

# THE WISDOM of SOLOMON



## Read Wisdom 1:1–15

The book of Wisdom is a combination of Greek philosophy and Jewish religion. The prologue, 1:1–15, is an exhortation to justice, which brings immortality. At times the author speaks in the person of Solomon. The section is addressed to the author's Jewish audience who are blasphemers and will be condemned. The introductory verses are a restatement of "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Wisdom is a personification of the functions of God. It is also defined as a cosmic power that pervades the universe. The word "disciplined" refers to religious construction. The term "grumbings" refers to the rebellion in the desert during the Exodus. Hades, the "abode of the dead" in Greek, is the equivalent of the Hebrew Sheol.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, as well as on the meaning of immortality.

**Pray:** Pray for a keen awareness of the relationship between God and the soul.

**Act:** Act in accordance with the righteous, not the wicked.

## Exhortation to Uprightness

- 1** Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth, think of the Lord in goodness and seek him with sincerity of heart;
- 2** because he is found by those who do not put him to the test, and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him.
- 3** For perverse thoughts separate people from God, and when his power is tested, it exposes the foolish;
- 4** because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin.
- 5** For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit, and will leave foolish thoughts behind, and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness.
- 6** For wisdom is a kindly spirit, but will not free blasphemers from the guilt of their words; because God is witness of their inmost feelings, and a true observer of their hearts, and a hearer of their tongues.
- 7** Because the spirit of the Lord has filled the world, and that which holds all things together knows what is said,
- 8** therefore those who utter unrighteous things will not escape notice, and justice, when it punishes, will not pass them by.

**Read Wisdom 1:16—2:24**

The author presents the views of his opponents and then denounces them. The destiny of the just is immortality. The word “spark” is a Greek reference to the soul as a fiery principle. Much of the book of Wisdom draws significantly from the prophet Isaiah (chapters 52–66), with emphasis on the fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13—53:12). References to “death” concern spiritual death, separation from God. Solomon refutes the opponent’s arguments, which assert that death is the end. It is God who provides the theological basis for belief in immortality, because the ultimate purpose of our existence is immortality, that is, incorruption.

**Reflect:** The righteous should expect to share in the destiny of the servants of God. In the future life they will be vindicated.

**Pray:** Pray that in the spirit of the Servant in Isaiah, we may be able to endure the attacks of the wicked.

**Act:** Act with an awareness that God is always on the side of the righteous.

- 9 For inquiry will be made into the counsels of the ungodly,  
and a report of their words will come to the Lord,  
to convict them of their lawless deeds;
- 10 because a jealous ear hears all things,  
and the sound of grumbling does not go unheard.
- 11 Beware then of useless grumbling,  
and keep your tongue from slander;  
because no secret word is without result,<sup>a</sup>  
and a lying mouth destroys the soul.
- 12 Do not invite death by the error of your life,  
or bring on destruction by the works of your hands;
- 13 because God did not make death,  
and he does not delight in the death of the living.
- 14 For he created all things so that they might exist;  
the generative forces<sup>b</sup> of the world are wholesome,  
and there is no destructive poison in them,  
and the dominion<sup>c</sup> of Hades is not on earth.
- 15 For righteousness is immortal.

**Life as the Ungodly See It**

- 16 But the ungodly by their words and deeds summoned death;<sup>d</sup>  
considering him a friend, they pined away  
and made a covenant with him,  
because they are fit to belong to his company.
- 2** For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves,  
“Short and sorrowful is our life,  
and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end,  
and no one has been known to return from Hades.
- 2 For we were born by mere chance,  
and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been,  
for the breath in our nostrils is smoke,  
and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts;
- 3 when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes,  
and the spirit will dissolve like empty air.
- 4 Our name will be forgotten in time,

<sup>a</sup> Or will go unpunished

<sup>b</sup> Or the creatures

<sup>c</sup> Or palace

<sup>d</sup> Gk him

- and no one will remember our works;  
 our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud,  
 and be scattered like mist that is chased by the rays of the sun and overcome by its heat.
- 5 For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow,  
 and there is no return from our death,  
 because it is sealed up and no one turns back.
- 6 “Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist,  
 and make use of the creation to the full as in youth.
- 7 Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes,  
 and let no flower of spring pass us by.
- 8 Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither.
- 9 Let none of us fail to share in our revelry;  
 everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment,  
 because this is our portion, and this our lot.
- 10 Let us oppress the righteous poor man;  
 let us not spare the widow or regard the gray hairs of the aged.
- 11 But let our might be our law of right,  
 for what is weak proves itself to be useless.
- 12 “Let us lie in wait for the righteous man,  
 because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions;  
 he reproaches us for sins against the law,  
 and accuses us of sins against our training.
- 13 He professes to have knowledge of God,

- and calls himself a child<sup>a</sup> of the Lord.
- 14 He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;  
 15 the very sight of him is a burden to us,  
 because his manner of life is unlike that of others,  
 and his ways are strange.
- 16 We are considered by him as something base,  
 and he avoids our ways as unclean;  
 he calls the last end of the righteous happy,  
 and boasts that God is his father.
- 17 Let us see if his words are true,  
 and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;  
 18 for if the righteous man is God’s child, he will help him,  
 and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.
- 19 Let us test him with insult and torture,  
 so that we may find out how gentle he is,  
 and make trial of his forbearance.
- 20 Let us condemn him to a shameful death,  
 for, according to what he says, he will be protected.”

### Error of the Wicked

- 21 Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray,  
 for their wickedness blinded them,  
 22 and they did not know the secret purposes of God,  
 nor hoped for the wages of holiness,  
 nor discerned the prize for blameless souls;
- 23 for God created us for incorruption,  
 and made us in the image of his own eternity,<sup>b</sup>
- 24 but through the devil’s envy death entered the world,  
 and those who belong to his company experience it.

<sup>a</sup> Or *servant*

<sup>b</sup> Other ancient authorities read *nature*

**Read Wisdom 3:1—4:19**

This section of Wisdom concerns the destiny of the righteous and the ungodly. The writer proclaims the fortunate state of the blessed and contrasts it with the miserable state of the wicked. While the writer makes use of the concept of the immortality of the soul, there is no indication of the concept of bodily resurrection in Wisdom. Immortality is the reward of the just. The term “visitation” (3:7) refers to a divine intervention. The “eunuch” (v. 14; see Isa 56:3–5) will take his rightful place in the heavenly temple. The memory of the wicked will perish; the recollection of the virtuous will enjoy eternal life. To live into old age, according to the book of Wisdom, is not a sure sign of God’s blessing.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the importance of quality of life rather than its quantity.

**Pray:** May we always be counted among the righteous.

**Act:** Act with due respect for human beings who may be physically disabled or handicapped.

**The Destiny of the Righteous**

- 3** But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,  
and no torment will ever touch them.  
2 In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,  
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,  
3 and their going from us to be their destruction;  
but they are at peace.  
4 For though in the sight of others they were punished,  
their hope is full of immortality.  
5 Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good,  
because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;  
6 like gold in the furnace he tried them,  
and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them.  
7 In the time of their visitation they will shine forth,  
and will run like sparks through the stubble.  
8 They will govern nations and rule over peoples,  
and the Lord will reign over them forever.  
9 Those who trust in him will understand truth,  
and the faithful will abide with him in love,  
because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones,  
and he watches over his elect.<sup>a</sup>

**The Destiny of the Ungodly**

- 10 But the ungodly will be punished as their reasoning deserves,  
those who disregarded the righteous<sup>b</sup>  
and rebelled against the Lord;  
11 for those who despise wisdom and instruction  
are miserable.  
Their hope is vain, their labors are unprofitable,  
and their works are useless.  
12 Their wives are foolish, and their children evil;  
13 their offspring are accursed.

**On Childlessness**

- For blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled,  
who has not entered into a sinful union;  
she will have fruit when God examines souls.  
14 Blessed also is the eunuch whose hands have done no lawless deed,

<sup>a</sup> Text of this line uncertain; omitted by some ancient authorities. Compare 4.15

<sup>b</sup> Or *what is right*

- and who has not devised wicked things against the Lord;  
for special favor will be shown him for his faithfulness,  
and a place of great delight in the temple of the Lord.
- 15 For the fruit of good labors is renowned,  
and the root of understanding does not fail.
- 16 But children of adulterers will not come to maturity,  
and the offspring of an unlawful union will perish.
- 17 Even if they live long they will be held of no account,  
and finally their old age will be without honor.
- 18 If they die young, they will have no hope  
and no consolation on the day of judgment.
- 19 For the end of an unrighteous generation is grievous.

