

## WISDOM OF SOLOMON

- 1) Introduction: Three main concerns: exhortation to justice, gift of wisdom, and the deliverance from Egypt. The first reference to the book is by Irenaeus c 200 CE. Others: Clement c 200, Muratorian Canon c 190, Origen c 250, Augustine c 400. It was clear to all of them that Solomon could not have written it. The nuances of numerous Greek words and phrases belong to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. See NIB pp 437-438 for the reasons that it was originally written in Greek.) Best guess: Philo of Alexandria c 40 CE, or a contemporary. The author retains a Hebrew mentality while conversing in a language of one who is familiar with Hellenism: Platonism, Epicurianism, Stoicism, Neo-Pythagorianism. /// A highly structured literary work – see NIB pp. 443-446 for details of the two literary structures: concentric and parallel (far too much for this feeble mind!). /// Finally accepted as canonical at the Council of Trent (1546), but rejected by Martin Luther, who continued to use it as inspirational reading.
- 2) 1:1-5 – Throughout, the NIV uses “justice” or “injustice,” the NRSV “righteousness” or “unrighteousness.” (JB: Synonymous?) /// As in Proverbs, the exhortation is to the rulers of the earth (v 1). But this may mean that all of us bear the responsibility of justice, as given to us in the Genesis story: “Fill the earth...,” “Have dominion...” /// This passage shows the value of righteousness 7 times, resistance to it 7 times. This is called “sapiential doctrine,” highlighting the two ways of life. /// In vv 6-11, juridical terms are used as in a trial: acquit, witness, scrutiny, unpunished. What is at stake if convicted is death as punishment.
- 3) 1:13 – “God did not make death.” (See Ezek 33:11 — “There is no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” And Deut 32:39 – “kill and make alive.”) Perhaps the question is answered in the next unit, 1:16-24.
- 4) 1:14 – The writer makes it clear that the death of the unjust is not the result of evil forces in the cosmos, but a personal decision. The author may have been criticizing the Hellenistic and native Egyptians who believed there is a dualism of forces of good and evil.
- 5) 1:16 – Intro to the speech of the wicked (2:1-20). The wicked invite death, consider it a friend, make a covenant with it. (See Isaiah 28:15-22)
- 6) 2:1-4 – “The unspeakable reality cannot be named,” instead half a dozen metaphors are used. (Ecclesiastes 6:12 -- “...what is good for mortals while they live the few days of their vain life, which they pass like a shadow.” Other references to the fragility of life in Eccl: 8:8, 2:16, 6:12. And in Psalms: 102:3, 49:8-9. /// The fallacy of the wicked’s reasoning: As no divine being gives no purpose for the life at the beginning, there is no divine reality for humans at the end, that human life in the face of death is void of meaning.
- 7) 2:5 -- Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5, “Life’s but a passing shadow...and then is heard no more.”
- 8) 2:6-9 – Nothing inherently wrong with this until taken with the preceding and the succeeding vs, then it’s horrible. When take as God’s gift, it is seen as from the hand of God, as in Qohelet’s frequent comment following an injunction to eat, drink, and be merry. /// As for any similarity to Epicurus’s parties, they were renowned for their simplicity and frugality, at least until the partiers had had a bit too much (which apparently was frequently).
- 9) 2:10-11 – These three groups, plus sojourners and orphans, were all protected by Israelite law (sojourners, orphans, widows — Deut 14:29; poor – Ex 23:6; elderly – Lev 19:32). /// “Might makes right” is as “old as the stars.” The vicious tone of the wicked masks an

