

CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES: NUMBER EIGHTY-FOUR

Bernard of Clairvaux

VARIOUS SERMONS

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Bernard of Clairvaux
Various Sermons

Translated by
Grace Remington, OCSO

Introduction by
Alice Chapman



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Scripture texts in this work are translated by the translator of the sermons.

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Abbreviations

CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CDH	Anselm, <i>Cur Deus Homo?</i>
CF	Cistercian Fathers series (Cistercian Publications)
Coll	<i>Collectanea Cisterciensis</i>
CS	Cistercian Studies series (Cistercian Publications)
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
RB	Rule of St. Benedict
PL	Patrologia Latina
SBOp	Sancti Bernardi Opera
SCh	Sources Chr�tiennes
VSV	The Life of St. Victor

BERNARD'S WORKS

Ann	Sermo in annuntiatione domini
BenV	Sermo in natali Sancti Benedicti (=VLH)
Csi	<i>De Consideratione</i>
Dil	<i>Liber de diligendo Deo</i>
Div	Sermo de diversis
Ep(p)	Epistle(s)
Gra	<i>Liber de gratia et libero arbitrio</i>
MalE	<i>Epitaphium sancti Malachiae</i>
MalH	Hymnus de sancto Malachiae
MalS	Sermo de sancto Malachiae
MalT	Sermo in transitu sancti Malachiae episcopi (=VLH)
MalV	<i>Vita sancti Malachiae</i>
OS	Sermo in festivitate Omnium Sanctorum
Pasc	Sermo in die paschae
Pre	<i>Liber de praecepto et dispensatione</i>
SC	Sermo super Cantica canticorum

SSV	Sermo de sancto Victori
VLH	Verba lectionis huius (=S Ben V)

Introduction to Bernard of Clairvaux's Various Sermons (*Sermones varii*)

Alice Chapman

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX (d. 1153) was a pivotal figure in the history of the Cistercian Order, and his sermons are some of the most influential and significant of the Middle Ages.¹ His sermon collections exemplify an eloquence and proficiency unmatched in Western Christendom.² Through his command of language and imagery, Bernard called his monks to engage in continual and daily conversion in the ongoing monastic quest toward conversion of life (*conversatio morum*).³ But his preaching reached beyond the cloister into

¹ As an entry point into Bernard of Clairvaux's life and significance, see Brian Patrick McGuire, ed., *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, vol. 25 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011). Also see Martha G. Newman, *The Boundaries of Charity: Cistercian Culture and Ecclesiastical Reform, 1098–1180* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); and Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992).

² Wim Verbaal, "The Preaching of Community: Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons and the School of Experience," *Medieval Sermon Studies* 48 (2004): 75–90. Also see Verbaal's Introduction to Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons for the Autumn Season*, trans. Irene Edmonds, CF 54 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2016), ix–lxvi, and his Introduction to Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons for Lent and the Easter Season*, trans. Irene Edmonds, et al., CF 52 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007), vii–lix. See also Jean Leclercq, "Sur le caractère littéraire des sermons de saint Bernard," *Studi medievali* 7 (1966): 701–44; Mette Birkedal Bruun, *Parables: Bernard of Clairvaux's Mapping of Spiritual Topography* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 2007).

³ RB 58.17: *Suscipiendus autem in oratorio coram omnibus promittat de stabilitate sua et conversatione morum suorum et oboedientia*. "Let the one being received promise before all in the oratory stability, conversion of life, and obedience."

the church. His “On Conversion: a Sermon to Clerics” and “Sermon on Saint Malachy” can be read with his treatise *On Consideration: Advice to a Pope* as painting a vivid picture of excellent ecclesiastical leadership, rooted in humility and focused on ministry following the example of Christ. Among his most famous and possibly most beautiful sermons, the Sermons on the Song of Songs lift the eyes of the reader to spiritual heights in contemplation of God, allowing the soul to glimpse the ultimate unity of the soul with God. Bernard’s over five hundred letters reveal his connection with and involvement in the most important ecclesiastical, spiritual, and political issues of his day.⁴ Of the 8 volumes of *Sancti Bernardi Opera* (SBOp), the Latin edition of his works published by Jean Leclercq, H. M. Rochais, and C. H. Talbot between 1957 and 1977, sermons fill 5, adding up to a staggering 729 sermons.⁵

There are ten sermons in the current collection. Leclercq gathered nine of them and placed them together in SBOp volume 6/1, titling them *Sermones varii*, or *Various Sermons*.⁶ This collection should not be confused with the *Sermons on Diverse Topics*, the *De diversis*, which are primarily monastic sermons and reflect Bernard’s preaching style.⁷

⁴ Much of Bernard’s involvement in the debates and issues of his day can be found among his letters. For the most recent dating and discussion of Bernard’s collected letters, see the *Opere di San Bernardo*, ed. Ferruccio Gastaldelli (Milan: Scriptorium Claravallense, Fondazione di Studi Cisterciensi, 1984, 1986), 6:1–2. For the English version, which includes Gastaldelli’s updates, see the 1998 reprint version of *The Letters of St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. Bruno Scott James (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 531–37, 538–52.