- 4** Better than this is childlessness with virtue,  
for in the memory of virtue<sup>a</sup> is immortality,  
because it is known both by God and by mortals.
- 2 When it is present, people imitate<sup>b</sup> it,  
and they long for it when it has gone;  
throughout all time it marches, crowned in triumph,  
victor in the contest for prizes that are undefiled.
- 3 But the prolific brood of the ungodly will be of no use,  
and none of their illegitimate seedlings will strike a deep root  
or take a firm hold.
- 4 For even if they put forth boughs for a while,  
standing insecurely they will be shaken by the wind,  
and by the violence of the winds they will be uprooted.
- 5 The branches will be broken off before they come to maturity,  
and their fruit will be useless,  
not ripe enough to eat, and good for nothing.
- 6 For children born of unlawful unions are witnesses of evil against their parents  
when God examines them.<sup>c</sup>
- 7 But the righteous, though they die early, will be at rest.
- 8 For old age is not honored for length of time,  
or measured by number of years;
- 9 but understanding is gray hair for anyone,  
and a blameless life is ripe old age.
- 10 There were some who pleased God and were loved by him,  
and while living among sinners were taken up.
- 11 They were caught up so that evil might not change their understanding  
or guile deceive their souls.

<sup>a</sup> Gk *it*

<sup>b</sup> Other ancient authorities read *honor*

<sup>c</sup> Gk *at their examination*

- 12 For the fascination of wickedness  
obscures what is good,  
and roving desire perverts the  
innocent mind.
- 13 Being perfected in a short time,  
they fulfilled long years;  
14 for their souls were pleasing to the  
Lord,  
therefore he took them quickly  
from the midst of wickedness.
- 15 Yet the peoples saw and did not  
understand,  
or take such a thing to heart,  
that God's grace and mercy are  
with his elect,  
and that he watches over his holy  
ones.

### The Triumph of the Righteous

- 16 The righteous who have died will  
condemn the ungodly who are  
living,  
and youth that is quickly  
perfected<sup>a</sup> will condemn the  
prolonged old age of the  
unrighteous.

- 17 For they will see the end of the wise,  
and will not understand what the  
Lord purposed for them,  
and for what he kept them safe.
- 18 The unrighteous<sup>b</sup> will see, and will  
have contempt for them,  
but the Lord will laugh them to  
scorn.  
After this they will become  
dishonored corpses,  
and an outrage among the dead  
forever;
- 19 because he will dash them  
speechless to the ground,  
and shake them from the  
foundations;  
they will be left utterly dry and  
barren,  
and they will suffer anguish,  
and the memory of them will perish.

### The Final Judgment

- 20 They will come with dread when  
their sins are reckoned up,  
and their lawless deeds will  
convict them to their face.

#### Read Wisdom 4:20—5:23

This section is a tableau of the last judgment. The righteous and their persecutors will confront one another at the final judgment. On the last day the just will be rewarded and the wicked punished.

**Reflect:** Compare Wisdom's description of the divine warrior with Isaiah 59:17, where Yahweh delivers the upright and punishes the wicked.

**Pray:** Pray that on the last day, we ascend to the heavenly court.

**Act:** In the course of life, have an awareness of accountability.

- 5** Then the righteous will stand with great  
confidence  
in the presence of those who have oppressed  
them  
and those who make light of their labors.
- 2 When the unrighteous<sup>c</sup> see them, they will be  
shaken with dreadful fear,  
and they will be amazed at the unexpected  
salvation of the righteous.
- 3 They will speak to one another in repentance,  
and in anguish of spirit they will groan, and say,
- 4 "These are persons whom we once held in  
derision  
and made a byword of reproach—fools that  
we were!  
We thought that their lives were madness  
and that their end was without honor.
- 5 Why have they been numbered among the  
children of God?  
And why is their lot among the saints?
- 6 So it was we who strayed from the way of truth,  
and the light of righteousness did not shine  
on us,  
and the sun did not rise upon us.

<sup>a</sup> Or ended

<sup>b</sup> Gk They

<sup>c</sup> Gk they

- 7 We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction, and we journeyed through trackless deserts, but the way of the Lord we have not known.
- 8 What has our arrogance profited us? And what good has our boasted wealth brought us?
- 9 “All those things have vanished like a shadow, and like a rumor that passes by; like a ship that sails through the billowy water, and when it has passed no trace can be found, no track of its keel in the waves; like a bird that flies through the air, no evidence of its passage is found; the light air, lashed by the beat of its pinions and pierced by the force of its rushing flight, is traversed by the movement of its wings, and afterward no sign of its coming is found there; like an arrow that is shot at a target, the air, thus divided, comes together at once, so that no one knows its pathway.
- 13 So we also, as soon as we were born, ceased to be, and we had no sign of virtue to show, but were consumed in our wickedness.”
- 14 Because the hope of the ungodly is like thistle-down<sup>a</sup> carried by the wind, and like a light frost<sup>b</sup> driven away by a storm; it is dispersed like smoke before the wind,

and it passes like the remembrance of a guest who stays but a day.

### The Reward of the Righteous

- 15 But the righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them.
- 16 Therefore they will receive a glorious crown and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord, because with his right hand he will cover them, and with his arm he will shield them.
- 17 The Lord<sup>c</sup> will take his zeal as his whole armor, and will arm all creation to repel<sup>d</sup> his enemies;
- 18 he will put on righteousness as a breastplate, and wear impartial justice as a helmet;
- 19 he will take holiness as an invincible shield,
- 20 and sharpen stern wrath for a sword, and creation will join with him to fight against his frenzied foes.
- 21 Shafts of lightning will fly with true aim, and will leap from the clouds to the target, as from a well-drawn bow,
- 22 and hailstones full of wrath will be hurled as from a catapult; the water of the sea will rage against them, and rivers will relentlessly overwhelm them;
- 23 a mighty wind will rise against them, and like a tempest it will winnow them away. Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth, and evildoing will overturn the thrones of rulers.

<sup>a</sup> Other ancient authorities read *dust*

<sup>b</sup> Other ancient authorities read *spider's web*

<sup>c</sup> *Gk He*

<sup>d</sup> *Or punish*

### Read Wisdom 6

Here we find Solomon's admonition to rulers exhorting them to seek wisdom. In chapters 6 through 9 of Wisdom, the author tries to impart some clear ideas of what wisdom truly means. It is not possible to succeed in life unless one enters into a relationship with wisdom, and it is the possession of wisdom that ultimately leads to immortality. Notice that in 6:12 wisdom is personified as a female figure. The vocation of the wise is to be the salvation of the world.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the implications of Solomon's description of wisdom.

**Pray:** Pray that we may be attentive to Solomon's instruction about the crucial importance of wisdom.

**Act:** In fulfillment of the vocation of the wise, may we have a positive influence on the communities in which we live.

### Kings Should Seek Wisdom

- 6** Listen therefore, O kings, and understand;  
learn, O judges of the ends of the earth.
- 2** Give ear, you that rule over multitudes,  
and boast of many nations.
- 3** For your dominion was given you from the Lord,  
and your sovereignty from the Most High;  
he will search out your works and inquire into  
your plans.
- 4** Because as servants of his kingdom you did  
not rule rightly,  
or keep the law,  
or walk according to the purpose of God,  
**5** he will come upon you terribly and swiftly,  
because severe judgment falls on those in  
high places.
- 6** For the lowliest may be pardoned in mercy,  
but the mighty will be mightily tested.
- 7** For the Lord of all will not stand in awe of  
anyone,  
or show deference to greatness;  
because he himself made both small and great,  
and he takes thought for all alike.
- 8** But a strict inquiry is in store for the mighty.
- 9** To you then, O monarchs, my words are  
directed,  
so that you may learn wisdom and not  
transgress.
- 10** For they will be made holy who observe holy  
things in holiness,  
and those who have been taught them will find  
a defense.
- 11** Therefore set your desire on my words;  
long for them, and you will be instructed.

