

# SAPIENTIAL BOOKS

## PROVERBS

### *Introduction*

*The doctrines or teachings of this anthology have two main axes, each with an extreme pole: one is the wise/foolish, the other is honorable/wicked. These two axes intertwine, because being wise has an ethical component, while wickedness is considered foolish.*

*God is present in this wise and ethical world: He possesses wisdom and grants good sense to human beings.*

### Proclamation of Wisdom

822Yahweh created me first,  
at the beginning of his works.  
23He formed me from of old,  
from eternity, even before the earth.  
24The abyss did not exist when I was born,  
the springs of the sea had not gushed forth,  
25the mountains were still not set in their place  
nor the hills, when I was born  
26before he made the earth or countryside,  
or the first grains of the world's dust.  
27I was there when he made the skies  
and drew the earth's compass on the abyss,  
28when he formed the clouds above  
and when the springs of the ocean emerged;  
29when he made the sea with its limits,  
that it might not overflow.  
When he laid the foundations of the earth,  
30I was close beside him,  
the designer of his works,  
and I was his daily delight,  
forever playing in his presence,  
31playing throughout the world  
and delighting to be with humans.  
32Now then, my sons, listen to me:  
happy are those who follow my ways.

# JOB

## *Introduction*

*The book of Job is drama with little action and a lot of passion. It brings forward the passion that a great, unresigned writer has portrayed in the main character of the book. Uneasy with the traditional doctrine about retribution, he opposed a concrete fact to a principle.*

*Our author brings his case to the extreme: he makes the innocent protagonist suffer so that his cry would come "from the depth."*

*The action is very simple: Job's friends defend God's justice as an impartial judge that rewards the good ones and punishes the bad ones. Job is not interested in this kind of justice by God because his own experience tells him otherwise. To prove his innocence to God, Job risks his own life. God, as the final judge, gives the final answer to Job and his friends. While being challenged, God answers and questions Job to lead him towards the mystery of God.*

*Through the dialogues, of a good conventional man, that gives thanks to God because everything goes well for him, comes a deep man, capable of assuming and representing the sorrowful humanity that searches God with audacity.*

*The book of Job is an especially modern book; it is provocative, not apt for conformists. It is difficult to read it without being challenged and it is difficult to understand it unless one takes sides.*

## **Prologue on earth**

**1** Job, a blameless and upright man who feared God and shunned evil, once lived in the land of Uz. **2** He had seven sons and three daughters. **3** Owner of seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys and a large number of servants, he was considered the greatest man among the people of the East.

**4** His sons used to take turns holding banquets in their homes and they would invite their three sisters to dine and drink with them.

## **Prologue in heaven**

**6** One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves before Yahweh, and Satan came with them. **7** Yahweh asked Satan:

—Where have you been?

Satan answered:

—Going up and down the earth, roaming about.

**8** Yahweh asked again:

—Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as blameless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil.

**9** But Satan returned the question:

—Does Job fear God for nothing? **10** Have you not built a protective wall around him and his family and all his possessions? You have blessed and prospered him, with his livestock all over the land. **11** But stretch out your hand and strike where his riches are, and I bet he will curse you to your face.

**12** Yahweh said to Satan:

—Very well, all that he has is in your power. But do not lay a finger upon the man himself.

So Satan left the presence of Yahweh.

## Job's trials

13One day, while his sons and daughters were feasting in the house of their eldest brother, 14a messenger came to Job and said:

—Your oxen were plowing, and your donkeys were grazing nearby 15when the Sabaeans came and carried them off. They killed the herdsmen. I alone escaped to tell you.

16While he was still speaking, another messenger came:

—God's fire fell from the sky and burned all your sheep and the shepherds as well. I alone have escaped to tell you.

17He had hardly finished speaking when another messenger arrived:

—Three raiding teams of Chaldeans have killed your servants and carried off your camels. I alone have escaped to tell you.

18He was still speaking when another messenger came and said to Job:

—Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking in the house of their eldest brother 19when suddenly a great wind blew across the desert and struck the house. It collapsed on the young people and they all died. I alone have escaped to tell you.

20In grief Job tore his clothes and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground and worshiped, 21saying:

—Naked I came from my mother's womb,  
naked shall I return.

Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken away.

Blessed be his name!

22In spite of this calamity, Job did not sin by blaspheming God.

**2** 1Once more the heavenly beings came to present themselves before Yahweh, and again Satan was with them. 2Yahweh asked Satan:

—Where have you been?

Satan answered:

—Going up and down the earth, roaming about.

3Yahweh asked again:

—Have you noticed my servant Job? No one on earth is as blameless and upright as he, a man who fears God and avoids evil. He still holds fast to his integrity even if you provoked me to ruin him without cause.

4Satan replied:

—Skin for skin! For his own life, anyone will give everything he owns. 5But lay your hand against his own flesh and bones and he will curse you to your face.

6Yahweh said to Satan:

—Very well, he is in your power. But spare his life.

7So Satan left the presence of Yahweh and afflicted Job with festering sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. 8Job took a potsherd to scrape himself and sat among the ashes.

9His wife said to him:

—Do you still hold on to your integrity? Curse God and die!

10Job replied:

—You talk foolishly. If we receive good things from God, why can't we accept evil from him?

In spite of this calamity, Job did not utter a sinful word.

## Job's friends

11Three of Job's friends—Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite—heard of the misfortune that came upon him. They set out from their own homes and journeyed together to offer their sympathy and consolation to Job. 12Failing to recognize him from the distance, they wept aloud, tore their garments and poured dust upon their heads. 13For seven days and seven nights, they sat on the ground beside him. They did not say a word to Job, for they saw how terribly he suffered.

**3** 1At length it was Job who spoke, cursing the day of his birth. 2This is what he said:

3—Cursed be the day I was born,  
and the night which whispered:

A boy has been conceived.

25For what I fear has come upon me,  
what I dread has befallen me.

26I find no rest, I find no ease;  
only turmoil, nothing of peace!

**4** 1Eliphaz the Temanite spoke next:

6—Should you not rely on your piety,  
and find assurance in your integrity?

7Have you seen a guiltless man perish,  
or an upright man done away with?

8As I see it, those who plow evil  
or those who sow trouble reap the same.

17Can a mortal be just in the eyes of God?  
Can a man be pure before his Maker?

**5** 8If I were you, I would appeal to God  
and lay before him my case,

9for wonders are past all reckoning,  
his miracles beyond all counting.

10He pours rain down on the earth  
and sends water upon the fields.

11He sets the lowly on high,  
turns grief into joy.

17 Blessed is the one whom God corrects;  
reject not, therefore, the lessons of the Almighty,  
18 He cures the wounds he has inflicted;  
he strikes but he also heals.  
19 From six troubles he will rescue you;  
at the seventh no harm will touch you.  
20 In famine he saves you from death;  
in war, from the threat of the sword.  
21 You will be protected from the lash of the tongue,  
and have no dread of marauding bands.  
27 This we have examined and found true.  
This we have heard, and you should know.

**7** 1 Job replied:

—Man's life on earth is a thankless job,  
his days are those of a mercenary.  
2 Like a slave he longs for the shade of evening,  
like a hireling waiting for his wages.  
3 Thus I am allotted months of boredom  
and nights of grief and misery.  
4 In bed I say, "When shall the day break?"  
On rising, I think, "When shall evening come?"  
and I toss restless till dawn.  
5 My body is full of worms and scabs;  
my skin festers with its boils and cracks.  
6 My days pass swifter than a weaver's shuttle,  
heading without hope to their end.  
7 My life is like wind, you well know it,  
O God; never will I see happiness again.

**10** 1 Since I loathe my life,

I shall pour forth my complaint;  
I shall speak of my soul's torment.  
2 I shall say to God: Do not condemn me,  
but tell me what is your quarrel with me?

**29** 1 Job continued his discourse:

2—Oh, that I were in months gone by,  
in the days when God watched over me,  
3 when his light shone upon my head  
and I walked with it through darkness.  
4 Oh, that I were in my prime,  
when God's friendship blessed my home,

5when the Almighty was still with me  
and my children were around me!

**32** 1The three men made no further reply to Job, because in their opinion, he was guiltless. 2But Elihu, son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became angry with Job for justifying himself before God. 3He was also angry with the three friends for their failure to refute Job, because they had allowed God to be condemned.