⁵ This number has been calculated by Michael Casey; see his introduction to Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Monastic Sermons*, CF 86 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2016), xiv, n. 4.

⁶ *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq and Henri-Marie Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1970), 6/1:9–55.

⁷ For a good assessment of the oral style of the *De diversis* sermons, see Jean Leclercq’s Introduction, *Sermoni diversi e vari*, *Opere di San Bernardo* 4 (Milan: Scriptorium claravallense, Fondazione di studi Cisterciensi, 2000), 3–25. It is also available in English, “Introduction to Saint Bernard’s *Sermones varii*,” trans. Elias Dietz, CSQ 43, no. 2 (2008): 147–60. For a comparison of Bernard’s literary style and preaching style, see Jean Leclercq, “Were the Sermons on the Song of Songs Delivered in Chapter?,” Introduction, *Sermons on the Song of Songs II*, trans. Kilian Walsh, CF 7 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1983), vii–xxx, esp. xiii–xxiv. See also Chris-

Leclercq placed the nine *De varii* sermons under eight headings, with the two sermons on the Feast of Saint Victor together under one entry. As the name of the collection suggests, no thematic or cohesive idea unites the sermons. In addition to the nine sermons in the Latin edition, Gaetano Raciti has discovered one other sermon, included here under the title “For the Feast of Saint Benedict.”⁸ Leclercq arranged these sermons roughly chronologically, according to the liturgical year. Although the sermon “For the Feast of Saint Benedict” would thus fit liturgically after the two sermons for the feast of Saint Victor, in this volume it comes at the end of the collection.

One of Bernard’s greatest achievements is the sermon collection for the liturgical year (*Sermones per annum*) in SBOp volumes 4–5 (SBOp 4:117–496, 5:1–451). Over a period of years, Bernard collected, revised, and edited this series of sermons.⁹ As a result, they demonstrate literary excellence. Leclercq identified four successive versions of this collection, which he viewed as developing toward a “perfect” final version.¹⁰ These four stages are often referred to by a letter, signifying where they fall in their chronological development: B (*brevis*), between 1138–1140; M (*media*), ca. 1140; L (*longior*), after 1148, and Pf (*perfecta*), complete before 1153. Wim Verbaal’s groundbreaking work has revolutionized our understanding of Bernard’s liturgical sermons. Verbaal has shown that the four stages of development are not a chronological succession aiming at a perfect version. Rather, each part has its own emphasis and character. For example, the sermons in B have a moral quality and focus on the “liberation of the human soul” while M and Pf focus on the liturgical year. The largest collection, L, seems to be

topher Holdsworth, “Were the Sermons of St. Bernard on the Song of Songs ever Preached?” *Medieval Monastic Preaching* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 295–318.

⁸ See the introduction and text for this sermon in Bernard de Clairvaux, *Sermons variés*, ed. Françoise Callerot, Pierre-Yves Emery, and Gaetano Raciti, *Œuvres complètes* XXVIII B, Sch 526 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2010), 161–72.

⁹ See Verbaal’s Introduction, CF 54:ix–xiii. For Bernard as a writer, see M. B. Pranger, “Bernard the Writer,” in *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. Brian Patrick McGuire (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 220–48.

¹⁰ See SBOp 4:ix–xvii, 130–31; pages 130–31 contain a helpful chart of the sermons included in each redaction of the collection. For a more complete assessment of the collection, see Jean Leclercq, “La tradition des sermons liturgiques de S. Bernard,” in *Recueil d’études sur saint Bernard et ses écrits* (Rome: Storia et Letteratura, 1966), 2:203–60.

an independent, parallel collection with two distinct halves. Verbaal's insights have revealed a deeper complexity and intentionality about the way Bernard organized his sermons; in so doing he has provided a glimpse into Bernard himself.¹¹

Because some of the texts in the *Various Sermons* resemble the liturgical sermons, many scholars view them as an extension or appendix to the sermons for the liturgical year.¹² But Leclercq grouped and titled them separately, because Bernard had not selected them for inclusion among the liturgical collection (SBOp 6/1:3–6).

