

The Intertestamental Period



An Open Seminar
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The Wisdom of Solomon



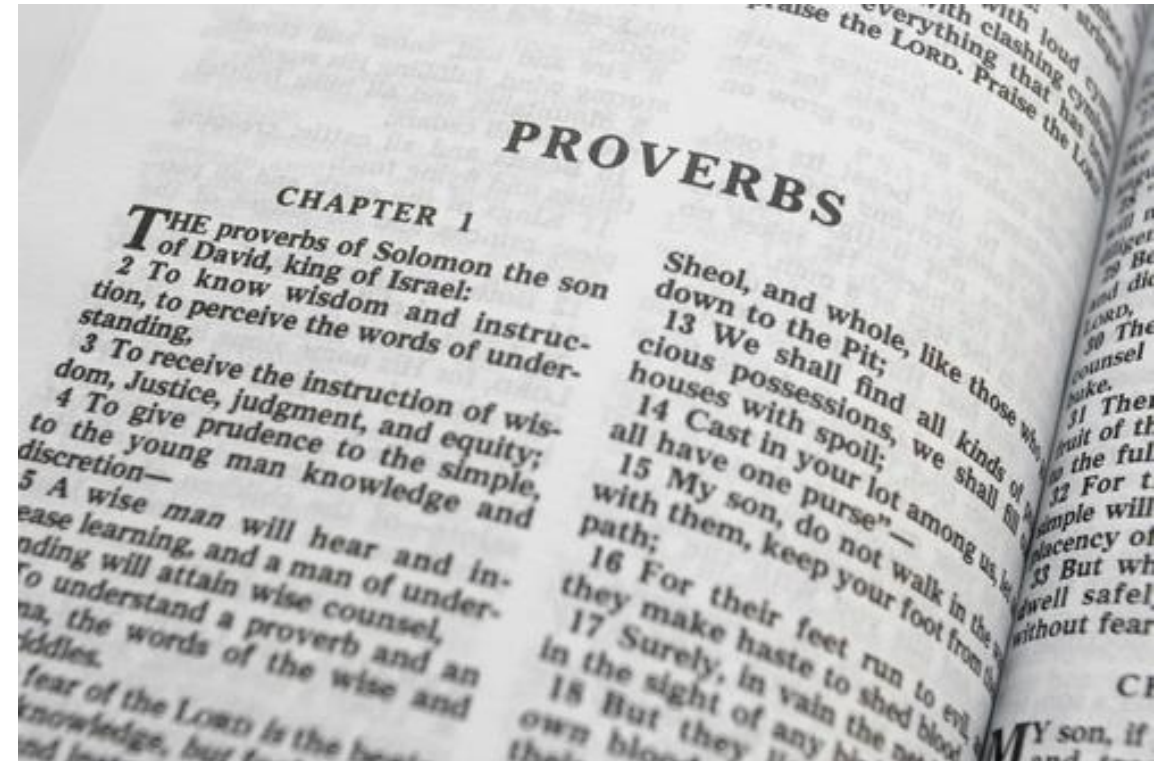
Wisdom in the Ancient Near East

- Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, other nations all had a “wisdom” tradition.
- Considered questions of “how to live.”
- Unlike Greek philosophy, this was more grounded in daily experience.
- Considered to be the right of the educated.



What is Wisdom Literature?

- Examples:
 - Proverbs
 - Job
 - Jonah
 - Ecclesiastes
- “Proverb” wisdom is found throughout the ancient Near East
- Job and Ecclesiastes are in fact highly critical of the Wisdom school’s assumptions
- Jonah critiques the prophetic tradition



The Israelite Sage (“wise man”)

- The sage was part of a circle that was separate from the priest or the prophet.
- From the Exile onward, these three intellectual niches began to converge.
- Solomon is the archetype of the Israelite sage.

Then they said, “Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the **priest**, nor counsel to the **sage**, nor the divine word to the **prophet**! Come on and let us strike at him with our tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words.”