**38** 1Then Yahweh answered Job out of the storm:

2—Who is this that obscures divine plans  
with ignorant words?

3Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you and you must answer.

4Where were you when I founded the earth?

Answer, and show me your knowledge.

5Do you know who determined its size,  
who stretched out its measuring line?

6On what were its bases set?

Who laid its cornerstone,

7while the morning stars sang together  
and the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

8Who shut the sea behind closed doors  
when it burst forth from the womb,

9when I made the clouds its garment  
and thick darkness its swaddling clothes;

10when I set its limits

with doors and bars in place,

11when I said, “You will not go beyond these bounds;  
here is where your proud waves must halt?”

12Have you ever commanded the morning,  
or shown the dawn its place,

13that it might grasp the earth by its edges  
and shake the wicked out of it,

14when it takes a clay color  
and changes its tint like a garment;

15when the wicked are denied their own light,  
and their proud arm is shattered?

16Have you journeyed to where the sea begins  
or walked in its deepest recesses?

17Have the gates of death been shown to you?  
Have you seen the gates of Shadow?

18Have you an idea of the breadth of the earth?  
Tell me, if you know all this.

19Where is the way to the home of light,  
and where does darkness dwell?

20 Can you take them to their own regions,  
and set them on their homeward paths?  
21 You know, for you were born before them,  
and great is the number of your years!  
22 Have you entered the storehouse of the snow  
or seen the storehouse of the hail,  
23 which I reserve for times of woe,  
for days of war and battle?  
24 What is the way to the place  
where lightning is dispersed,  
or the place whence the east wind  
begins spreading over the earth?  
25 Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain,  
and a path for the thunderstorm,  
26 to bring rain to no-man's-land  
and to the unpeopled wilderness,  
27 to enrich the wasted and desolate ground,  
to make the desert bloom with green?  
28 Does the rain have a father?  
Who fathers the drops of dew?  
29 From whose womb comes the ice,  
and who gives birth to the frost from the skies,  
30 when the waters lie as hard as stone,  
when the surface of the deep is frozen?  
31 Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,  
or loosen the bonds of Orion?  
32 Can you guide the morning star in its season,  
or lead the Bear with its train?  
33 Do you know the laws of the heavens,  
and can you establish their rule on earth?  
34 Can you raise your voice to the clouds  
and order their waters to pour down?  
35 Will lightnings flash at your command  
and report to you, "Here we are?"  
36 Who has given the ibis foresight  
or endowed the cock with foreknowledge?  
37 Who has the wisdom to count the clouds?  
Who tilts the water jars of heaven  
38 so that the dust cakes into a mass  
and clods of earth stick together?  
39 Can you hunt the woods to appease  
the hunger of the lioness and her whelps,  
40 as they crouch in their dens  
or lie in wait in the thicket?  
41 Who provides prey for the raven  
when its young cry out to God  
and roam about desperate for food?

**40** 1Yahweh said to Job:

2—Must a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?

Let him who would correct God answer.

3Job said:

4—How can I reply, unworthy as I am!

All I can do is put my hand over my mouth.

5I have spoken once, now I will not answer;

Oh, yes, twice, but I will do no further.

**42** 1This was the answer Job gave to Yahweh:

2—I know that you are all powerful;

no plan of yours can be thwarted.

3bI spoke of things I did not understand,

too wonderful for me to know.

5My ears had heard of you,

but now my eyes have seen you.

6Therefore I retract all I have said,

and in dust and ashes I repent.

12Yahweh blessed Job's latter days much more than his earlier ones. He came to own fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-donkeys. 13He was also blessed with seven sons and three daughters. 14The first daughter he named Dove, the second Cinnamon, and the third Bottle of Perfume. 15Nowhere in the land was there found any woman who could compare in beauty with Job's daughters. Their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.

16Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. 17He died old and full of years.

## SIRACH

### *Introduction*

*The prologue written by the Greek translator gives information about the author and epoch.*

*The 'Wisdom of Ben Sirach' was a book that was read so often in the early Church that it got the name and designation of "Ecclesiasticus".*

*The Jews in general, and a portion of the early Church, did not consider this book as canonical, even though it was read in the church.*

*Some Jewish authors make reference to it in the Middle Ages.*

*As the book itself tells us, the author spent his time in studying, teaching and explaining what traditionally was understood as wisdom or good sense or prudence or knowledge. It fosters observation, experience and reflection as a source of knowledge; still the author underlines the value of tradition, the need of prayer.*

**43** 1The pride of the heights above is the clear firmament.

How glorious is the spectacle of the heavens!