- abysmal despair in the value of human life.
- 10) 2:12-20 – V.12 – see Pss 10:8-11, 17:8-11, 37:12, 59:3-4, 64:2-4. Vv 17-18. Pss 13:5, 27:13. Pss 19-20 – Pss 3:2, 22:8, 71:11. /// “Him” in v 20 is the righteous man, see 2:12. See also James 5:6.
  - 11) 2:21-24 – The injustice of the wicked has blinded them to three essential realities: the secret purposes of God, the images of holiness, and the prize for blameless souls. The wicked overlook the destiny for man: incorruption – contradicting the wicked’s claim that man has come to exist arbitrarily. Man is immortal because he was created in the image of God. So where does death originate? Man brings it on by his own words and actions, and by the envy of the devil. (In *Life of Adam and Eve*, the devil accuses Adam of being the reason he was deprived of the glory he had in heaven, and was thrown out.) So, to disprove the false reasoning of the wicked, the author must resolve the issue of the tragic deaths of the righteous.
  - 12) 3:1-4 – Three images of the just: in the hands of God, at peace, hope of immortality.
  - 13) 3:5 – Another suggestion that God *tests* us to see if we’re worthy. (JB: hard to accept but it occurs so often in both OT and NT that maybe it’s true.
  - 14) 3:7-8 – See Daniel 12, where the righteous will shine like the sky and the stars. And Matthew 13:43 where they will shine like the sun.
  - 15) 3:10 – All their reasoning, thoughts, and beliefs will turn against the wicked at the judgment.
  - 16) **REFLECTIONS 3:1-13c**  
This passage is often used in funerals because seemingly destructive forces, pain and loss can become moments of purification, resolution, and deeper union with others.
  - 17) 3:13b-14 – The virtue of the barren woman appears to be weakness and tragedy but turns out to be a passage toward blessedness, if she (and the eunuch) maintain their moral integrity. The author borrows from Isaiah 54 for the woman, Isaiah 56 for the eunuch.
  - 18) 3:16-19 – Taken literally, innocent children are punished for the sins of their parents. However, in prophetic literature (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea), terms relating to adultery signify Israel’s faithlessness to God, idolatry, and abandonment of the law. Adultery referred to this whole complexity of Israel’s faithlessness to God. Children from such “adulterous relationships signified the privileges” gained from the allusions and cultic practices, therefore they were demolished by God. (JB: rather convoluted reasoning methinks, but who am I to argue with scholars!)
  - 19) 5:1-3 The confession of the wicked does not take place in the presence of God, or the just; they are admitting their error among themselves. This indicates no change of heart, just admission that they are wrong.
  - 20) 5:4-14 – This confession is in eloquent language to show the reader they have the ability to be strong, but their injustice is heading them toward a death that is more devastating than they had lamented in their opening rumination.
  - 21) 5:15-23 – An adaptation of the metaphors in Isaiah 59:17-19. 23b – JB: sounds to me like lawlessness and evil-doing wins out after all!

## 22) SUMMARY, CHAPTERS 1-5

Opens with an exhortation to love God, warning against a way of life that would hinder these values. Then the defense by the wicked for their unjust way of life. Counter-accusation envisioned a shameful death for the just ones. This would disprove the claims of the just and prove the validity of the unjust. Through the metaphor of a trial, the author presents scenes of the just in the hands of God – eunuch, barren woman, virtuous

youth, giving the *appearance* of tragedy, functions as witnesses for the just against injustice. Finally, the confession of the wicked, the sentence of annihilation, the vindication of the just.

- 23) 6:1-2 – Not addressed to contemporary kings and emperors but a metaphor directed at anyone who rules and judges. On the other hand, the author is not critiquing political power.
- 24) 6:6-8 – Klarchic says that these vv indicate that God is impartial to appearances. (JB: Sounds to me that he is partial – showing mercy to the lowly but not the mighty!) But see all the gospels except Mark where Jesus says, “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, etc...” See also the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14ff.
- 25) 6:17-21 – A classic 6-part syllogism: five easily accepted propositions, followed by a surprise and difficult proposition -- in this case that the desire for wisdom leads to kingdom.

## 26) OVERVIEW 6:22- 10:21

- The author speaks in the first person. This second part can be understood as the creative drama between wisdom and the righteous, represented in Solomon’s desire for wisdom. Solomon is never named, but attributed to him because Hebrews idolized him as the wise sage who governed with wisdom. Wisdom then becomes personified. The author highlights two functions of wisdom: creative role for humans, cosmic function in the universe. This culminates in the recession of wisdom into the background, having completed her function of drawing the righteous into immediate relationship with God, portrayed in the very last chapter (19<sup>th</sup>).
- 27) 7:1-6 – The description of Wisdom of Solomon’s origin is informed by the Greek science that state that the semen and blood were mixed, then “compacted into human flesh. Nine solar months = 10 lunar months. /// Solomon’s wisdom is not a special gift to him alone, it is open to anyone.
  - 28) 7:7-12 – See 2 Chron 1:6-12 where Solomon prays to God to give him wisdom rather than riches, and God rewards his request with both. /// Wisdom is usually portrayed as a lover, but there are exceptions – Philo’s mother and nurse, Proverbs (not actually a mother but acts like one to her children – though Solomon says he did not know this -- v12).
  - 29) 7:17-20 – Refers to Hellenistic philosophies and science, including botany and zoology (v 20), of the author’s day, not Solomon’s. (See NIB p. 502-3.
  - 30) 7:22-23 – This passage is in continuity with Proverbs which describes Wisdom as being God’s first creation (8:22-36). Three sets of seven (not arbitrary): 1<sup>st</sup>: mobility and transparency of wisdom, 2<sup>nd</sup>: moral good associated with wisdom, 3<sup>rd</sup>: indomitable relationship to humanity.
  - 31) 7:24-26 – The speed and pervasiveness is a Greek reflection, especially Philo and the Stoics. The five metaphors for God attempt to root wisdom in God – a great innovation in comparison to the origins of wisdom in Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24. The Greek “atmis” for “breath” does not have the connotation that “ruah” does in Genesis: rather it is the misty fragrance of the power of God. **Reflection:** nowhere else in the Bible is there such a variety of metaphors relating personified wisdom to God.
  - 32) 7:27-8:1 – Introduces a “moral perspective.” Wisdom is superior to light not because it brightens but that evil does not prevail over wisdom.

