unfairly accuses her of stealing a goat when she receives one as a bonus for her work. This prompts her to retort that all his charities and righteous deeds have achieved nothing for him (like Job's wife in Job 2:9).

Tobit's prayer (like the Book of Job) challenges the reader to answer the question "Why do the righteous suffer?" Like Job, Tobit does not accuse God of injustice, even though the reader might expect that. Rather, Tobit asks God to take him from this life and bring him to "the eternal abode" (3:6). Like others who find themselves tested to their extreme limits, Tobit longs for death and the peace that it brings (like Job in Job 3). Whereas Job pleaded his innocence of any wrongdoing, Tobit explains his suffering as the just punishment for his sins and the sins of his ancestors (Tobit 3:1–5). Job and Tobit may both ask the question "Why do the righteous suffer," but they answer it differently. For Tobit, human suffering is punishment from God for sin (Tobit 3:5). For Job, the answer is much more complex.

At this point, the author of Tobit introduces the second character of his book, Sarah. Her despair comes from seven unconsummated marriages and the reproach of her servants (as Tobit's wife had reproached him). Only her pious concern for her parents keeps her from committing suicide (Tobit 3:10) so, like Tobit and Job, she asks the Lord for the end of her life.

Intertestamental Judaism had a different view of women than does Holy Scripture (as we will see particularly in Ecclesiasticus). The modern reader may notice that Tobit's piety took two and a half chapters to describe, while Sarah's person and plight occupies only three verses. Like Abraham's wife, the Sarah of Tobit is childless, but for a different reason (the demon Asmodeus). Her piety consists of avoiding intimate contact with a man rather than a catalog of good deeds (Tobit 3:14), and her role in the story of Tobit is clearly minor compared to the men. In the final analysis, her faithfulness is defined by an exclusive relationship with Tobias and the promise of children from her union with him.

Tobit's author reveals a greater interest in angels and demons than Scripture, introducing the reader to Raphael (an angel of God's presence; 3:16) after mentioning the demon Asmodeus (3:8). Tobit's prayer, offered at the same time as Sarah's, results in God sending Raphael to heal Tobit and arrange the marriage of Tobias and Sarah.

2 Tobias's Journey (Tobit 4–9)

If Tobit's story reminds us of Job's, the story of Tobias's journey brings to mind the narrative of Jacob in Genesis 27–33. Both stories involve deception, travel, supernatural help, success, and unusual practices. Tobit uses the internal parts of the "miracle fish" to rescue both Sarah and Tobit from their predicaments.

A point of contrast between Tobit and canonical Scripture appears in the treatment of almsgiving (giving money to the poor and needy, a basic tenet of Jewish piety). Tobit's advice to Tobias seems a bit self-serving, as though the primary reason for helping others is to secure God's favor and assistance in time of need (Tobit 4:7–11). Tobit even restricts almsgiving to those who "live uprightly," or practice righteousness (4:7; see also 4:17).

Contrast with this the preaching of John the Baptist, who calls his followers to share with others without restriction (Luke 3:11). Or, consider the "Golden Rule" of Jesus (Matthew 7:12; see also Deuteronomy 15 and Ephesians 4:28). Acts of charity in canonical Scriptures serve to demonstrate saving faith (Matthew 25:31–46) and compassion (cf. Tabitha in Acts 9:36 and Cornelius in Acts 10:4). The primary difference between canonical Scripture and Tobit in their treatment of almsgiving is seen in the motivation behind charitable acts and the unrestricted scope of those to whom such gifts should be given. God's people give because they resemble their heavenly Father (Matthew 5:43–48), not as a hedge against future need (Tobit 4:9).

In Tobit 5, Raphael's deceptions present ethical problems for Christian readers but may have been understood as acceptable by the original audience in this fictional story. The author has made sure his readers know, by his historical and geographical notes, that this book is not a historical account of a real man and maiden. Like Abraham's encouragement to his servant who is sent to find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:7), Tobit assures Tobias of angelic assistance (5:17).