2When the sun rises and appears, it proclaims:



—I am your marvelous work, Most High!  
3At noon, it dries up the land;  
who can bear its burning heat?  
4You may stoke a furnace to produce heat,  
but three times greater  
is the heat of the sun burning the mountains,  
and sending out fiery vapors,  
blinding the eyes with its rays.  
5How great is the Lord who made it  
and whose word directs its rapid course!  
6He also made the moon,  
exact in marking the months  
and the passage of time.  
7With its full light gradually decreasing,  
the moon determines and rules over the feast days.  
8The month also takes its name from the moon.  
How marvelously does it increase in its phases,  
providing a signal for the heavenly hosts,  
brightly shining in the expanse of the sky!  
9The bright radiance of the stars  
accounts for the beauty of the sky.  
What a brilliant ornament they are  
for the heights of the Lord!  
10At the command of the All Holy  
they stand as appointed  
and never fail to keep watch.  
11Look at the rainbow and praise  
the One who made it.  
How magnificent it is in splendor!  
12It forms a circle of glory in the sky,  
a bow that is bent by the hands of its Maker.  
13At his order the snow falls  
and lightning strikes according to his decrees.  
14The storerooms of heaven are opened  
and clouds fly away like birds.  
15It is his power that thickens the clouds,  
making them freeze and break into hailstones.  
16a He has only to look and the mountains are shaken;  
17athe voice of his thunder terrifies the earth.  
16bAt his will the south wind blows,  
  
17bas do cyclones and hurricanes from the north.  
18The snow flutters down like birds  
and alights on the ground like locusts.  
The eye marvels at the beauty of its whiteness  
and the mind is amazed to see it fall.  
19He sprinkles frost on the earth like salt;  
it freezes and becomes like thorny spikes.  
20The cold north wind blows

and turns the water into ice.  
Ice forms on all stagnant water  
giving it a freezing coat of armor.  
21He wears down the mountains  
and scorches the desert,  
withering the green grass as if by fire.  
22A mist is a timely remedy,  
and dew after the heat restores it all to life.  
23According to his plan he stilled  
the great deep and planted islands in it.  
24Those who cross the seas tell of its dangers,  
and we listen in astonishment to what they relate:  
25It is all about strange and marvelous adventures  
with marine animals and monsters of all kinds.  
26Thanks be to God, all turns out well  
and everything is held together by his word.  
27We shall not give further examples;  
one last word: He is everything.  
28Where shall we find the strength to glorify him?  
For he is the Mighty One, greater than all his works.

## OTHER BOOKS

### JONAH

#### *Introduction*

*The book of Jonah is so brief, so well known and so misunderstood; and it has given rise to many false interpretations. Some, naively, read it as history, and of course they find it unbelievable and even ridiculous.*

*Others include it among the Prophets as if dealing with a personage that really existed.*

*The book of Jonah is a novel about adventures, completely fictitious, with a religious, moralizing intention: its thesis is to show God's goodness, who is worried about each person's life. It is a God that threatens and announces his punishments with the aim of not having to punish anybody. Jonah is his speaker, a person who is not worthy of that mission, neither, in his mediocrity, capable of understanding the forgiving heart of God.*

**1**The word of Yahweh came to Jonah, son of Amittai:

2—Go to Nineveh, the great city, and preach against it, because I have known its wickedness.

3But Jonah decided to flee from Yahweh and go to Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, found a ship bound for Tarshish, and paid the fare. Then he boarded it and went into the hold of the ship, journeying with them to Tarshish, far away from Yahweh.

4Yahweh stirred up a storm wind on the sea, so there was a sea tempest, which threatened to destroy the ship.

5The sailors took fright, and each cried out to his own god. To lighten the ship, they threw its cargo into the sea.

6Meanwhile Jonah had gone into the hold of the ship, where he lay fast asleep. The captain came upon him and said:

—How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god. Perhaps he will be mindful of us and will not allow us to die here.