### 33) REFLECTIONS 7:13-8:1

This passage speaks to the faith/science controversy: since God created the cosmos through wisdom, then knowledge of the cosmos leads to God: wisdom bridges the distance between God's transcendence and immanence. The distance yet proximity of God is a paradox. His face is untouchable but his care for us is unbounded. Whether or not Paul knew "The Book of Wisdom," he employs the image of a mirror reflecting the glory of God to portray the manner in which God's glory transforms humans in Christ (2 Cor 3:18) (See also 2 Cor 4:4, Col 1:15, and Heb 1:3.)

- 34) 8:4 – The NIV is much closer to the proper meaning than the NRSV, saying that wisdom is an instructress (NRSV: initiate) in understanding God. An initiate at that time referred to one who has learned the mysteries of God and is honor-bound **not** to reveal them. Also "selector" of God's works is much stronger than "associate."
- 35) 8:5-8 -- The first biblical reference to the famous debates about the four virtues going on at that time in Greek literature: self-control, prudence, justice, and courage.
- 36) 8:10-16 – For examples of the truth of these claims, see 1 Kings 3:16-28 ("divided baby"), 1 Kings 4:20-21, 1 Kings 4:29-36, 1 Kings 10:1-13.
- 37) 8:20 – Solomon believed in the pre-existence of his soul, influenced by the Greek ideas treating with that subject, as exemplified by Philo and Josephus.
- 38) 9:1-6 – Clear reference to the Priestly account of creation – Genesis 1:3-29. Humanity has been transformed by God's wisdom. Humans are greatly limited by their weakness and short lives, but this is overcome by God's wisdom.
- 39) 9:11-12 – Wisdom was present at creation and will guide Solomon in his decisions and actions. (JB: Where is God, Jesus, and the holy spirit? Is Wisdom a 4<sup>th</sup> person alongside the Trinity?) See # 42.
- 40) 9:17-18 – (JB: This adds to my confusion. God has given man wisdom and sent his holy spirit, thus setting the path for man, who was taught and saved by Wisdom?)
- 41) 10:1-21 – Through wisdom God provides care for humanity. Through wisdom God has fashioned the human heart. Here the author has chosen familiar biblical figures to illustrate how their difficulties fell under the providential gaze of God. Through wisdom God reverses the misfortune of the just and thwarts the plans of the unjust. In chapter 10 and the rest of the book, history provides the data to argue for the merits of justice and the perils of the injustice. /// In 10:4 he implies that the earth was flooded because of Abel's sin, but actually it was only the expression of violence that led to the wickedness that brought on the divine wrath. /// 5a refers to the Tower of Babel and the confusion brought on by God in making many languages so they could not understand each other. See Genesis 11:1-9 for the definition and play on words of Babel and Balal. In 7b he is referring to 4:3 where the illegitimate seedlings of the ungodly will not take root. 10:10-12 summary: Jacob flees from Esau. Jacob has a vision of a ladder to heaven at Bethel. Growing prosperity despite Laban. Wrestles with God at Peniel. Wisdom working in all. /// 10:21: May be the author's clever reference to Moses telling God that he did not know how to speak. Or a reference to Psalm 8:2 which is from an early rabbinic tradition that even babies leave the breast to sing God's praises.
- 42) 11:1-26 – This brings to a conclusion the exposition of wisdom's role in the lives of the righteous and introduces specifically the events of the exodus from Egypt. The author attributes the guiding hand of God to personified wisdom. Personified wisdom is not a separate entity from the divine sphere. It is the particular outreach of God to humans in