AUTHENTICITY

In addition to the carefully edited liturgical series, Bernard also wrote a variety of other sermons. Some were short sermon outlines, like those in the *Sentences*, and still others reflect his monastic preaching, like the *Sermons on Diverse Topics*.¹³ At times, Bernard simply dictated a sermon outline, and at other times he may have worked with a secretary. Leclercq observes, “some of the texts that are clearly Saint Bernard's are not his in the same way, depending on whether they were drawn up by Bernard alone, or by Bernard and a secretary, or only by a secretary.”¹⁴ As a result, it is impossible to determine the Bernardine authenticity of a text on the basis of its phrasing or style, both of which varied according to context and genre.¹⁵ The work of

¹¹ Wim Verbaal, Introduction, CF 54:ix. Also see Wim Verbaal, Introduction to Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons for Advent and the Christmas Season*, trans. Irene Edmonds, et al., CF 51 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007), vii–lix; and Wim Verbaal, Introduction, CF 52:vii–lxiii.

¹² Raciti made this observation twice in *Sermons variés*: SCh 526:22, 161.

¹³ See Casey, Introduction, CF 8:xv.

¹⁴ Leclercq, “Introduction to *Sermones varii*,” 147.

¹⁵ Jeroen De Gussem encourages readers and scholars to think differently about medieval authorship. Challenging the assumptions of both Leclercq and Rochais, De Gussem focuses on “computational stylistics” to distinguish authorship in evaluating the work of Bernard of Clairvaux and his most famous secretary, Nicholas of Montieramey. De Gussem argues for “turns of phrase that reveal [Nicholas's] presence.” The comparison of clusters of phrases specific to each author, he says, does not establish a “hierarchical ‘author-scribe’ relationship,” but rather challenges one to realize

SERMON TWO: FOR EPIPHANY

Context

The arrival of the magi on Epiphany, traditionally celebrated on January 6, marks the first recognition of Jesus' divinity. The very meaning of the word, "appearance from above," conveys its importance in the Christian year. Because it was a significant feast, Cistercians celebrated it for eight days, an octave. Therefore Bernard composed sermons not only for the Feast of Epiphany itself but also for the octave and the Sunday that followed.³⁶ Since this Epiphany sermon was not among those that Bernard collected and edited for the liturgical year, Mabillon did not include it in his seventeenth-century collection. It thus remained unpublished until it was included among the *Sermones varii* in the 1970 SBOP edition (SBOP 6/1:10–55).

Although this Epiphany sermon was not included in Bernard's series of liturgical sermons, its authenticity is not in question, since both the manuscript tradition and the consistency of the content have been established (SBOP 6/1:3–4). This sermon was part of a manuscript transmission associated with the Cistercian house of Morimond; Leclercq says, "it is there that the oldest texts are found."³⁷ In a sense, this sermon departs from the more careful style of Bernard's more literary sermons, and the language is at certain points imprecise. Its ideas appear in a rather disjointed way, in what Raciti has called "leaps of thought," evident throughout the text.³⁸ Both the content and the ideas contained in the sermon also reflect its authenticity, and some of the prominent themes are consistent with other works of Bernard.

³⁶ In his *Sermons for the Liturgical Year*, Bernard included three sermons for Epiphany, one on the octave, and two for the Sunday after the octave of Epiphany. See SBOP 4:291–326, and the English version, under the title, *Sermons for Advent and the Christmas Season*, trans. Irene Edmonds, et al., CF 51 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007), 154–93.

³⁷ Leclercq, "Introduction to Saint Bernard's *Sermones varii*," 151. In SBOP 6/1:3–4, Leclercq lists the manuscripts and explains the manuscript transmission of the sermon, demonstrating the association of the texts with the "zone de Morimond" or the "area of Morimond." This analysis establishes the external evidence for the authenticity of the sermon.

³⁸ Raciti, *Sermones variés*, SCh 526:81. Raciti also acknowledges some clumsiness in the writing.

Content

The sermon opens with a brief overview outlining the three reasons for the feast: it marks the arrival of the magi, celebrates the baptism of Jesus, and commemorates the changing of the water into wine at John the Evangelist's wedding at Cana. After this brief introduction, it makes a dramatic turn toward an assessment of the "moral teaching" of the feast's mysteries.³⁹ Three things, Bernard says, are necessary for the soul to return "home" (*ad patriam*): "the will, the ability, and the knowledge" (*velle, posse, nosse*).⁴⁰ Reason (*ratio*), guided by grace, makes judgments to which the will gives assent, and then the body carries out the action in loyal service. But the devil interrupts proper order, confusing reason with deceit, perverting the desire of the will, and causing the flesh to be occupied with carousing. The result is a fundamental disorder, elevating the will over reason, which is now a captive, leaving the flesh to obey an errant will.