### Description of Wisdom

- 12** Wisdom is radiant and unfading,  
and she is easily discerned by those who love  
her,  
and is found by those who seek her.
- 13** She hastens to make herself known to those  
who desire her.
- 14** One who rises early to seek her will have no  
difficulty,  
for she will be found sitting at the gate.
- 15** To fix one's thought on her is perfect  
understanding,  
and one who is vigilant on her account will  
soon be free from care,
- 16** because she goes about seeking  
those worthy of her,



- and she graciously appears to them in their paths,  
and meets them in every thought.
- 17 The beginning of wisdom<sup>a</sup> is the most sincere desire for instruction,  
and concern for instruction is love of her,
- 18 and love of her is the keeping of her laws,  
and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality,
- 19 and immortality brings one near to God;
- 20 so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.
- 21 Therefore if you delight in thrones and scepters, O monarchs over the peoples,  
honor wisdom, so that you may reign forever.
- 22 I will tell you what wisdom is and how she came to be,  
and I will hide no secrets from you,  
but I will trace her course from the beginning of creation,  
and make knowledge of her clear,  
and I will not pass by the truth;
- 23 nor will I travel in the company of sickly envy,  
for envy<sup>b</sup> does not associate with wisdom.
- 24 The multitude of the wise is the salvation of the world,  
and a sensible king is the stability of any people.
- 25 Therefore be instructed by my words, and you will profit.

#### Solomon Like Other Mortals

- 7** I also am mortal, like everyone else,  
a descendant of the first-formed child of earth;  
and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh,
- 2 within the period of ten months, compacted with blood,  
from the seed of a man and the pleasure of marriage.
- 3 And when I was born, I began to breathe the common air,  
and fell upon the kindred earth;  
my first sound was a cry, as is true of all.
- 4 I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths.
- 5 For no king has had a different beginning of existence;
- 6 there is for all one entrance into life, and one way out.

#### Solomon's Respect for Wisdom

- 7 Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;  
I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.
- 8 I preferred her to scepters and thrones,  
and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her.
- 9 Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem,  
because all gold is but a little sand in her sight,  
and silver will be accounted as clay before her.

<sup>a</sup> Gk *Her beginning*

<sup>b</sup> Gk *this*

**Read Wisdom 7:1—8:1**

Despite Solomon's lofty status, he shares the limitations of all mortals. In the course of his speech, Solomon describes the attributes and benefits of wisdom. The description of Solomon's prayer for wisdom is based on 1 Kings 3:3–14. It is in this famous prayer that he asks God for "a listening heart" to enable him to govern his kingdom. The concept of wisdom is all-encompassing, including the craftsman's skill. Divine wisdom is also identified with science and philosophy. Note that in Wisdom 7:22–23 wisdom is described in a series of twenty-one epithets taken from Greek philosophy. The number twenty-one connotes absolute perfection.

**Reflect:** Kings are not to be deified. They are no different from ordinary humans.

**Pray:** Pray for "an understanding mind" so that you too may be able to deal effectively with the members of your community.

**Act:** Whether one is a craftsman, philosopher, or scientist, there is ample opportunity to share wisdom.

- 10 I loved her more than health and beauty,  
and I chose to have her rather than light,  
because her radiance never ceases.
- 11 All good things came to me along with her,  
and in her hands uncounted wealth.
- 12 I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads  
them;  
but I did not know that she was their mother.
- 13 I learned without guile and I impart without  
grudging;  
I do not hide her wealth,
- 14 for it is an unfailing treasure for mortals;  
those who get it obtain friendship with God,  
commended for the gifts that come from  
instruction.

**Solomon Prays for Wisdom**

- 15 May God grant me to speak with judgment,  
and to have thoughts worthy of what I have  
received;  
for he is the guide even of wisdom  
and the corrector of the wise.
- 16 For both we and our words are in his hand,  
as are all understanding and skill in crafts.
- 17 For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge  
of what exists,  
to know the structure of the world and the  
activity of the elements;
- 18 the beginning and end and middle of times,  
the alternations of the solstices and the  
changes of the seasons,
- 19 the cycles of the year and the constellations of  
the stars,
- 20 the natures of animals and the tempers of wild  
animals,  
the powers of spirits<sup>a</sup> and the thoughts of  
human beings,  
the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots;
- 21 I learned both what is secret and what is  
manifest,
- 22 for wisdom, the fashioner of all things,  
taught me.

**The Nature of Wisdom**

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,  
unique, manifold, subtle,  
mobile, clear, unpolluted,  
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,  
irresistible, <sup>23</sup> beneficent, humane,  
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,  
all-powerful, overseeing all,

<sup>a</sup> Or winds

- and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.
- 24 For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.
- 25 For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
- 26 For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness.
- 27 Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets;
- 28 for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.
- 29 She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
- 30 for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

### Read Wisdom 8:2–21

In this section we read about Solomon's love for wisdom and some of the characteristics of God's gift of wisdom. Wisdom is described as God's female consort, and Solomon speaks of her as a bride whom he marries and takes into his home. Note in verse 7 the mention of the four cardinal virtues: self-control, prudence, justice, and courage. Regardless of the endowments that people may have in mind, body, and spirit, this will not guarantee for them the possession of wisdom. Wisdom is a gift from God.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the cardinal virtues and their place in your life.

**Pray:** May we appreciate the depth of wisdom as described by Solomon.

**Act:** Act with self-control, prudence, justice, and courage.

**8** She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.

### Solomon's Love for Wisdom

- 2 I loved her and sought her from my youth; I desired to take her for my bride, and became enamored of her beauty.
- 3 She glorifies her noble birth by living with God, and the Lord of all loves her.
- 4 For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works.
- 5 If riches are a desirable possession in life, what is richer than wisdom, the active cause of all things?
- 6 And if understanding is effective, who more than she is fashioner of what exists?
- 7 And if anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for mortals than these.
- 8 And if anyone longs for wide experience, she knows the things of old, and infers the things to come; she understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles; she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and times.

**Wisdom Indispensible to Rulers**

- 9 Therefore I determined to take her  
to live with me,  
knowing that she would give me  
good counsel  
and encouragement in cares and  
grief.
- 10 Because of her I shall have glory  
among the multitudes  
and honor in the presence of the  
elders, though I am young.
- 11 I shall be found keen in judgment,  
and in the sight of rulers I shall be  
admired.
- 12 When I am silent they will wait for me,  
and when I speak they will give heed;  
if I speak at greater length,  
they will put their hands on their  
mouths.
- 13 Because of her I shall have  
immortality,  
and leave an everlasting  
remembrance to those who  
come after me.
- 14 I shall govern peoples,  
and nations will be subject to me;
- 15 dread monarchs will be afraid of  
me when they hear of me;  
among the people I shall show  
myself capable, and  
courageous in war.
- 16 When I enter my house, I shall find  
rest with her;  
for companionship with her has no  
bitterness,  
and life with her has no pain, but  
gladness and joy.
- 17 When I considered these things  
inwardly,  
and pondered in my heart  
that in kinship with wisdom there  
is immortality,
- 18 and in friendship with her, pure  
delight,  
and in the labors of her hands,  
unfailing wealth,  
and in the experience of her  
company, understanding,  
and renown in sharing her words,  
I went about seeking how to get  
her for myself.
- 19 As a child I was naturally gifted,  
and a good soul fell to my lot;
- 20 or rather, being good, I entered an  
undefiled body.
- 21 But I perceived that I would not  
possess wisdom unless God  
gave her to me—  
and it was a mark of insight to  
know whose gift she was—  
so I appealed to the Lord and  
implored him,  
and with my whole heart I said:

**Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom**

- 9** “O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy,  
who have made all things by your word,  
2 and by your wisdom have formed humankind  
to have dominion over the creatures you have  
made,  
3 and rule the world in holiness and  
righteousness,  
and pronounce judgment in uprightness of  
soul,  
4 give me the wisdom that sits by your throne,  
and do not reject me from among your  
servants.  
5 For I am your servant<sup>a</sup> the son of your serving  
girl,  
a man who is weak and short-lived,  
with little understanding of judgment and laws;

<sup>a</sup> Gk *slave*

### Read Wisdom 9

This is the prayer of Solomon. The creative word of God is here identified with wisdom. Without divine help, we can accomplish nothing. In verse 8 the reference is to Mt. Moriah, where Abraham was asked to sacrifice Isaac. "Glory" is a manifestation of God's attributes and power. Human beings are insignificant in the presence of God.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the necessity of divine help in order to accomplish anything.

