



In the last centuries before Christ, Greek culture, spread by Alexander, penetrated into the countries of the Middle East (see introduction to Maccabees). The Greeks had a new way of viewing the freedom of the individual and nobility of spirit. They promoted scientific research and highly esteemed physical beauty, etc.

The Jews had to be open to this new way of thinking: when a people encloses itself in its national culture, without looking beyond it, it ends up being asphyxiated. Their culture was intimately linked to the word of God they had received for centuries, but the revelation of God was not finished and could no longer enclose itself within the molds of Hebraic culture.

The Book of Wisdom is the first important effort to express the faith and wisdom of Israel, not only in Greek, but also in a form adapted to Greek culture.

It gives an answer to the crucial questions of evil, pain and death; it sketches a proof of the existence of God that will inspire Paul and shows that God's mercy extends to all beings without exception.

Note especially the magnificent Chapters 3–5 concerning the death of the just and hope in eternal life and also the hymn to wisdom in Chapter 7.

The Book of Wisdom was written in Egypt between the years 80 and 50 before Christ by one of the many Jews who were living in the Greek world. It is one of the *deuterocanonical* books. See page 1046.

**Seek life; know God**

Mt 6:33 **1** • <sup>1</sup>Love justice, you who rule over the world! Think rightly of God, seek him with simplicity of heart, <sup>2</sup>for he reveals himself to those who do not challenge him and is found by those who do not distrust him.

Is 55:6; 65:1; Jer 29:13; Pro 8:17 <sup>3</sup>Crooked thinking distances you from God; and his Omnipotence, put to the test, confounds the foolish.

Rom 7:24; 8:2 <sup>4</sup>Wisdom does not enter the wicked nor remain in a body that is enslaved to sin. <sup>5</sup>The Holy Spirit who instructs us shuns deceit; it keeps aloof from foolishness and is ill at ease when injustice is done.

Pro 8:31; Tit 3:4 <sup>6</sup>Wisdom is a spirit, a friend to man, and will not leave the blasphemous unpunished, because God knows his innermost feelings, truly sees his thoughts and hears what he says.

Jer 23:24; Ps 139:7-12; Acts 2:4 <sup>7</sup>For God's spirit has filled the whole world; and he who holds together all things, knows each word that is spoken. <sup>8</sup>So whoever speaks unjustly will not escape; the irrefutable sentence will reach him. <sup>9</sup>The intentions of the unholy will be examined; what he has said will reach the Lord and his wickedness will be confounded.

<sup>10</sup>Remember that a jealous ear hears everything; even whispers are recorded.

15:24; Ps 78:19 <sup>11</sup>Beware then, of empty complaints and keep your tongue from faultfind-

ing, since your most secret word will have consequences; a lying tongue brings death to the soul. <sup>12</sup>Do not bring about your own death by your wrong way of living. And do not let the work of your hands destroy you.

<sup>13</sup>God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living. <sup>14</sup>Since he has created everything, all creatures of the universe are for our good; there is no deadly poison in them and the netherworld has no dominion over the earth, <sup>15</sup>because justice is immortal.

**The godless say there is no other life**

<sup>16</sup>It is the godless that consider death a friend and call for it in every way. They have made a pact with it and they shall justly belong to it.

**2** <sup>1</sup>Led by mistaken reasons they think, "Life is short and sad and there is no cure for death. It was never heard that anyone came back from the netherworld.

• <sup>2</sup>By chance we were born; when life is over, it will be as if we never existed. The breath in our nostrils is like a puff of smoke, and thought is no more than a spark resulting from the movement of the heart. <sup>3</sup>Put this out and the body turns to ashes, the spirit melts away like idle air.

<sup>4</sup>In time our name will be forgotten, no

• **1.1** God is more present to us than we are to ourselves. We need not look very far for authentic wisdom: it appears as spirit coming from God that becomes present to us interiorly but is only revealed to the just.

How can we express the nearness of the in-accessible and holy God? Here the author speaks of Providence, Wisdom, Justice, the Spirit of God. He speaks of them as if they were persons sent by God to look after us. In fact, it is a way of presenting God himself who, though he preserves his mystery, is close to people and to events.