- the cosmos. Its purpose is to guide them to God.
- 43) 11:5 – E. g. The Egyptians were punished twice with water: when it was turned to blood and when it drowned the army. The Israelites were saved twice by water: when it drowned the army and when it was given through “flinty” rock.
  - 44) 11:6-10 – The author gets around the difficulty of both Israelites and Egyptians suffering thirst by saying that Israelites were warned by a parent, whereas the Egyptians were punished by God.
  - 45) 11:14 – Referring to Moses in the bulrushes as a baby.
  - 46) 11:15-12:27 – A long dissertation on the principle of *rex talionis*, the punishment fits the crime. God loves everything that he created or he wouldn’t have created it. God judged the Canaanites in stages, then punished them little by little, then destroyed them completely when they showed no signs of quitting their sinning, thus showing his universal love and moderation. (JB: Come again?)
  - 47) 12:19-22 – Once again the author stresses that God was moderate and merciful to the Canaanites by giving them time and space to turn from their injustice. (JB: He must not have read about the total destruction of the people of Ai and Jericho!)
  - 48) 13:1-9 – A beautiful metaphor of God as the artisan creating his art, but then the author criticizes the “adherents of nature” who have not looked for a God who created it all.
  - 49) 13:10-19 – The author draws deliberate parallels between the perpetrators of injustice and the idol makers and worshipers. In 2:24, death enters the world through the adversary’s envy. Here the idols have entered the world through human vanity. As if commenting on all the things the idol can’t do, Plato claimed that idol worship reminds the human of living gods, and those gods “feel great good will towards us and gratitude.”
  - 50) 14:3 – Appealing *directly* to God as Father is very late, although saying “as” or “like” a father occurs several times in the OT (see NIB p 533 for some of them).
  - 51) 14:22-26 – This list of vices follows Hosea 4:1-2, which in turn is structured according to Exodus 20:3-16 (four of the ten commandments). These vices are considered by the unjust as a form of peace, being blind to the purposes of God. Tacitus, in commenting on the *Pax Romana*, says while the Romans’ use of brutal power brought them peace, it left the conquered in sheer desolation.
  - 52) 15:1-6 – The author refers to the sexual aberrations associated with idolatry. There were several legends in circulation: one was that Pygmalion, King of Cyprus, had a statue made of a woman from ivory, then fell in love with it. Jesus’s teachings reflect the idea that one receives what one loves. He contrasts the treasures of the earth with those of heaven. Where people place their treasure, there will be their heart. In the parable of the talents, there is a direct correlation between what one actually receives and what one has been given or invested.
  - 53) 15:8 – A very late canonical image: the soul being lent (or “on lease”) and returning to the Creator. But Lucretius, Philo, and Josephus all had the same idea. See Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 where the body returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God.
  - 54) 16:4 – Nowhere in Exodus does it say that the Egyptians were hungry, though it’s logical to assume that, when the source of their water, food and livestock were lost.
  - 55) 16:5-7 – In Numbers 21:6-9, God punishes the complaining Israelites by sending poisonous snakes. But after many died, he relents and instructs Moses to hang a bronze serpent on a pole so that when a bitten person looks at it, he is saved.
  - 56) 16:15-29 – Are all natural disasters (including death) the Creator’s response to human

immorality? Are all forms of deliverance a response to human morality? Unequivocally, “NO!” // v 22 – Referring to the manna that appeared like frost on the ground and metaphorically was not destroyed by fire (the sun). // vv 24-29 – Perhaps the answer to the conundrum of the relationship of wisdom to God: the wisdom of God and the forces of creation are intimately connected...Creation is the work of God through his wisdom.

- 57) 17:1-18:4 – “Imaginative, poetic interpretation skills at their highest level.” From Ex 10:21-23, the author constructs a diptych of 25 vv. – a complex style of Alexandrian writing.
- 58) 18:3 – Only here and in Ex 13:21-22 is the light called a “pillar of fire” – elsewhere it it’s a “fiery light.”
- 59) 18:20-25 – A digression to Numbers 16:1-50, the levitical rebellion against Moses and Aaron, causing God’s wrath and bringing a plague causing the death of 14,700 people, stopped by Aaron making atonement for the people. The reference in v 24 is to the four rows of four precious stones on Aaron’s ephod, engraved with all 12 of Israel’s sons. The robe of the high priest symbolized the entire universe: blue color, the air; full length, the recesses of the earth; the breast plate, heaven; the twelve stones, the sons of Israel and the 12 signs of the Zodiac.
- 60) 19:13-19 – Egypt welcomed the Israelites as guests at first, then enslaved them: Joseph and his brothers became the benefactors of the Egyptians in the governorship of Joseph. // v. 14 – Referring to the citizens of Sodom, who didn’t receive Lot and his family willingly and were struck blind. This became the paradigm of sin and punishment – see NIB p. 596 for a partial list of examples in both testaments. // v 19 --- The Israelites are the land creatures, frogs the water creatures.