**Pray:** Our prayers should reflect the humility and sincerity of Solomon's classic prayer.

**Act:** Our actions should always be in conformity with the words of our prayers.

- 6 for even one who is perfect among human beings  
will be regarded as nothing without the wisdom that comes from you.
- 7 You have chosen me to be king of your people and to be judge over your sons and daughters.
- 8 You have given command to build a temple on your holy mountain, and an altar in the city of your habitation, a copy of the holy tent that you prepared from the beginning.
- 9 With you is wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments.
- 10 Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labor at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you.
- 11 For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory.
- 12 Then my works will be acceptable, and I shall judge your people justly, and shall be worthy of the throne<sup>a</sup> of my father.
- 13 For who can learn the counsel of God? Or who can discern what the Lord wills?
- 14 For the reasoning of mortals is worthless, and our designs are likely to fail;
- 15 for a perishable body weighs down the soul, and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful<sup>b</sup> mind.
- 16 We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labor; but who has traced out what is in the heavens?
- 17 Who has learned your counsel, unless you have given wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?
- 18 And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by wisdom."

### The Work of Wisdom from Adam to Moses

- 10** Wisdom<sup>c</sup> protected the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression,
- 2 and gave him strength to rule all things.
- 3 But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his anger,

<sup>a</sup> Gk thrones

<sup>b</sup> Or anxious

<sup>c</sup> Gk She

**Read Wisdom 10:1—11:14**

The remaining chapters of the book of Wisdom use the biblical history of salvation to illustrate Solomon's understanding of wisdom. Note that in referencing biblical persons, individual names are never used. Names are replaced by generic titles. In 10:6, "Five Cities" refers to the cities of the plain: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar. This section is actually a homily on the exodus. The second half of the book of Wisdom, which emphasizes God's dealings with Israel and Egypt, begins in chapter 11.

**Reflect:** Just as wisdom led Israel through the desert, we too can depend upon wisdom to guide us in our journey through life.

**Pray:** Pray that the biblical figures, unnamed, may furnish us with an example of wisdom.

**Act:** Act with the same awareness of wisdom on your own exodus.

- he perished because in rage he killed his brother.
- 4 When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood.
- 5 Wisdom<sup>a</sup> also, when the nations in wicked agreement had been put to confusion, recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God, and kept him strong in the face of his compassion for his child.
- 6 Wisdom<sup>a</sup> rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were perishing; he escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities.<sup>b</sup>
- 7 Evidence of their wickedness still remains: a continually smoking wasteland, plants bearing fruit that does not ripen, and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving soul.
- 8 For because they passed wisdom by, they not only were hindered from recognizing the good, but also left for humankind a reminder of their folly, so that their failures could never go unnoticed.
- 9 Wisdom rescued from troubles those who served her.
- 10 When a righteous man fled from his brother's wrath, she guided him on straight paths; she showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of holy things; she prospered him in his labors, and increased the fruit of his toil.
- 11 When his oppressors were covetous, she stood by him and made him rich.
- 12 She protected him from his enemies, and kept him safe from those who lay in wait for him; in his arduous contest she gave him the victory, so that he might learn that godliness is more powerful than anything else.
- 13 When a righteous man was sold, wisdom<sup>c</sup> did not desert him, but delivered him from sin. She descended with him into the dungeon, and when he was in prison she did not leave him,

<sup>a</sup> Gk *She*

<sup>b</sup> Or *on Pentapolis*

<sup>c</sup> Gk *she*

until she brought him the scepter  
of a kingdom  
and authority over his masters.  
Those who accused him she  
showed to be false,  
and she gave him everlasting  
honor.

### Wisdom Led the Israelites out of Egypt

- <sup>15</sup> A holy people and blameless race  
wisdom delivered from a nation of  
oppressors.  
<sup>16</sup> She entered the soul of a servant  
of the Lord,  
and withstood dread kings with  
wonders and signs.  
<sup>17</sup> She gave to holy people the  
reward of their labors;  
she guided them along a  
marvelous way,

- and became a shelter to them by  
day,  
and a starry flame through the  
night.  
<sup>18</sup> She brought them over the Red  
Sea,  
and led them through deep waters;  
<sup>19</sup> but she drowned their enemies,  
and cast them up from the depth  
of the sea.  
<sup>20</sup> Therefore the righteous plundered  
the ungodly;  
they sang hymns, O Lord, to your  
holy name,  
and praised with one accord your  
defending hand;  
<sup>21</sup> for wisdom opened the mouths of  
those who were mute,  
and made the tongues of infants  
speak clearly.

### Wisdom Led the Israelites through the Desert

- 11** Wisdom<sup>a</sup> prospered their works by the hand of  
a holy prophet.  
<sup>2</sup> They journeyed through an uninhabited  
wilderness,  
and pitched their tents in untrodden places.  
<sup>3</sup> They withstood their enemies and fought off  
their foes.  
<sup>4</sup> When they were thirsty, they called upon you,  
and water was given them out of flinty rock,  
and from hard stone a remedy for their thirst.  
<sup>5</sup> For through the very things by which their  
enemies were punished,  
they themselves received benefit in their need.  
<sup>6</sup> Instead of the fountain of an ever-flowing river,  
stirred up and defiled with blood  
<sup>7</sup> in rebuke for the decree to kill the infants,  
you gave them abundant water unexpectedly,  
<sup>8</sup> showing by their thirst at that time  
how you punished their enemies.  
<sup>9</sup> For when they were tried, though they were  
being disciplined in mercy,  
they learned how the ungodly were tormented  
when judged in wrath.  
<sup>10</sup> For you tested them as a parent<sup>b</sup> does in  
warning,  
but you examined the ungodly<sup>c</sup> as a stern  
king does in condemnation.  
<sup>11</sup> Whether absent or present, they were equally  
distressed,

<sup>a</sup> Gk She

<sup>b</sup> Gk a father

<sup>c</sup> Gk those

**Read Wisdom 11:15—12:18**

God is merciful because God loves; at the same time God manifests power in judgment. Of chief consideration in this section is the punishment of the wicked, with a focus on the sins of the Canaanites. God uses the same means for helping Israel and punishing the enemy. The slaughter of children refers to the sacrifices to Molech, described in Leviticus 18:21 and 20:2–5.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the fact that we are answerable for our actions; sin has its consequences.

**Pray:** Pray that, with wisdom's help, we may avoid the sins of the Canaanites.

**Act:** Act with understanding toward others, regardless of their human frailty.

- 12 for a twofold grief possessed them,  
and a groaning at the memory of what had  
occurred.
- 13 For when they heard that through their own  
punishments  
the righteous<sup>a</sup> had received benefit, they  
perceived it was the Lord's doing.
- 14 For though they had mockingly rejected him  
who long before had been cast out and  
exposed,  
at the end of the events they marveled at him,  
when they felt thirst in a different way from  
the righteous.

**Punishment of the Wicked**

- 15 In return for their foolish and wicked thoughts,  
which led them astray to worship irrational  
serpents and worthless animals,  
you sent upon them a multitude of irrational  
creatures to punish them,
- 16 so that they might learn that one is punished  
by the very things by which one sins.
- 17 For your all-powerful hand,  
which created the world out of formless  
matter,  
did not lack the means to send upon them a  
multitude of bears, or bold lions,
- 18 or newly-created unknown beasts full of rage,  
or such as breathe out fiery breath,  
or belch forth a thick pall of smoke,  
or flash terrible sparks from their eyes;
- 19 not only could the harm they did destroy  
people,<sup>b</sup>  
but the mere sight of them could kill by fright.
- 20 Even apart from these, people<sup>a</sup> could fall at a  
single breath  
when pursued by justice  
and scattered by the breath of your power.  
But you have arranged all things by measure  
and number and weight.

**God Is Powerful and Merciful**

- 21 For it is always in your power to show great  
strength,  
and who can withstand the might of your arm?
- 22 Because the whole world before you is like a  
speck that tips the scales,  
and like a drop of morning dew that falls on  
the ground.
- 23 But you are merciful to all, for you can do all  
things,

<sup>a</sup> Gk they

<sup>b</sup> Gk them



and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent.  
 24 For you love all things that exist,  
 and detest none of the things that you have made,  
 for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.