*God did not make death nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living (v. 13). His creation is good and at the service of humankind.*

Death does not come from God as is explained in 2:23, but rather from the envy of the devil. So, we are asked to look confidently to the Lord: to think well of him is to deny all these false questions: Why does God allow evil, death, earthquakes and tragedies? God wants only life.

• **2.2** *By chance we were born.* The "impious," meaning those who have freed themselves from the law of God and their conscience, are friends of death since they do not know true life. For them wisdom consists in profiting from life: let us enjoy the good things now. The mentality of the godless who do not believe in the hereafter is, in some way, very much like that of the society in which we live.

Ps 39:7; 144:4; Job 8:9; 14:2; Ecl 6:12; 8:13; 29:15

one will remember what we did. <sup>5</sup>Life passes like the shadow of a cloud, disappears like mist chased by the sun and overpowered by its heat. Our days are like the passing of a shadow; from death there is no turning back, the seal is set: no one returns.

Is 22:13; 1Cor 15:32

<sup>6</sup>Come then and enjoy all the good things; let us use creation with the zest of youth, <sup>7</sup>making the most of choicest wines and perfumes and not passing by any flower of spring. <sup>8</sup>Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they fade.

<sup>9</sup>Let everyone take part in our orgy; let us post everywhere the signs of our joy, for that is our due, the lot assigned to us.

Lev 25: 35-37; 22:21; Lev 19:32

<sup>10</sup>Let us oppress the upright man who is poor, and have no thought for the widow, or respect for the white hair of old age.

<sup>11</sup>Let our strength be our right, since it is proved that weakness is useless.

Jer 11:19; 20:10; Jn 5: 16, 18; Mt 26:4

<sup>12</sup>Let us set a trap for the righteous, for he annoys us and opposes our way of life; he reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of being false to our upbringing.

Mt 11:27; Wis 5:5; Lk 22:70

<sup>13</sup>He claims knowledge of God and

calls himself son of the Lord. <sup>14</sup>He has become a reproach to our way of thinking; even to meet him is burdensome to us. <sup>15</sup>He does not live like others and behaves strangely.

Es 3:8; 13:4-5

<sup>16</sup>According to him we have low standards, so he keeps aloof from us as if we were unclean. He emphasizes the happy end of the righteous and boasts of having God as father.

Mt 5:11; Jn 5:18

<sup>17</sup>Let us see the truth of what he says and find out what his end will be. <sup>18</sup>If the righteous is a son of God, God will defend him and deliver him from his adversaries.

Ps 22:9; Mt 27:43

<sup>19</sup>Let us humble and torture him to prove his self-control and test his patience. <sup>20</sup>When we have condemned him to a shameful death, we may test his words."

Is 53:7; Mt 26: 67-68; 27:12

<sup>21</sup>This is the way they reason, but they are mistaken, blinded by their malice. <sup>22</sup>They do not know the mysteries of God nor do they hope for the reward of a holy life; they do not believe that the blameless will be recompensed.

<sup>23</sup>Indeed God created man to be immortal in the likeness of his own nature, <sup>24</sup>but the envy of the devil

Gen 1:26; 2P 1:4

*Let us set a trap for the righteous for he opposes our way of life (v. 12).* Secretly we all admire an upright person, but in any institution, her presence disturbs us—in the trade unions just as in the factories—because we cannot buy her conscience.

*He does not live like others and behaves strangely (v. 15).* When this was written the Jews were not well-thought-of by non-Jews because of all the things in their lives that were different from the pagan customs. The same is true now, as well; even though believers try not to be distinct, their integrity and enthusiasm make them "strange."

*Let us see the truth of what he says (v. 17).* Because the godless are the friends of death, they necessarily come to persecute and even kill the good. For them it is like a game to prove to what extent the righteous can remain firm, since they themselves believe in nothing. They need to destroy others to convince themselves that they alone benefit from life.

*If the righteous is a son of God, God will*

*defend him (v. 18).* The words in verses 16-20 reveal the situation of Jesus on the cross. Matthew, in particular, will recall them in 27:43.