7The sailors said to each other:

—Let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this disaster.

So they did, and the lot fell on Jonah.

8They questioned him:

—So you are responsible for this evil that has come upon us? Tell us where you are from. What is your country, your nationality?

9And Jonah told them his story:

—I am a Hebrew and I worship Yahweh, God of heaven who made the sea and the land.

10As they knew that he was fleeing from Yahweh, the sailors were seized with great fear and said to him:

—What a terrible thing have you done!

11—What shall we do with you now to make the sea calm down?

The sea was growing more and more agitated.

12He said to them:

—Pick me up and throw me into the sea. It will quiet down, for I know it is because of me that this storm has come.

13The sailors, however, still did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea had grown much rougher than before. 14Then they called on Yahweh:

—O Yahweh, do not let us perish for taking this man's life. Do not hold us guilty of shedding innocent blood. For you, Yahweh, have done this as you have thought right.

15They took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm again. 16At this the men were seized with great fear of Yahweh. They offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows to him.

**2** 1Yahweh provided a large fish which swallowed Jonah. He remained in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

2From the belly of the fish Jonah prayed to Yahweh, his God:

3—In my distress I cried to Yahweh,  
and he answered me;

from the belly of the netherworld  
you heard my voice when I called.

4You cast me into the abyss,  
into the very heart of the sea,  
and the currents swirled about me;  
all your breakers and your billows  
passed over engulfing me.

5Then I thought:

I have been cast out from your presence,  
but I keep on looking to your holy Temple.

6The waters engulfed me up to my throat;  
all around me was the abyss;  
wrapped about my head were seaweeds.

7I went down to the roots of the mountains,  
the bars of the netherworld closed upon me,  
but you brought my life up from the pit,  
Yahweh, my God.

8When my soul was fainting within me,  
I remembered Yahweh,  
and before you rose my prayer  
up to your holy Temple.

9Those who worship worthless idols  
lose your grace

10but I, with songs of praise,  
will offer to you sacrifices.

What I have vowed, I will make good—  
deliverance comes from Yahweh, my God.

11Then Yahweh gave his command to the fish, and it belched out Jonah onto dry land.

**3** 1The word of Yahweh came to Jonah a second time:

2—Go to Nineveh, the great city, and announce to them the message I give you.

3In obedience to the word of Yahweh, Jonah went to Nineveh. It was a very large city, and it took three days just to cross it. 4So Jonah walked a single day's journey and began proclaiming:

—Forty days more and Nineveh will be destroyed.

5The people of the city believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

6Upon hearing the news, the king of Nineveh got up from his throne, took off his royal robe, put on sackcloth and sat down in ashes. 7He issued a proclamation throughout Nineveh:

—By the decree of the king and his nobles, no people or beasts, herd or flock, will taste anything; neither will they eat nor drink. 8But let people and beasts be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call aloud to God, turn from his evil ways and violence. 9Who knows? God may yet relent, turn from his fierce anger and spare us.

10When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened upon them.

**4** 1But Jonah was greatly displeased at this, and he was indignant. 2He prayed to Yahweh and said:

—O Yahweh, is this not what I said when I was yet in my own country? This is why I fled to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and full of love, and you relent from imposing terrible punishment. 3I beseech you now, Yahweh, to take my life, for now it is better for me to die than to live.

4But Yahweh replied:

—What right have you to be angry?

5Jonah then left the city. He went to a place east of it, built himself a shelter and sat under its shade to wait and see what would happen to Nineveh. 6Then Yahweh God provided a castor—oil plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade over his head and to ease his discomfort. Jonah was very happy about the plant.

7But the next day, at dawn, God sent a worm which attacked the plant and made it wither. 8When the sun rose, God sent a scorching east wind; the sun blazed down upon Jonah's head, and he grew faint. His death wish returned and he said:

—It is better for me to die than to live.

9Then God asked Jonah:

—Do you have a right to be angry about the castor oil plant?

Jonah answered:

—I am right to be angry enough to wish to die.

10Yahweh said:

—You are concerned about a plant which cost you no labor to make it grow. Overnight it sprang up, and overnight it perished. 11But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot distinguish right from left and they have many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned for such a great city?