25 How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?  
 Or how would anything not called forth by you have been preserved?  
 26 You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love the living.

### Read Wisdom 12:19–27

God's lessons for Israel and the punishment of the Egyptians are summed up in this section. It is consoling to realize that God is both just and lenient. Divine judgment is a model of the goodness and mercy of God toward God's people.

**Reflect:** No one of us is above the wickedness of the Canaanites and the Egyptians.

**Pray:** Pray, lest we consider ourselves above sin.

**Act:** Act with confidence in the kindness and goodness of God.

**12** For your immortal spirit is in all things.  
 2 Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass,  
 and you remind and warn them of the things through which they sin,  
 so that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord.

### The Sins of the Canaanites

- 3 Those who lived long ago in your holy land  
 4 you hated for their detestable practices,  
 their works of sorcery and unholy rites,  
 5 their merciless slaughter<sup>a</sup> of children,  
 and their sacrificial feasting on human flesh and blood.  
 These initiates from the midst of a heathen cult,<sup>b</sup>  
 6 these parents who murder helpless lives,  
 you willed to destroy by the hands of our ancestors,  
 7 so that the land most precious of all to you might receive a worthy colony of the servants<sup>c</sup> of God.  
 8 But even these you spared, since they were but mortals,  
 and sent wasps<sup>d</sup> as forerunners of your army to destroy them little by little,  
 9 though you were not unable to give the ungodly into the hands of the righteous in battle,  
 or to destroy them at one blow by dread wild animals or your stern word.  
 10 But judging them little by little you gave them an opportunity to repent,  
 though you were not unaware that their origin<sup>e</sup> was evil  
 and their wickedness inborn,  
 and that their way of thinking would never change.  
 11 For they were an accursed race from the beginning,

<sup>a</sup> Gk *slaughterers*

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Gk uncertain

<sup>c</sup> Or *children*

<sup>d</sup> Or *hornets*

<sup>e</sup> Or *nature*

and it was not through fear of anyone that you left them unpunished for their sins.

### God Is Sovereign

- 12 For who will say, "What have you done?"  
or will resist your judgment?  
Who will accuse you for the destruction of nations that you made?  
Or who will come before you to plead as an advocate for the unrighteous?
- 13 For neither is there any god besides you, whose care is for all people,<sup>a</sup>  
to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly;
- 14 nor can any king or monarch confront you about those whom you have punished.
- 15 You are righteous and you rule all things righteously,  
deeming it alien to your power to condemn anyone who does not deserve to be punished.
- 16 For your strength is the source of righteousness,  
and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all.
- 17 For you show your strength when people doubt the completeness of your power,  
and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it.<sup>b</sup>
- 18 Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness,  
and with great forbearance you govern us;  
for you have power to act whenever you choose.

### God's Lessons for Israel

- 19 Through such works you have taught your people

that the righteous must be kind,  
and you have filled your children with good hope,  
because you give repentance for sins.

- 20 For if you punished with such great care and indulgence<sup>c</sup> the enemies of your servants<sup>d</sup> and those deserving of death,  
granting them time and opportunity to give up their wickedness,  
21 with what strictness you have judged your children,  
to whose ancestors you gave oaths and covenants full of good promises!
- 22 So while chastening us you scourge our enemies ten thousand times more,  
so that, when we judge, we may meditate upon your goodness,  
and when we are judged, we may expect mercy.

### The Punishment of the Egyptians

- 23 Therefore those who lived unrighteously, in a life of folly,  
you tormented through their own abominations.
- 24 For they went far astray on the paths of error,  
accepting as gods those animals that even their enemies<sup>e</sup> despised;  
they were deceived like foolish infants.
- 25 Therefore, as though to children who cannot reason,  
you sent your judgment to mock them.
- 26 But those who have not heeded the warning of mild rebukes  
will experience the deserved judgment of God.
- 27 For when in their suffering they became incensed

<sup>a</sup> Or all things

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Gk uncertain

<sup>c</sup> Other ancient authorities lack *and indulgence*; others read *and entreaty*

<sup>d</sup> Or children

<sup>e</sup> Gk they

at those creatures that they had  
thought to be gods, being  
punished by means of them,  
they saw and recognized as the

true God the one whom they  
had before refused to know.  
Therefore the utmost  
condemnation came upon them.

### Read Wisdom 13–14

Chapters 13 through 15 are an excursus discussing the foolishness of nature worship. As an example, wooden images are mentioned. These idols are of human origin and at the same time a source of evil. In 14:6, “hope of the world” refers to Noah and his family. In 14:7, “wood” is a reference to Noah’s ark. In 14:21, “the name that ought not to be shared” signifies God, and this name is not to be shared with mortals. In 14:11, “abomination” refers to idolatry. In 14:22, “peace” signifies spiritual and temporal well-being. In short, security and salvation are from God, not from idols, which are the invention of human vanity. Unlike God, idols have not existed from all eternity. They are products of time and, hence, will not endure forever.

**Reflect:** What are the idols in our own lives?

**Pray:** May we avoid the temptation to find security in human creations rather than God.

**Act:** On every occasion in life, we must put our confidence in God, not in idols.

### The Foolishness of Nature Worship

- 13** For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature;  
and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works;
- 2** but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air,  
or the circle of the stars, or turbulent water, or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world.
- 3** If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord,  
for the author of beauty created them.
- 4** And if people<sup>a</sup> were amazed at their power and working,  
let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them.
- 5** For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.
- 6** Yet these people are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him.
- 7** For while they live among his works, they keep searching,  
and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful.
- 8** Yet again, not even they are to be excused;
- 9** for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the world,  
how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?

### The Foolishness of Idolatry

- 10** But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are those who give the name “gods” to the works of human hands,  
gold and silver fashioned with skill,

<sup>a</sup> Gk they

- and likenesses of animals,  
or a useless stone, the work of an  
ancient hand.
- 11 A skilled woodcutter may saw  
down a tree easy to handle  
and skillfully strip off all its bark,  
and then with pleasing workmanship  
make a useful vessel that serves  
life's needs,
- 12 and burn the cast-off pieces of his  
work  
to prepare his food, and eat his fill.
- 13 But a cast-off piece from among  
them, useful for nothing,  
a stick crooked and full of knots,  
he takes and carves with care in  
his leisure,  
and shapes it with skill gained in  
idleness;<sup>a</sup>  
he forms it in the likeness of a  
human being,
- 14 or makes it like some worthless  
animal,  
giving it a coat of red paint and  
coloring its surface red  
and covering every blemish in it  
with paint;
- 15 then he makes a suitable niche  
for it,  
and sets it in the wall, and fastens  
it there with iron.
- 16 He takes thought for it, so that it  
may not fall,  
because he knows that it cannot  
help itself,  
for it is only an image and has  
need of help.
- 17 When he prays about possessions  
and his marriage and  
children,  
he is not ashamed to address a  
lifeless thing.
- 18 For health he appeals to a thing  
that is weak;  
for life he prays to a thing that is  
dead;  
for aid he entreats a thing that is  
utterly inexperienced;  
for a prosperous journey, a thing  
that cannot take a step;
- 19 for money-making and work and  
success with his hands  
he asks strength of a thing whose  
hands have no strength.