In addition to sowing discord, the devil aims to trap humanity in a morass of sin, resulting in "being unable to avoid sin."⁴¹ Bernard had earlier similarly addressed sin and the human will in *On Grace and Free Will* (Gra),⁴² which provides the conceptual backdrop here, explaining

³⁹ For medieval writers, the biblical text had different levels of meaning, the literal, allegorical, moral (or tropological), and spiritual (or anagogical). The literal meaning takes the text at face value, focusing on its obvious meaning, while the allegorical sought to probe a deeper meaning. For Bernard, this pattern often meant reading the text as in light of the allegorical relationship between Christ and the Church. The moral or tropological reading understood the text as conveying a lesson or some kind of moral instruction, while the spiritual meaning sought to plumb the depths of meaning in relation of the soul to God. This was the highest meaning, reserved for the spiritually advanced. See Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, vol. 2 of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 40–41.

⁴⁰ For the concept of the soul's return to its homeland (*patria*), see Bernard, *On Grace and Free Will* (SBOP 3:171), *Apology* (SBOP 3:183), and *Sentences* (SBOP 6/2:252).

⁴¹ Cf. Augustine's *De correptione et gratia* 12.3 (PL 44:936); it is among Augustine's Anti-Pelagian writings. The English is *On Rebuke and Grace*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series I*, 5:485.

⁴² Freedom of choice (*liberum arbitrium*) is Bernard's focus in *On Grace and Free Choice*. This aspect of freedom was not lost in the Fall and will not be lost in heaven.

that Adam's decision to disobey God led to humanity's enslavement to sin. The result was the loss of two conditions: the inability to sin (*non posse peccare*) and the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*), both of which were replaced by the inability to avoid sin, or not being able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*).⁴³ The only way to escape the bondage of sin, Bernard explains, is through the action of grace, which restores men and women (but only partially) to Adam's original condition, the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*). Alone, humanity could not make satisfaction for the debt of sin. Making satisfaction was only possible if a "worthy payment" could be made, and only one person could pay the penalty for sin. Christ therefore had to make "proper satisfaction" for the debt incurred by humanity.⁴⁴

This argument lies behind Bernard's discussion of sin in the Epiphany sermon. In paragraph three, Bernard explains its implications for his monks. The devil, he says, emphasizes only the painful aspects of

It is essential to the human condition. However, because of the Fall, human choice, although free, is exercised in a world ruled by sin. In that sense, it is free but exists in a condition of bondage. For the role of grace, see Gra 16; cf. Gra 4:10.

⁴³ Bernard explains that human beings have lost two of the three freedoms they possessed before the Fall. Freedom from sin, also called freedom of counsel (*liberum consilium*), has two parts, a superior and an inferior. The superior is the inability to sin (*non posse peccare*), and the inferior is the ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*). Although both parts are lost, action of grace can restore the inferior portion and is also progressive, increasing gradually over time. However, the superior part can only be restored in the celestial realm after death. Freedom from sorrow, which he refers to as freedom of pleasure (*liberum complacitum*), is also lost and can be regained only upon return to our homeland (*patria*), but by following the example of Mary and through contemplation, one can see a glimmer of happiness in this life, though rare and fleeting (SBOP 3:177). Freedom from necessity, that is, free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), continues to retain its innate freedom, since it is essential to humanity. The major difference since the Fall is that although freedom from necessity is mired in sin, this reality does not itself force or compel the will. Free choice remains free; its liberty is never lost (SBOP 3:169, 170, 177). Bernard maintains a radical freedom of the Will (*volutas*), which he defines as a "self-determining habit of the soul" (SBOP 3:167).

⁴⁴ The similarities of Bernard's position to Anselm's argument in *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why God Became Man*) appear both here and again in Sermon Eight, "On the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit." I show the similarities to Anselm text together with some detailed analysis below in the introduction to that sermon. In particular, I consider the idea that humanity cannot pay the debt incurred at Fall and the terminology and idea of making "satisfaction" for the debt.

the rule (*ordinis tormenta*), stoking the fear of “future torments.” The deception that follows is the human perception that the world is sweet and monastic life is bitter. The only remedy for this confusion, Bernard explains, is the action of grace, as the “Lord knocks at the door of the heart” in order to restore order, and reason cooperates and reemerges as the guide, commanding the body to open the door. When one thus opens the door to grace, “will screams in protest,” as the flesh now acts contrary to the will, in cooperation with reason.