The burning of the fish's heart and liver are combined with ardent prayer to secure the defeat of the demon Asmodeus and the safety of Tobias (6:17–18). Readers may well recall the rebellion of Israel in Numbers 21:4–9 when God rescued His people from the fiery serpents with a bronze serpent. (The faith of those who looked to the bronze serpent is assumed in Numbers 21 and reflected in Jesus' use of it in John 3:14–15.) Following through on these instructions, Tobias and Sarah begin their marriage (Tobit 8:4–8).

3 The Homecoming (Tobit 10–14)

Like Jacob before him, Tobias returns with a wife and great wealth. He also returns with concern for his parents, knowing they were worried about him. The reader may ask, "If his father has faith (5:17–22), why does he struggle with doubt and worry (10:1–3)?" Like us, God's people throughout the ages often found themselves conflicted. Faith and unbelief inhabit the same heart, as was the case, for example, with the demon-possessed boy's father in Mark 9:24.

An old Latin phrase says it well: *Simul iustus et peccator*; we are "simultaneously justified and yet a sinner." The new man in Christ and the old Adam coexist in every child of God and create an internal conflict that continues throughout our entire life on earth. Tobit's struggle between trust and doubt may well have reflected the original audience's faith-struggle in the late third century BC or early second century BC. Gentiles still ruled them, poverty was still common, and no rescue seemed imminent. They may have struggled with the fact that God's timetable is often very different from ours, as Peter explained to his readers in 2 Peter 3. Tobit's story encourages them to stay the course and not falter from discouragement, for "the Lord will exalt His people" (14:7).

After testing, God restored Tobit to health, wealth, and social position. Tobit's restoration provided a model for his original readers, encouraging them to similar behavior in the hope of similar improvement.

Raphael reveals his true identity in 12:11–22. He explains that God sent him to help Tobit and Sarah because of Tobit's many good deeds. However, apart from Sarah's prayer, no note of Sarah's righteous acts appears, consistent with her relatively passive role in the narrative. Raphael's comments challenge the Christian reader to consider why God answers prayer.

Jesus teaches us to pray by addressing the almighty God as “Father” (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2), an intimate and warm family term. Luther “unpacks” this when he explains the introduction of the Lord’s Prayer in his Small Catechism: “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.” In Tobit, the angel Raphael presents his prayers to God; in the Gospels, believers come directly to God in the name of Jesus (see John 16:23–26).

The author’s hope for the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple comes to full expression in chapter 14 on the lips of Tobit. If God’s people will walk in the path of righteousness and generosity (like Tobit), they will experience a blessed and glorious future (like Tobit).

Psalms 73 offers something of a necessary corrective to Tobit’s formula for success. In that psalm, Asaph observes the wealth, respect, and easy life of evildoers. He admits that he wavered in his conviction to keep his focus exclusively on God (the “pure in heart” of v. 1, opposite of the “double-minded” in James 4:8). Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17), but it may please Him to distribute those gifts to those who disobey Him. Only at the final judgment do we see how the path of faith and righteousness is far superior to the way of unbelief and sinfulness, Asaph’s point in Psalm 73:17. On earth, God’s people may have to suffer and may struggle with doubt and unbelief. At the Last Day, however, God’s people receive the inheritance won for them by Jesus (Hebrews 9:15; 1 Peter 1:4).

4 The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach (*Ecclesiasticus* 1:1–6:17)

This Jesus from the Time between the Testaments presents a laundry list of topics. If you’ve read Proverbs, you’ve seen this before. His wisdom will round out our study today and occupy us for the next two sessions. Written in Hebrew between 200 and 175 BC, the Wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach (also known as *Ecclesiasticus*) offers advice on how to succeed in life. The Jewish people in Israel faced increasing pressure during these years to abandon the Jewish way of life in favor of the cosmopolitan culture passed down from Alexander the Great and his successors. Much like the Israelites who entered the Promised Land under Joshua twelve centuries earlier, the people of God needed to be warned against the paganism of the Gentiles living in the land.

