



Part 15: Hidden Wisdom

Word ALIVE



Background Notes

PURPOSE: To present Ben Sirach and Wisdom, Jewish wisdom which incorporated what it learned from Greek wisdom in Alexandria.

AUTHOR: Ben Sirach wrote the book that bears his name. Though Solomon is attributed to Wisdom, since the original is Greek, it is most likely by a Greek-speaking Jewish scribe using a pseudonym who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, ironically the same nation which oppressed his forefathers.

DATE: Sirach lived in the 3rd or 2nd Century BC. The Book of Wisdom is the last Old Testament book written (1st Century BC).

STYLE: Both books incorporate Jewish wisdom writing with the Greek philosophy and poetry found in the Hellenism they were exposed to. Sirach is basically a collection of this teacher's notes.



Opening Quotes

“He who honors his father atones for sins; he stores up riches who reveres his mother.” Sir 3:2

“Before man are life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him.” Sir 15:17

“From the mouth of the Most High I came forth... in the beginning, he created me.” Sir 24:3-9

“Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven.” Sir 28:2

“The prayer of the lowly reaches the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal, nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds, judges justly and affirms the right.” Sir 35:17

“God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. For he fashioned all things that the might have being... God formed man to be imperishable.” Wis 1:13

“For though in the sight of others the righteous were punished, their hope is full of immortality. Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good, because God tested them and found them worthy of himself... At the time of their visitation they will shine forth.” Wis 3:1-7

“For if the just one be the son of God, he will defend him... Let us condemn him to a shameful death; for according to his own words, God will take care of him..” Wis 2:18

“There is no god besides you who have the care of all, that you need show you have not unjustly condemned.” – Wis 12:13

the BIG PICTURE		☞ : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		☞ : key covenants in our Father's plan	
12 Periods	Plot	Other books related to period		stories in each period	
BC	🌐 THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah's ark, Tower of Babel	
1850	👤 THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek	
1250	🏔️ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus	
1200	♣️ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua	
1100	👤 THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel	
1030	👑 KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple	
1000	🏰 THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile	
721 587	🌀 BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, "major" prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)	
538	⚙️ THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs	Cyrus, 2 nd temple, 2 nd Law, "minor" prophets, new writings	
163 63	🕯️ THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)	
AD	✝️ JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection	
33 70	🕯️ APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ	



The Story of Part 15: Hidden Wisdom



The Restoration is over. Israel is a united nation again, soon to become the Hasmonean Dynasty. But even then, Israel would still be dominated by another. But unlike the cruel Assyrian and Babylonian empires, and unlike the more merciful Persian empire, Israel was about to be attacked, not so much militarily, as culturally, by the Greek Empire. When the Jews were settled in Judah (now called Palestine), there had also been Jews in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, also pondering in their writings their tumultuous history. But now there were Hellenistic influences on Jewish thought. A variety of religions and philosophical systems were offering their own wisdom, their own path to salvation, and their own view on the real meaning of life. Though graced with the brilliant monotheistic insights of Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato, the Greek pagans began to worship the body, which often degenerated into hedonism, and worshipped the mind, which degenerated into skepticism.

The Book of Sirach, the largest wisdom writing in the Bible, set out to demonstrate that the Jewish way of life was superior to Greek culture, and that true wisdom emanated not from Athens, but from Jerusalem. At the same time, its author, Ben Sira, did not hesitate to incorporate into his lessons whatever he learned from Greek wisdom that was compatible with his Jewish heritage and tradition.

There is no real structure to this large book, which is basically a collection of teacher's notes. He begins with the comparison of God's love for his people as the love between a child and his parents. The duty towards parents was not only one of the Ten Commandments, but even a condition for having one's sins atoned.

He then moves to the humility required for wisdom, advising the reader not to burden his mind with things beyond his grasp. The more humble you are, he insists, the greater you are, and the more you will find favor with God.

He then gives us the strongest scriptural passage on free will, revealing that God never commands any man to sin.

Then, as in Proverbs, wisdom is described as a woman, and now she speaks for herself. "From the mouth of the Most High I came forth," she says, "Before all ages, in the beginning, he created me." We once again recognize the parallel between wisdom personified and Christ. Ben Sira lays out a lesson we have already read from third Isaiah, a lesson that the Lord himself would teach his apostles when they asked him how to pray: "Forgive you neighbor's injustice; then, when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven." This was not a teaching Jesus invented, but a scriptural teaching he would reinforce himself.

Ending again with a note on humility, Ben Sira teaches that the prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds

and will not rest until it reaches its goal. This image reminds us of an image given by Isaiah in reverse, where the Word of God will come down and return to God only after it reaches its goal! In fact, in just one more century, the "Word" would come to mean not just Scripture, but wisdom personified, and it would mean a man. But we're getting ahead of ourselves!

The book of Wisdom was the last written book of the Old Testament. The author is a free man writing in the very same place where his fathers were persecuted long ago before the Exodus. Like Ben Sira, he addresses the different philosophical systems in vogue in Alexandria, and revisits the age old problem addressed by Job and Ecclesiastes – the problem of retribution. Why the uneven distribution of suffering which does not always seem to correlate to a person's goodness? Where is God's justice?