### Folly of a Navigator Praying to an Idol

- 14** Again, one preparing to sail and about to  
voyage over raging waves  
calls upon a piece of wood more fragile than  
the ship that carries him.
- 2 For it was desire for gain that planned that  
vessel,  
and wisdom was the artisan who built it;
- 3 but it is your providence, O Father, that steers  
its course,  
because you have given it a path in the sea,  
and a safe way through the waves,
- 4 showing that you can save from every danger,  
so that even a person who lacks skill may put  
to sea.
- 5 It is your will that works of your wisdom  
should not be without effect;  
therefore people trust their lives even to the  
smallest piece of wood,  
and passing through the billows on a raft they  
come safely to land.
- 6 For even in the beginning, when arrogant  
giants were perishing,

<sup>a</sup> Other ancient authorities read *with intelligent skill*

- the hope of the world took refuge  
on a raft,  
and guided by your hand left to  
the world the seed of a new  
generation.
- 7 For blessed is the wood by which  
righteousness comes.
- 8 But the idol made with hands is  
accursed, and so is the one  
who made it—  
he for having made it, and the  
perishable thing because it  
was named a god.
- 9 For equally hateful to God are the  
ungodly and their ungodliness;
- 10 for what was done will be punished  
together with the one who  
did it.
- 11 Therefore there will be a visitation  
also upon the heathen idols,  
because, though part of what God  
created, they became an  
abomination,  
snares for human souls  
and a trap for the feet of the foolish.
- 16 Then the ungodly custom, grown  
strong with time, was kept as  
a law,  
and at the command of monarchs  
carved images were worshiped.
- 17 When people could not honor  
monarchs<sup>a</sup> in their presence,  
since they lived at a distance,  
they imagined their appearance far  
away,  
and made a visible image of the  
king whom they honored,  
so that by their zeal they might  
flatter the absent one as  
though present.
- 18 Then the ambition of the artisan  
impelled  
even those who did not know the  
king to intensify their worship.
- 19 For he, perhaps wishing to please  
his ruler,  
skillfully forced the likeness to  
take more beautiful form,
- 20 and the multitude, attracted by the  
charm of his work,  
now regarded as an object of  
worship the one whom shortly  
before they had honored as a  
human being.
- 21 And this became a hidden trap for  
humankind,  
because people, in bondage to  
misfortune or to royal authority,  
bestowed on objects of stone or  
wood the name that ought not  
to be shared.
- 22 Then it was not enough for them  
to err about the knowledge of  
God,  
but though living in great strife due  
to ignorance,  
they call such great evils peace.
- 23 For whether they kill children in  
their initiations, or celebrate  
secret mysteries,  
or hold frenzied revels with strange  
customs,

### The Origin and Evils of Idolatry

- 12 For the idea of making idols was  
the beginning of fornication,  
and the invention of them was the  
corruption of life;
- 13 for they did not exist from the  
beginning,  
nor will they last forever.
- 14 For through human vanity they  
entered the world,  
and therefore their speedy end has  
been planned.
- 15 For a father, consumed with grief  
at an untimely bereavement,  
made an image of his child, who  
had been suddenly taken from  
him;  
he now honored as a god what  
was once a dead human being,  
and handed on to his dependents  
secret rites and initiations.

<sup>a</sup> Gk *them*

- 24 they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery,
- 25 and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury,
- 26 confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favors, defiling of souls, sexual perversion, disorder in marriages, adultery, and debauchery.
- 27 For the worship of idols not to be named is the beginning and cause and end of every evil.
- 28 For their worshipers<sup>a</sup> either rave in exultation,

- or prophecy lies, or live unrighteously, or readily commit perjury;
- 29 for because they trust in lifeless idols they swear wicked oaths and expect to suffer no harm.
- 30 But just penalties will overtake them on two counts: because they thought wrongly about God in devoting themselves to idols, and because in deceit they swore unrighteously through contempt for holiness.
- 31 For it is not the power of the things by which people swear,<sup>b</sup> but the just penalty for those who sin, that always pursues the transgression of the unrighteous.

### Read Wisdom 15

This section discusses the benefits of worshiping the true God, who is “kind and true, patient, and ruling all things in mercy” (see Ex 34:6). Idols are counterfeit goods. Because they are often glazed and gilded, it has been said that idolatry is a lucrative fraud. What distinguished Egyptian idolatry was the worship of animal gods, a practice that was denounced by the Romans as well as by the Jews. In summary, it is clear that the fabrication of idols is both useless and sinful.

**Reflect:** Compare Wisdom 15:8 with Luke 12:20.

**Pray:** Pray that God may keep us from confusing idols with God.

**Act:** In our relations with others, let us never make idols of them.

### Benefits of Worshiping the True God

- 15** But you, our God, are kind and true, patient, and ruling all things<sup>c</sup> in mercy.
- 2 For even if we sin we are yours, knowing your power; but we will not sin, because we know that you acknowledge us as yours.
- 3 For to know you is complete righteousness, and to know your power is the root of immortality.
- 4 For neither has the evil intent of human art misled us, nor the fruitless toil of painters, a figure stained with varied colors,
- 5 whose appearance arouses yearning in fools, so that they desire<sup>d</sup> the lifeless form of a dead image.
- 6 Lovers of evil things and fit for such objects of hope<sup>e</sup> are those who either make or desire or worship them.

### The Foolishness of Worshiping Clay Idols

- 7 A potter kneads the soft earth and laboriously molds each vessel for our service, fashioning out of the same clay both the vessels that serve clean uses

<sup>a</sup> Gk they

<sup>b</sup> Or of the oaths people swear

<sup>c</sup> Or ruling the universe

<sup>d</sup> Gk and he desires

<sup>e</sup> Gk such hopes

- and those for contrary uses,  
 making all alike;  
 but which shall be the use of each  
 of them  
 the worker in clay decides.
- 8 With misspent toil, these workers  
 form a futile god from the  
 same clay—  
 these mortals who were made of  
 earth a short time before  
 and after a little while go to the  
 earth from which all mortals  
 are taken,  
 when the time comes to return the  
 souls that were borrowed.
- 9 But the workers are not concerned  
 that mortals are destined to die  
 or that their life is brief,  
 but they compete with workers in  
 gold and silver,  
 and imitate workers in copper;  
 and they count it a glorious thing  
 to mold counterfeit gods.
- 10 Their heart is ashes, their hope is  
 cheaper than dirt,  
 and their lives are of less worth  
 than clay,
- 11 because they failed to know the  
 one who formed them  
 and inspired them with active  
 souls  
 and breathed a living spirit into  
 them.
- 12 But they considered our existence  
 an idle game,  
 and life a festival held for profit,  
 for they say one must get money  
 however one can, even by  
 base means.
- 13 For these persons, more than all  
 others, know that they sin

when they make from earthy  
 matter fragile vessels and  
 carved images.

- 14 But most foolish, and more  
 miserable than an infant,  
 are all the enemies who oppressed  
 your people.
- 15 For they thought that all their  
 heathen idols were gods,  
 though these have neither the use  
 of their eyes to see with,  
 nor nostrils with which to draw  
 breath,  
 nor ears with which to hear,  
 nor fingers to feel with,  
 and their feet are of no use for  
 walking.
- 16 For a human being made them,  
 and one whose spirit is borrowed  
 formed them;  
 for none can form gods that are  
 like themselves.
- 17 People are mortal, and what they  
 make with lawless hands is dead;  
 for they are better than the objects  
 they worship,  
 since<sup>a</sup> they have life, but the  
 idols<sup>b</sup> never had.

### Serpents in the Desert

- 18 Moreover, they worship even the  
 most hateful animals,  
 which are worse than all others  
 when judged by their lack of  
 intelligence;
- 19 and even as animals they are not  
 so beautiful in appearance  
 that one would desire them,  
 but they have escaped both the  
 praise of God and his blessing.

- 16** Therefore those people<sup>c</sup> were deservedly  
 punished through such creatures,  
 and were tormented by a multitude of animals.
- 2 Instead of this punishment you showed  
 kindness to your people,  
 and you prepared quails to eat,  
 a delicacy to satisfy the desire of appetite;
- 3 in order that those people, when they desired  
 food,

<sup>a</sup> Other ancient authorities read *of which*

<sup>b</sup> Gk *but they*

<sup>c</sup> Gk *they*

### Read Wisdom 16

In chapters 16 through 19 the author contrasts God's treatment of Israel with God's treatment of the Egyptians. Chapter 16 describes the plague of insects as well as the sending of the quail. The bronze serpent symbolizes the deliverance of salvation. Bites of locusts and flies are a warning to the Israelites lest they, like the Egyptians, incur death. Note in this section that the Egyptians hunger while Israel eats well. The element of fire represents destruction to the Egyptians, but the same fire is beneficial to the Israelites for baking manna and boiling water.