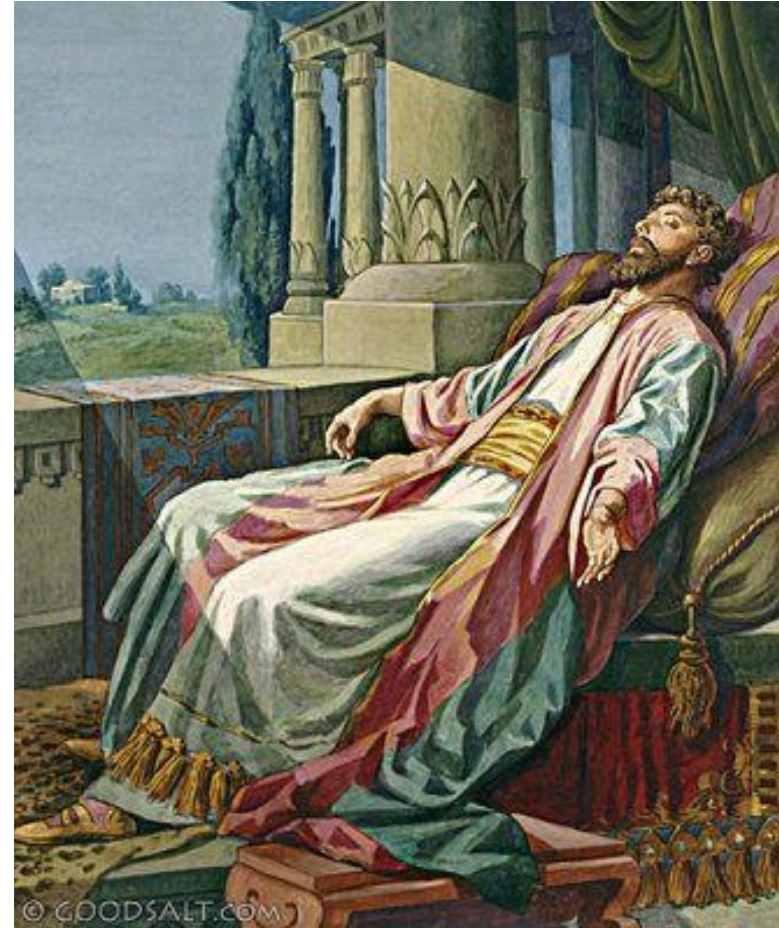
Jeremiah 18:18

What is Hebrew Wisdom Literature?

- Typically a late development in Israelite religion
- Highly individualistic. How does one become successful?
- Less concerned with big issues of salvation and acts of divinity, or Jewish national identity
- Mostly ignores matters of covenant and election or God acting in history
- More cosmopolitan in scope
- Questioning, skeptical. Likes to ask hard questions
- Enjoys contemplation of God's creation

Wisdom and Narrative

- Proverb is the initial format of wisdom
- Hebrew Wisdom literature makes little use of the dialogue as found in Greek sources
- Development of the parable as a means of encapsulating a lesson
- Parable reached its full expression in New Testament times



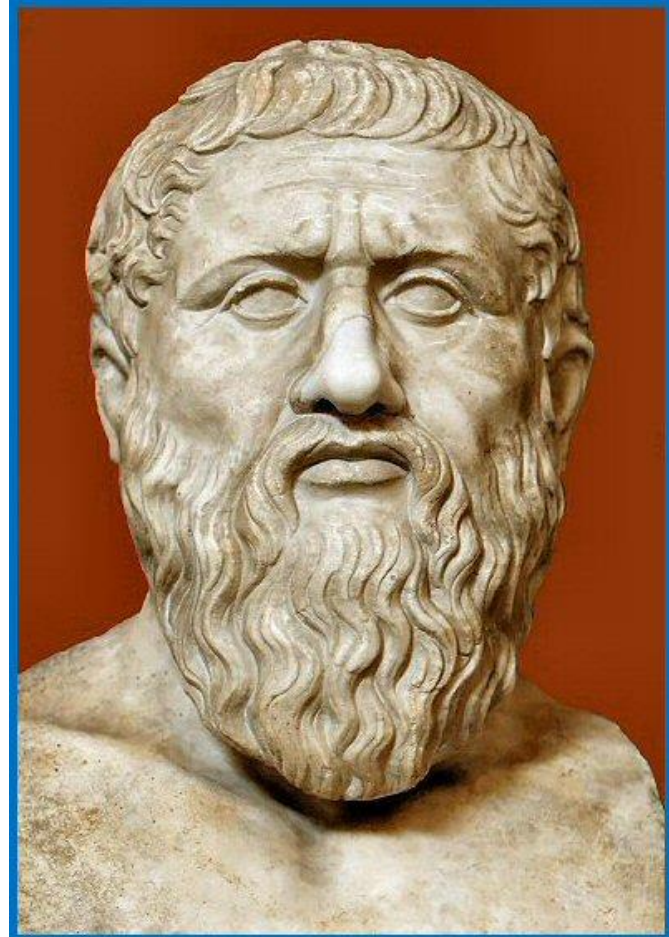
Wisdom Personified

- Female presence (“Saint Sophia”)
- Works beside God
- Existed in the beginning, took part in the creation
- Conveys knowledge to those who seek her
- Often with the divine Feminine