The Son of God brings peace to this internal conflict, reconciling humanity to God as Mediator and Redeemer. Bernard then re-visions the gifts of the magi as offerings that each person—that is, each monk—should give to the Son, with reason bringing “the gold of devotion,” the will “the incense of prayer,” and the flesh “the myrrh of mortification.” Each gift is proper to a different aspect of the Son; in order to conform to the “image of his humanity,” in thanksgiving for his human suffering, one must present him with the gift of myrrh, which is the mortification of the flesh. In order to be “reformed” in the image of his divinity, one should offer the incense of prayer, following his example in this life so that through grace we might conform to his image in both body and spirit. Finally, in regard to his kingship, one ought to present the gold of devotion and acceptance of his leadership.

Once the gifts are presented, then one begins to know God and turns away from the world. The monk who has spent obedience to buy wisdom can now draw near to God and be enlightened according to Psalm 33:6. Having set aside the habits of the “old person,” one can now walk in the light of the new according to the spirit. What comes is an inner peace, for where God is, there is joy, serenity, and happiness.

SERMON THREE: FOR THE CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL

Context

As the topic of this sermon is the most famous story of Christian conversion, it is no surprise that Bernard wrote two sermons for the

SERMON THREE

For the Conversion of Saint Paul

1. **T**oday Paul was converted, or, rather, Saul was converted, having turned into Paul. He became like that little child¹ in the gospel of whom the Lord said, *Unless you are converted and become like this little child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.**

*Matt 18:3

Perhaps the little child the Lord was speaking of was himself. True, he is *the Lord, great and highly to be praised,** but he is also the *little child who has been given to us.**

*Ps 47:2

*Isa 9:6

He appears to us now not as great, but little, in order to make himself lovable* and to be a powerful example of the littleness we need to acquire. Your conversion is to a little child so you might learn to be little. When you have been converted, may you become a little child too. Hear how clearly the Lord himself manifests this little child, designated as the model of conversion, pointing out those things that are little in himself as the very things that we should imitate. *Learn from me,* he says, *for I am meek and humble of heart.** Here is a double littleness: humility and meekness. The first is an

**gratum*

*Matt 11:29

¹ *parvulus*, which can be used both as a noun meaning “a little child” or as an adjective describing anything that is “very little.” Throughout the sermon Bernard plays on this ambiguity, which is impossible to capture in the English. It is translated here in both ways. The name *Paulus* also means small, and its affinity to the word *parvulus* is part of the word-play as well.

interior littleness, the second an exterior one. Neither one is a little virtue, though, for the one who offers this singular teaching, although he is little, is equally great.

Today Paul was converted. Today he ceased to be Saul. Today he became humble and meek of heart. The confession of his mouth proves the humbling of his heart when he cries out, *Lord, what do you want me to do?** But even more, the very magnitude of the grace he received is proof of it, since grace is only given in exceptional measure to the exceptionally humble.

*Acts 9:6

2. Because meekness is, as I have said, an exterior kind of littleness and is therefore more visible [than humility], Paul's conversion proposes meekness to us in three ways, just as there are three battering rams that strike our meekness from without: hurtful words, the loss of things, and bodily injuries. These are the three circumstances where we must exhibit patience* and exercise meekness. Proven virtue* is virtue that none of them seems able to break.

*2 Cor 6:4

*Wis 1:3

Consider how at the very moment of his conversion Paul was tested by all three and was found to be truly *Paul*, truly meek and patient in his situation. *Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Kicking against the goad is hard on you.** This is a hard word, a reproachful word, a menacing word. With regard to his body, he was struck and thrown to the ground. Was he also tested by loss? Absolutely! The very light of his eyes was taken from him, and, as Scripture says, *when his eyes were opened he could see nothing.**

*Acts 26:14

*Acts 9:8

These are the three things that also tested and exercised Job's patience, that man whom God gave us as a renowned example of this virtue. But we leave it to you to pursue this line of thought further. It is enough to counsel you that meekness, to a large extent, is what determines the shape our conversion takes. I say this to the shame of those who are supposed to be already converted but reveal themselves to be inwardly resentful

and rebellious² when faced with bodily injuries, the loss of things, or—what is even more inexcusable—hurtful words.

² *perversos penitus et aversos* instead of *conversos*.

Scriptural Index

Scriptural references are identified by sermon and paragraph number or by VSV (the Life of Saint Victor) and paragraph number.

Genesis (Gen)	
1:16	9.8
2:17	8.1
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3:9	1.2
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4:7	1.6
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14:15	8.5
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32:33	1.3

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2 Kings (2 Kgs)

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Tobit (Tob)

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5:23	2.6
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7.5	VSV.1
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