**Reflect:** Consider that fire, like all elements, has both destructive and beneficial properties.

**Pray:** Pray that we may be always grateful for the light of the sun and the moon.

**Act:** Let the word of God be a light in our hearts each day.

- might lose the least remnant of appetite<sup>a</sup> because of the odious creatures sent to them, while your people,<sup>b</sup> after suffering want a short time, might partake of delicacies.
- 4 For it was necessary that upon those oppressors inescapable want should come, while to these others it was merely shown how their enemies were being tormented.
- 5 For when the terrible rage of wild animals came upon your people<sup>c</sup> and they were being destroyed by the bites of writhing serpents, your wrath did not continue to the end;
- 6 they were troubled for a little while as a warning, and received a symbol of deliverance to remind them of your law's command.
- 7 For the one who turned toward it was saved, not by the thing that was beheld, but by you, the Savior of all.
- 8 And by this also you convinced our enemies that it is you who deliver from every evil.
- 9 For they were killed by the bites of locusts and flies, and no healing was found for them, because they deserved to be punished by such things.
- 10 But your children were not conquered even by the fangs of venomous serpents, for your mercy came to their help and healed them.
- 11 To remind them of your oracles they were bitten, and then were quickly delivered, so that they would not fall into deep forgetfulness and become unresponsive<sup>d</sup> to your kindness.
- 12 For neither herb nor poultice cured them, but it was your word, O Lord, that heals all people.
- 13 For you have power over life and death; you lead mortals down to the gates of Hades and back again.
- 14 A person in wickedness kills another, but cannot bring back the departed spirit, or set free the imprisoned soul.

### Disastrous Storms Strike Egypt

- 15 To escape from your hand is impossible;  
16 for the ugly, refusing to know you,

<sup>a</sup> Gk loathed the necessary appetite

<sup>b</sup> Gk they

<sup>c</sup> Gk them

<sup>d</sup> Meaning of Gk uncertain



- were flogged by the strength of your arm,  
pursued by unusual rains and hail  
and relentless storms,  
and utterly consumed by fire.
- 17 For—most incredible of all—in  
water, which quenches all  
things,  
the fire had still greater effect,  
for the universe defends the  
righteous.
- 18 At one time the flame was  
restrained,  
so that it might not consume the  
creatures sent against the  
ungodly,  
but that seeing this they might  
know  
that they were being pursued by  
the judgment of God;
- 19 and at another time even in the  
midst of water it burned more  
intensely than fire,  
to destroy the crops of the  
unrighteous land.

### The Israelites Receive Manna

- 20 Instead of these things you gave  
your people food of angels,  
and without their toil you supplied  
them from heaven with bread  
ready to eat,  
providing every pleasure and  
suited to every taste.
- 21 For your sustenance manifested  
your sweetness toward your  
children;  
and the bread, ministering<sup>a</sup> to the  
desire of the one who took it,  
was changed to suit everyone's  
liking.

- 22 Snow and ice withstood fire  
without melting,  
so that they might know that the  
crops of their enemies  
were being destroyed by the fire  
that blazed in the hail  
and flashed in the showers of rain;
- 23 whereas the fire,<sup>b</sup> in order that the  
righteous might be fed,  
even forgot its native power.
- 24 For creation, serving you who  
made it,  
exerts itself to punish the  
unrighteous,  
and in kindness relaxes on behalf  
of those who trust in you.
- 25 Therefore at that time also,  
changed into all forms,  
it served your all-nourishing  
bounty,  
according to the desire of those  
who had need,<sup>c</sup>
- 26 so that your children, whom you  
loved, O Lord, might learn  
that it is not the production of  
crops that feeds humankind  
but that your word sustains those  
who trust in you.
- 27 For what was not destroyed by fire  
was melted when simply warmed  
by a fleeting ray of the sun,
- 28 to make it known that one must  
rise before the sun to give you  
thanks,  
and must pray to you at the  
dawning of the light;
- 29 for the hope of an ungrateful  
person will melt like wintry  
frost,  
and flow away like waste water.

### Terror Strikes the Egyptians at Night

- 17** Great are your judgments and hard to  
describe;  
therefore uninstructed souls have gone astray.
- 2 For when lawless people supposed that they  
held the holy nation in their power,  
they themselves lay as captives of darkness  
and prisoners of long night,

<sup>a</sup> Gk and it, ministering

<sup>b</sup> Gk this

<sup>c</sup> Or who made supplication

**Read Wisdom 17:1—18:4**

Terror strikes the Egyptians at night. The pillar of fire is a gift to the Israelites, in contrast to the Egyptians' plague of darkness. The natural sounds in verses 18 and 19 become more intimidating in the darkness. In 18:3–4 note the contrast between the plague of darkness and the light experienced by the Israelites, who were to become the bearers of the light of the law.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the significance of 17:18–19: the vivid description of these sounds that are so ominous in the darkness.

**Pray:** Pray that the light of God's love may illuminate your path through life.

**Act:** Act as a light for others in their time of darkness.

- shut in under their roofs, exiles from eternal providence.
- 3 For thinking that in their secret sins they were unobserved behind a dark curtain of forgetfulness, they were scattered, terribly<sup>a</sup> alarmed, and appalled by specters.
- 4 For not even the inner chamber that held them protected them from fear, but terrifying sounds rang out around them, and dismal phantoms with gloomy faces appeared.
- 5 And no power of fire was able to give light, nor did the brilliant flames of the stars avail to illumine that hateful night.
- 6 Nothing was shining through to them except a dreadful, self-kindled fire, and in terror they deemed the things that they saw to be worse than that unseen appearance.
- 7 The delusions of their magic art lay humbled, and their boasted wisdom was scornfully rebuked.
- 8 For those who promised to drive off the fears and disorders of a sick soul were sick themselves with ridiculous fear.
- 9 For even if nothing disturbing frightened them, yet, scared by the passing of wild animals and the hissing of snakes
- 10 they perished in trembling fear, refusing to look even at the air, though it nowhere could be avoided.
- 11 For wickedness is a cowardly thing, condemned by its own testimony;<sup>b</sup> distressed by conscience, it has always exaggerated<sup>c</sup> the difficulties.
- 12 For fear is nothing but a giving up of the helps that come from reason;
- 13 and hope, defeated by this inward weakness, prefers ignorance of what causes the torment.
- 14 But throughout the night, which was really powerless and which came upon them from the recesses of powerless Hades, they all slept the same sleep,
- 15 and now were driven by monstrous specters, and now were paralyzed by their souls' surrender; for sudden and unexpected fear overwhelmed them.
- 16 And whoever was there fell down,

<sup>a</sup> Other ancient authorities read *unobserved, they were darkened behind a dark curtain of forgetfulness, terribly*

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Gk uncertain

<sup>c</sup> Other ancient authorities read *anticipated*

and thus was kept shut up in a  
 prison not made of iron;  
 17 for whether they were farmers or  
 shepherds  
 or workers who toiled in the  
 wilderness,  
 they were seized, and endured the  
 inescapable fate;  
 for with one chain of darkness  
 they all were bound.  
 18 Whether there came a whistling wind,  
 or a melodious sound of birds in  
 wide-spreading branches,  
 or the rhythm of violently rushing  
 water,  
 19 or the harsh crash of rocks hurled  
 down,

or the unseen running of leaping  
 animals,  
 or the sound of the most savage  
 roaring beasts,  
 or an echo thrown back from a  
 hollow of the mountains,  
 it paralyzed them with terror.  
 20 For the whole world was illumined  
 with brilliant light,  
 and went about its work  
 unhindered,  
 21 while over those people alone  
 heavy night was spread,  
 an image of the darkness that was  
 destined to receive them;  
 but still heavier than darkness  
 were they to themselves.

### Light Shines on the Israelites

**18** But for your holy ones there was very great  
 light.

- Their enemies<sup>a</sup> heard their voices but did not  
 see their forms,  
 and counted them happy for not having  
 suffered,  
 2 and were thankful that your holy ones,<sup>b</sup>  
 though previously wronged, were doing  
 them no injury;  
 and they begged their pardon for having been  
 at variance with them.<sup>b</sup>  
 3 Therefore you provided a flaming pillar of fire  
 as a guide for your people's<sup>c</sup> unknown journey,  
 and a harmless sun for their glorious wandering.  
 4 For their enemies<sup>d</sup> deserved to be deprived of  
 light and imprisoned in darkness,  
 those who had kept your children imprisoned,  
 through whom the imperishable light of the  
 law was to be given to the world.