This is also verified in the lives of real believers, a scandal to a materialist who enjoys inflicting suffering on those who make sacrifices for others. We have seen comfortable "Christians" rejoicing over the death of those who speak of justice and who, by their involvement, disturb the conscience of the satisfied.

*Those who take his side shall experience death (v. 24).* Those who do evil begin to experience death. There is a physical wearing down caused by vice (alcoholism, licentiousness), but there is an even greater deterioration of enthusiasm, generosity and trust. "The person who sows for the benefit of his own flesh shall reap corruption and death from the flesh" (Gal 6:8). See also Romans 6:21.

The text considers what Jesus will do; that behind a mass of evil that tear humanity, and behind our disbelief there is a presence of "the Enemy" (see Mt 13:39; Heb 2:14-15).

Gen 3; Rom 5:12; Jn 8:44

brought death to the world, and those who take his side shall experience death.

### The just will live with God

Dt 33:3;  
Is 51:16;  
Ps 89:22;  
Jn 10:28

**3** • <sup>1</sup>The souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch them.

<sup>2</sup>In the eyes of the unwise they appear to be dead. Their going is held as a disaster; <sup>3</sup>it seems that they lose everything by departing from us, but they are in peace.

Rom  
8:18;  
2Cor  
4:17

<sup>4</sup>Though seemingly they have been punished, immortality was the soul of their hope. <sup>5</sup>After slight affliction will come great blessings, for God has tried them and found them worthy to be with him; <sup>6</sup>after testing them as gold in the furnace, he has accepted them as a holocaust.

Ps 17:3;  
26:2;  
Pro 17:3;  
Job  
23:10

<sup>7</sup>At the time of his coming they will shine like sparks that run in the stubble. <sup>8</sup>They will govern nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will be their king forever.

Dn 12:3;  
Mt 13:43

Dn 7:27;  
Ps 149:7;  
1Cor 6:2;  
Rev 5:10;  
20:4-6

<sup>9</sup>Those who trust in him will penetrate the truth, those who are faithful will live with him in love, for his grace and mercy are for his chosen ones.

Pro  
28:5;  
1Cor  
13:12;  
1Jn 3:2

<sup>10</sup>But the godless who have ignored the upright and deserted the Lord,

will meet the punishment their evil thoughts deserve.

<sup>11</sup>Unhappy are those who put no value on wisdom and instruction, their hope is vain, their efforts useless, their work without profit; <sup>12</sup>their wives are foolish, their children evil, their posterity cursed.

Sir 41:5;  
Ps 109:  
9-10

### A truly fruitful life

• <sup>13</sup>Happy the childless wife if she is blameless and has not been guilty of adultery; she will be found fruitful on the day of judgment.

Is 54:1

<sup>14</sup>And happy the impotent man who has done no evil or harbored resentful thoughts against the Lord. His fidelity will be richly rewarded with a special place in the Lord's heavenly Sanctuary.

Is 56:3

<sup>15</sup>The toil of the righteous bears choice fruit; and wise discernment is a tree that does not wither.

<sup>16</sup>But the children born of adultery die young and the offspring of an unlawful union disappear.

<sup>17</sup>If they live long, they count for nothing and are finally despised in their old age. <sup>18</sup>If they die young, it is without hope, and they cannot comfort themselves with thinking of the Judgment.

<sup>19</sup>Cruel is the fate of an evil race.

Sir 16:4

• **3.1** *The souls of the just are in the hands of God.* This is the great revelation in this book. In the previous books of the Scriptures, the soul only means the breath of a person, that is to say, the life in him which disappears at death. Now, the soul means the person who does not die when the body does.

*Their going is held as a disaster* (v. 2). Whether the just die in the hands of violent people, or naturally die as we all do, the end of their lives seems to contradict God's goodness. It is a scandal that death can overcome the just. (We know that the just are those who fulfill the hopes that God placed in them.) It is only the body which dies. They are alive before God as Jesus will also state (Lk 20:38).

*But they are in peace* (v. 3). They will forever enjoy what they hoped for here on earth. That is to say, we only see one side of death: we shall never know how everyone experienced his

departure, even less how he awakened in God's world.