The Problem of Retribution

- Experience showed that living according to “wisdom” did not always work out
- Lack of afterlife in Hebrew thought blocked post-mortals retribution
- Platonic doctrine of an immortal soul solved the problem of retribution
- Wisdom teaches the imperishable nature of the soul (2:23)

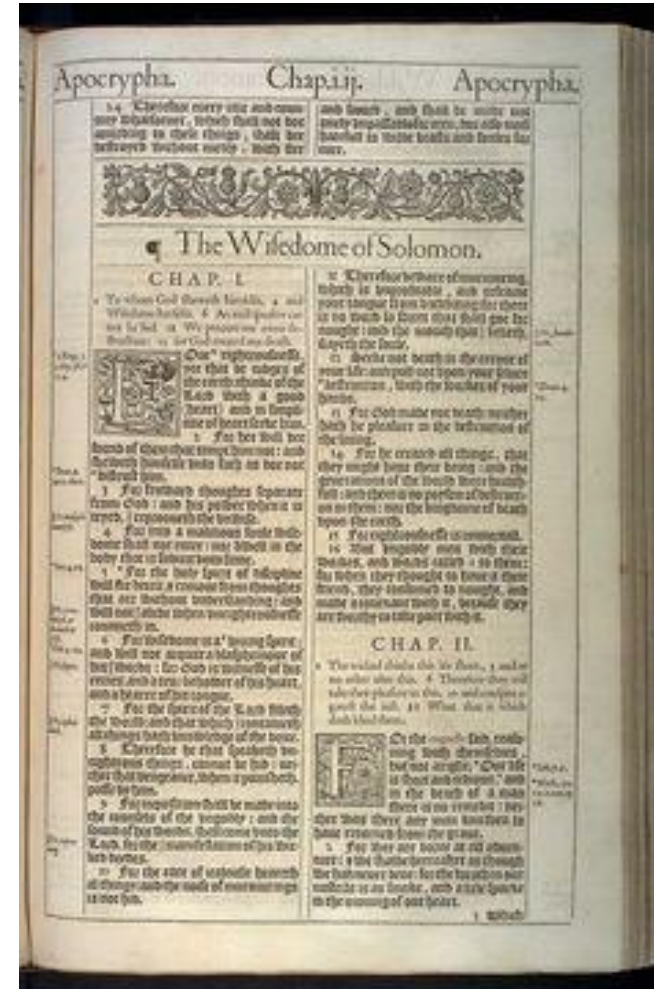


Old Wisdom vs. New Wisdom

- The Book of Ecclesiastes is a devotee of wisdom, but is
 - Skeptical of the justice of God
 - Questions the value of Wisdom and hard work in securing a good life
 - Uncertain, even doubtful of the existence of an afterlife
 - Destiny is largely fixed, not much one can do but accept it
 - Life is to be enjoyed greatly, but through moderate means
 - The fortune enjoyed by wicked vs. righteous shows little distinction; no reward or punishment in this life
- “Solomon’s” Wisdom is an active agent in the history of Israel

“New” Wisdom

- Makes assumptions that are opposite those of Ecclesiastes and other OT Wisdom literature
- Written during a period of persecution
- The objective of the righteous is no longer to “live well” but to win through in the afterlife



Aspects of Wisdom

With respect to humanity

- Perfection of knowledge, shown in action
- Found only in righteous persons
- Given only to earnest supplicants
- Gives power to triumph over evil
- To be prized above all else

With respect to God

- Personified, given semi-divine status
- With God from eternity
- Partner beside his throne, knows his thought
- An emanation of God's glory
- Makes anything possible

The Book of Wisdom: Overview

- Estimated date of composition is unclear
- From 50 BCE to the reign of Gaius Caligula (37–41 CE)
- Several words in Wisdom unattested prior to the 1st Century
- Author was an Alexandrian Jew with deep knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures, but unnamed.



The Book of Wisdom: Canonicity

- Found in three oldest Greek OT manuscripts
- Cyprian, Ambrose, accepted Solomonic attribution
- Origen, Eusebius, Augustine denied authority.
- Jerome disputed Solomon as author, changed the name to “Wisdom,” non-authoritative.
- Council of Trent (1545-1563) Wisdom becomes deuterocanonical *contra* Luther



Main Divisions of Wisdom of Solomon

- The Reward of Righteousness (1:1–6:21).
- Praise of Wisdom by Solomon (6:22–11:1).
- Special Providence of God During the Exodus (11:2–16; 12:23–27; 15:18–19:22) with digressions on God's mercy (11:17–12:22) and on the folly and shame of idolatry (13:1–15:17).
- Possibly contains or incorporates a Hellenistic Haggadah?

Note: other scholars posit other divisional arrangements.