### The Death of the Egyptian Firstborn

- 5 When they had resolved to kill the infants of  
 your holy ones,  
 and one child had been abandoned and  
 rescued,  
 you in punishment took away a multitude of  
 their children;  
 and you destroyed them all together by a  
 mighty flood.  
 6 That night was made known beforehand to  
 our ancestors,

<sup>a</sup> Gk *They*

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Gk uncertain

<sup>c</sup> Gk *their*

<sup>d</sup> Gk *those persons*

**Read Wisdom 18:5–25**

The firstborn of the Egyptians are destroyed while Israel is saved. The child referred to in verse 5 is Moses. In verse 9, the reference to “singing the praises of the ancestors” has to do with the first Passover sacrifice that evolved in later times. Verses 15 and 16 contain a famous citation from the book of Wisdom that tells of the personification of the word of God. God’s word is considered the executor of divine judgment; it is a “stern warrior” who descends from heaven in the middle of the night to slay the firstborn of the Egyptians. The “blameless man” is Aaron, whose breastplate is engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and on whose miter are engraved the words “Sacred to the LORD.”

**Reflect:** Notice in retrospect that throughout chapters 10–19, the book of Wisdom embellishes the biblical text.

**Pray:** Pray with an awareness that the word of God is the wisdom of God.

**Act:** Reflect God’s word in all your actions.

- so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted.
- 7 The deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of their enemies were expected by your people.
- 8 For by the same means by which you punished our enemies you called us to yourself and glorified us.
- 9 For in secret the holy children of good people offered sacrifices, and with one accord agreed to the divine law, so that the saints would share alike the same things, both blessings and dangers; and already they were singing the praises of the ancestors.<sup>a</sup>
- 10 But the discordant cry of their enemies echoed back, and their piteous lament for their children was spread abroad.
- 11 The slave was punished with the same penalty as the master, and the commoner suffered the same loss as the king;
- 12 and they all together, by the one form<sup>b</sup> of death, had corpses too many to count. For the living were not sufficient even to bury them, since in one instant their most valued children had been destroyed.
- 13 For though they had disbelieved everything because of their magic arts, yet, when their firstborn were destroyed, they acknowledged your people to be God’s child.
- 14 For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone,
- 15 your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior
- 16 carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth.
- 17 Then at once apparitions in dreadful dreams greatly troubled them, and unexpected fears assailed them;
- 18 and one here and another there, hurled down half dead, made known why they were dying;

<sup>a</sup> Other ancient authorities read *dangers*, *the ancestors already leading the songs of praise*

<sup>b</sup> Gk *name*

- 19 for the dreams that disturbed them  
forewarned them of this,  
so that they might not perish  
without knowing why they  
suffered.

### Threat of Annihilation in the Desert

- 20 The experience of death touched  
also the righteous,  
and a plague came upon the  
multitude in the desert,  
but the wrath did not long continue.  
21 For a blameless man was quick to  
act as their champion;  
he brought forward the shield of  
his ministry,  
prayer and propitiation by incense;  
he withstood the anger and put an  
end to the disaster,  
showing that he was your servant.  
22 He conquered the wrath<sup>a</sup> not by  
strength of body,

not by force of arms,  
but by his word he subdued the  
avenger,  
appealing to the oaths and  
covenants given to our  
ancestors.

- 23 For when the dead had already  
fallen on one another in heaps,  
he intervened and held back the  
wrath,  
and cut off its way to the living.  
24 For on his long robe the whole  
world was depicted,  
and the glories of the ancestors  
were engraved on the four  
rows of stones,  
and your majesty was on the  
diadem upon his head.  
25 To these the destroyer yielded,  
these he<sup>b</sup> feared;  
for merely to test the wrath was  
enough.

### The Red Sea

- 19** But the ungodly were assailed to the end by  
pitiless anger,  
for God<sup>c</sup> knew in advance even their future  
actions:  
2 how, though they themselves had permitted<sup>d</sup>  
your people to depart  
and hastily sent them out,  
they would change their minds and pursue  
them.  
3 For while they were still engaged in mourning,  
and were lamenting at the graves of their dead,  
they reached another foolish decision,  
and pursued as fugitives those whom they had  
begged and compelled to leave.  
4 For the fate they deserved drew them on to  
this end,  
and made them forget what had happened,  
in order that they might fill up the punishment  
that their torments still lacked,  
5 and that your people might experience<sup>e</sup> an  
incredible journey,  
but they themselves might meet a strange death.

<sup>a</sup> Cn: Gk *multitude*

<sup>b</sup> Other ancient authorities read *they*

<sup>c</sup> Gk *he*

<sup>d</sup> Other ancient authorities read *had changed  
their minds to permit*

<sup>e</sup> Other ancient authorities read *accomplish*

### God Guides and Protects His People

- 6 For the whole creation in its nature was  
fashioned anew,

### Read Wisdom 19

This final chapter of the book of Wisdom considers death and salvation at the Red Sea. The Egyptians drown, but the Israelites pass through the dry land. Verse 14 refers to the Sodomites. The Egyptians hated strangers; the Sodomites, too, had a great distaste for strangers. The Egyptians, however, were more inhospitable than the Sodomites. The book of Wisdom ends with a formula of praise to God, who has provided unceasing help to Israel. Divine encouragement has enabled the Jews to persevere. The purpose of the book of Wisdom is to prove the excellence of Judaism in contrast to other religions. It is interesting to note that, in comparison with the wordiness of preceding chapters, the book's ending is quite abrupt.

**Reflect:** Reflect on the encouraging conclusion of the book of Wisdom. Trust in God leads to salvation.

**Pray:** Pray for the realization that God's unceasing help to Israel is also a reality in our own lives.

**Act:** Let us act with sincere concern for our neighbors, even those who make life difficult for us.

complying with your commands,  
so that your children<sup>a</sup> might be kept  
unharméd.

- 7 The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp,  
and dry land emerging where water had stood  
before,  
an unhindered way out of the Red Sea,  
and a grassy plain out of the raging waves,  
8 where those protected by your hand passed  
through as one nation,  
after gazing on marvelous wonders.  
9 For they ranged like horses,  
and leaped like lambs,  
praising you, O Lord, who delivered them.  
10 For they still recalled the events of their  
sojourn,  
how instead of producing animals the earth  
brought forth gnats,  
and instead of fish the river spewed out vast  
numbers of frogs.  
11 Afterward they saw also a new kind<sup>b</sup> of birds,  
when desire led them to ask for luxurious food;  
12 for, to give them relief, quails came up from  
the sea.

### The Punishment of the Egyptians

- 13 The punishments did not come upon the  
sinners  
without prior signs in the violence of thunder,  
for they justly suffered because of their wicked  
acts;  
for they practiced a more bitter hatred of  
strangers.  
14 Others had refused to receive strangers when  
they came to them,  
but these made slaves of guests who were  
their benefactors.  
15 And not only so—but, while punishment of  
some sort will come upon the former  
for having received strangers with hostility,  
16 the latter, having first received them with  
festal celebrations,  
afterward afflicted with terrible sufferings  
those who had already shared the same rights.  
17 They were stricken also with loss of sight—  
just as were those at the door of the righteous  
man—  
when, surrounded by yawning darkness,  
all of them tried to find the way through their  
own doors.

<sup>a</sup> Or servants

<sup>b</sup> Or production

### A New Harmony in Nature

- <sup>18</sup> For the elements changed<sup>a</sup> places  
with one another,  
as on a harp the notes vary the  
nature of the rhythm,  
while each note remains the same.<sup>b</sup>  
This may be clearly inferred from  
the sight of what took place.
- <sup>19</sup> For land animals were transformed  
into water creatures,  
and creatures that swim moved  
over to the land.
- <sup>20</sup> Fire even in water retained its  
normal power,  
and water forgot its fire-quenching  
nature.

- <sup>21</sup> Flames, on the contrary, failed to  
consume  
the flesh of perishable  
creatures that walked  
among them,  
nor did they melt<sup>c</sup> the crystalline,  
quick-melting kind of  
heavenly food.

### Conclusion

- <sup>22</sup> For in everything, O Lord, you  
have exalted and glorified  
your people,  
and you have not neglected to  
help them at all times and in  
all places.

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<sup>a</sup> Gk *changing*

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Gk uncertain

<sup>c</sup> Cn: Gk *nor could be melted*

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