

MONDAY
17 JANUARY
 1 Samuel 15:16-23
 Psalm 50:8-10. 16-17. 24
 Mark 2:18-22

TUESDAY
18 JANUARY
 1 Samuel 16:1-13
 Psalm 89:19-27
 Mark 2:23-end

WEDNESDAY
19 JANUARY
 1 Samuel 17:32-33. 37. 40-51
 Psalm 144:1-2. 9-10
 Mark 3:1-6

THURSDAY
20 JANUARY
 1 Samuel 18:6-9; 19:1-7
 Psalm 56:1-2. 8-end
 Mark 3:7-12

FRIDAY
21 JANUARY
 1 Samuel 24:3-22a
 Psalm 57:1-2. 8-end
 Mark 3:13-19

SATURDAY
22 JANUARY
 2 Samuel 1:1-4. 11-12. 17-19. 23-end
 Psalm 80:1-6
 Mark 3:20-21

REFLECTION

The week's readings from the Psalms start with God addressing those who think it sufficient to observe ceremonial law. Why, God asks, would I need sacrifices when "every wild animal of the forest is mine"? Paying lip service in this way is disrespectful, and those who are wicked have no right to call on God's covenant.

In Thursday's reading the psalmist appeals to God and claims to trust God. For all that, though, the lasting impression is of someone in a state of raw desperation: "people trample on me... foes oppress me; my enemies trample on me... many fight against me". It's as though he is trying to convince himself that "God is for me". He continues: "in God I trust... What can a mere mortal do to me? My vows to you I must perform, O God; I will render thank offerings to you."

There are times in every life when we simply have to go through the motions. But clinging to faith in this way is not to be confused with paying lip service.

The week rounds off with a heartfelt cry to God. If we cling on in times of trouble we can be certain that God will "Restore us," and "let your face shine."

PRAYER

Lord God, be gracious to us and bless us and make your face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. We ask this in Jesus' name.



THE APOCRYPHA

PART IV – A HEROINE AND AN ANGEL

Have you ever wondered about the lives of the individuals hidden behind the events narrated in the Old Testament story? If so, you are in good company. Some of the writers whose work is in the Apocrypha wrote stories that almost have the flavour of a Sunday-night television costume drama, but with added theology.

The book of Tobit tells a tale set in the time of the Assyrian invasion of Israel. It involves a righteous man blinded by sparrow droppings, a young woman pursued by a demon who kills her husbands, some money left on deposit, an angel in disguise, a magic fish and, rather charmingly, a dog. If you have read Salley Vickers' novel *Miss Garnet's Angel* you will be familiar with the story, and it is worth reading. Suffice to say it all eventually ends well.

The context for the book of Judith is also the Assyrian invasion. It tells the story of a young widow who seduces the commander of the Assyrian army and, while he is drunk, cuts his head off with his own sword, securing not only the safety of her people but also considerable wealth and prestige for herself. There is a pretty spine-tingling scene where Judith stands before the elders of her town and pulls the commander's severed head out of her bag.

Both these books bear the marks of fiction, but they are no less valuable for that. They encourage us to look for the human interest behind the big events described in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament itself, we are seldom given much information about what people think and feel, and these stories fill the gap. They give us examples of how we may use our imaginations and have some fun with the text of the Bible. Above all, they tell us that because human beings love stories, they are a very effective means of conveying theological truth, something Jesus knew well when he used parables to talk about the kingdom of God.



Tobit and Anna with the Kid, by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1626, Rijksmuseum

LIVE
 the WORD

SUSTAINING YOU
 THROUGH THE WEEK

Edited by
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 and
 Heather Smith

Second week
 of Epiphany

Monday 17 January
 Saturday 22 January
 2022

WEEK