Jewish people who had moved away from Israel needed the same message. The path of wisdom that leads to success comes exclusively from obeying God’s Word and adhering to the piety of their ancestors. Living in Egypt, the grandson of Jesus son of Sirach translated *Ecclesiasticus* into the common language of the day, Greek, so that all Jewish people could benefit from his grandfather’s wisdom (see the Prologue).

This is the only book in the Apocrypha that bears the real author’s name. Jesus son of Sirach offers his as a synthesis of Hebrew Scripture and his experiences from a lifetime of teaching and travel. Jesus son of Sirach’s admonition to resist Greek religion and culture may have sounded hard enough to do when he wrote this book. But it would prove much more difficult in the years following, when Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled (175–164 BC). The cost of the way of wisdom would get much higher.

Jesus son of Sirach begins by praising wisdom, and then he offers his first lesson to his students (2:1–6:17). Because the word *wisdom* is feminine in Hebrew, authors picture wisdom as a woman (Proverbs 8–9). Unlike Proverbs, Jesus son of Sirach understands wisdom as a created thing (*Ecclesiasticus* 1:9) rather than a personified attribute of God (as in Proverbs 8:22–31). As we know from the New Testament, Christ Jesus is the incarnate wisdom of God and the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:24). At the heart of wisdom for both Jesus son of Sirach and Holy Scripture is a right relationship with God, expressed as “the fear of the LORD,” which is saving faith and faithful obedience (*Ecclesiasticus* 1:14; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10).

In chapter 3, Jesus son of Sirach affirms the duty owed to parents, one of the obligations emphasized by Tobit. The concepts of “honor” and “dishonor” may seem strange to modern Western readers, but they continue to play an important role in Eastern cultures. Western people might use the word “shame” to mean “embarrassment” but that is not what Eastern cultures have in mind. “Honor” would include social status, respect, and adherence to cultural values. “Shame” denotes failure and ultimately leads to exclusion and death. Isaiah, for example, points out that idol-makers will all be “put to shame” because their gods are a lie, promising help but failing to deliver (Isaiah 44:9–11). Similarly, Paul is not “ashamed” of the Gospel (Romans 1:16) because it actually does what it promises—saves us from eternal damnation.

"Humility" also can be easily misunderstood. The word translated "meekness" in Ecclesiasticus (3:17, ESV; "humility" NRSV) appears as a fruit of the Spirit in the New Testament (Galatians 5:23, "gentleness" NIV) and is a characteristic of Jesus (Matthew 11:29) and His followers (Matthew 5:5). It conveys a picture of someone who acts considerately toward others, with kindness and patience included. Jesus son of Sirach counsels his students to live with gentle consideration toward others (3:17–20, much like Paul's advice in 2 Timothy 2:25). James points out that this gentle consideration for others is closely linked to true wisdom (James 3:13).

Readers familiar with the New Testament will find many such parallels in Ecclesiasticus because both draw heavily from the Hebrew Scriptures, although we will see several stark differences as well.

Conclusion

During the period when Tobit and Ecclesiasticus were written, God's people in Judea must have often wondered what path would lead them back to the "glory days" of David and Solomon. The exiles who returned from Babylon under Persian rule (end of sixth to fifth century BC) had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and restored its temple. But it compared poorly to Solomon's glorious original. Following Alexander's conquest of the area and his death at the end of the fourth century BC, they found themselves under the rule of the Ptolemies. Life was hard and getting harder. Using a fictional story, the author of Tobit affirms that they suffer because they (and their ancestors) have sinned but that the path back to prosperity lay in scrupulous obedience to the Mosaic Law and the piety of their ancestors. Jesus son of Sirach offers the same advice, compiling a series of lessons on wisdom that paint the same picture: success lies at the end of the road of obedience to the Law and adherence to traditional piety.

In the next session, we will hear more from Jesus son of Sirach and learn more about how this Jesus differs from the one crucified and risen for our salvation. For now it is enough to say that the wisdom of these great books from the Time between the Testaments tells us much about life but not nearly enough about the life everlasting that the Lord promised throughout the Old Testament. One more faithful than Tobit was yet to come, whose suffering had the power to save. A wiser man than the son of Sirach was coming, whose words and works would stun the world and change our lives forever.

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 3.