In answer to this question, Wisdom adopts the concept introduced by Isaiah (26:19), Daniel (12:2) and 2 Maccabees (7) – the belief in life after death. Remember, in the traditional view, death gave way to the shadowy existence apart from God called Sheol. But this Jewish author is influenced now by the Greek concept of a separate body and soul. The difference is that he acknowledges immortality not just as a characteristic of the soul, but as a gift from God, like wisdom itself. And while it may seem like we search for wisdom, in reality it is Wisdom which seeks us out first, anticipating our own desires.

The Book of Wisdom does not yet envision a bodily resurrection, but in adopting the platonic separation of body and soul, it succinctly answers the problem of retribution by pointing beyond this life. The righteous will ultimately rest in the hand of God, while the wicked will suffer in Sheol, now a place of torment. The bliss of heaven and horror of hell were only beginning to be revealed.

Wisdom then declares that before the eyes of God the whole universe is like a drop of morning dew, a creation which he sustains. How could the universe exist without God? The Greek (and modern) skeptic evades this question with the popular concept of an infinite series of causes and effects to explain the universe. But even such an infinite series would violate logic if it ignored an *outside* cause. The mere duration of a thing does not explain its existence! Since each link in an infinite chain is still dependent, the chain itself is dependent. An eternal series of dependent and caused things can be explained only by One who is independent and uncaused, who exists with a complete self-sufficiency not found in finite things. It is this uncaused Cause, the Creator himself, whom Wisdom praises: "There is no god besides you who have the care of all, that you need show you have not unjustly condemned."



Defending the Faith: 66 vs. 73 Books in the Bible

“Catholics have added seven books to the Bible. Go to any bookstore and you will see that this is true. And the Bible prohibits the adding or subtracting from God’s Word.”

This is easily the most popular misconception about the Bible, and it has serious doctrinal implications. It is taken for granted that the Table of Contents is not part of the Bible itself. The reason we know that there are 73 and not 66 books in the Bible is because the same Church which canonized the New Testament also canonized the Old, and at around the same time. This is not a biased opinion, but a historical fact. Even John Wycliff, who first rejected the authority of the Church and taught the authority of Scripture alone, knew to include the seven books in his translation.

The reason most bibles in the bookstores have only 66 books is because of the following history. In 1519, two years after Luther posted his 95 Theses in Wittenburg, he debated Johannes Eck over prayers for the dead, claiming that this was not scriptural. When Eck pointed out prayers for the dead in the book of Maccabees, Luther denied that the book was scriptural, referring to the fact that the Hebrew canon had seven fewer books than the Greek canon used by the Church. This is true enough, but because the Church follows Christ and the apostles, not the Jewish councils which rejected Christ, she accordingly adopted the books of the Greek translation used by Christ and the apostles.

All arguments against the seven books being a part of the Bible are based on misinformation. Here are seven such arguments, followed by the objective facts:

1. *There is no proof that Jesus and the apostles used the Septuagint as their Bible.* Yes there is. The Old Testament is often quoted from the Greek canon, not the Hebrew (one example: Mt 1:23).
2. *The Church added the books in 1546 at the Council of Trent.* No, the Church *recognized*, not added, the books, and not just in 1546. The Council of Orange in 393 already listed these books, and that was

about the same time that the New Testament was canonized. Why accept the New Testament of the Church and then not the Old?

3. *You can tell which books are part of the Bible by their content. The seven books don’t witness to the Gospel.* Only someone who hasn’t read them could possibly think this. Read Wisdom 2:12-20 and then Matthew 27:41-43.
4. *The seven books teach unbiblical things like Purgatory, free will, indulgences, prayers for the dead, and the intercession of those in heaven.* This argument begs the question by assuming that the books are not biblical in the first place. Take out the Book of James and you could equally say that works having a role in justification is unbiblical. (Martin Luther did just this by calling inspired book a bunch of “straw” in his own Bible.)
5. *I believe the seven books are important for their historical content, but they are not the word of God.* Like the previous two arguments, there is no basis for believing this, but it is always suggested without explaining just why the other 66 books are obviously canonical.
6. *St. Jerome, the author of the Vulgate, believed that only the Hebrew should be the Old Testament.* He also believed in Purgatory, free will, prayers for the dead, and the intercession of the saints. Why reject him there? And he still accepted the canon of the Church in spite of his love/hate relationship with the Hebrew language!
7. *Almost all of the Bibles in the bookstores have 66 books, not 73.* That is all too true. But Christ founded a Church, not a bookstore. And it is only *non-Catholic* bibles that have 66 books.



Expressing the Faith: Shine

Though not exactly the keepers of kosher monotheism, Collective Soul captures the soul’s yearning for the eternal love of heaven in this song.

*Give me a word, give me a sign
Show me where to look, tell me what will I find.
Lay me on the ground, fly me in the sky
Show me where to look, tell me what will I find.*

*Love is in the water, love is in the air
Show me where to go, tell me will love be there?
Teach me how to speak, teach me how to share
Teach me where to go, tell me will love be there?*

Oh, heaven let your light shine down.

Oh, heaven let your light shine down.

↗ **Next time: “The Big Macc Attack”** ↖