At the time of judgment we will see that the just are the only ones who have been truly alive. The death of the friends of God brings peace to those who were at their side. Through their death the martyrs bring the triumph of the cause for which they lived.

• **13.** *Happy the childless wife if she is blameless.* In the Scriptures we always find praise of the fruitful life, of a couple having several children and raising them to be fully human (see Ps 127 and 128). Here the question is revised: what is a fruitful life? In Israel, being without children was seen as God's punishment and the Law excluded eunuchs (or castrated men) from religious worship. Yet one of the prophets took an opposite view (see Is 56:4).

Sir 16:3

**4** • <sup>1</sup>Better to have no children and to be virtuous. People like this are highly considered by God and by mortals. The memory of their life will never end.

<sup>2</sup>When virtue is present we imitate it; when it is absent we long for it; it is crowned in eternity for having triumphed in the blameless struggle.

Sir 23:25; 40:15

<sup>3</sup>The numerous progeny of the wicked will be of no use. Offspring of doubtful plants, they will not have deep roots or lay solid foundations. <sup>4</sup>For a time they may produce, but their weak branches shaken by the wind will be uprooted by the storm. <sup>5</sup>Their twigs will be broken off before grown, their fruit useless, unripe for eating and good for nothing. <sup>6</sup>Children born of unlawful intercourse witness, when God examines them, to the wrongdoing of their parents.

Ps 58:10

• <sup>7</sup>The upright, even if he dies before his time, will be at rest. <sup>8</sup>Honorable age does not depend on length of days, nor is the number of years a true measure of life.

<sup>9</sup>A man's gray hair is understanding, and a spotless life is ripe old age.

Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5

<sup>10</sup>The upright was pleasing to God, who loved him, and since he was living among sinners, he was taken up. <sup>11</sup>God removed him lest evil impair his understanding and treachery seduce his soul. <sup>12</sup>For the fascination of evil obscures true values and restless desire undermines a simple heart.

<sup>13</sup>Though his life soon ended, he traveled far. <sup>14</sup>Because his soul was precious to the Lord, he was quickly removed from the wickedness around him.

<sup>15</sup>People saw but did not understand, and it did not occur to them that God's grace and mercy are with his chosen ones, his protection is for the holy. Is 57:1

<sup>16</sup>The righteous who dies will condemn the ungodly who survives. A life fulfilled early in youth condemns the endless days of the wicked.

<sup>17</sup>They may see the death of the wise, but they will not understand God's design for him and why he has taken him to safety. <sup>18</sup>They may see and sneer at him, but the Lord will also laugh at them <sup>19</sup>when they have become a useless corpse, a loathsome and dead thing forever.

Ps 37:13; Pro 1:26

The Lord will dash them to the ground, voiceless, shaking them from their foundations; they will wither and suffer anguish; even their memory will fade.

<sup>20</sup>They will come trembling for the reckoning of their sins and they will be confounded when confronted with their wickedness.

• **4.1** *Better to have no children and to be virtuous.* Here we have the revelation of another way of being fruitful: seeking perfection. We know of childless couples and of single women who channeled their capacity for love and surrender toward others and succeeded in having spiritual children and family. A fruitful life is one spent for others or for God. When these lines were written, there were Jews going to the desert to form religious communities of single men, in order to pray and to hurry the coming of the Savior. Years later, Mary will dedicate her virginity to God and so, for Christians, she is the model of a virginity consecrated to God and with its own form of fruitfulness.

• 7. "Why did God take him? My husband was such a good man." A word that is often

heard. No mortal accident can prevent God from giving all that he wished to each one. God has given some of us the grace to grow more quickly and to reach in a few years the perfection that others only achieve after many years.

*The upright was pleasing to God who loved him* (v. 10). The wife or the son whom God took did not belong to us. A strong bond of love between them and us developed with countless circumstances and memories, but a stronger love united them to the Lord who reserved them for himself.

*Since he was living among sinners* (v. 10), God took him (see Gen 5:24). This is another answer to the premature death of our children: Who knows what they would have done with their lives? God knows best what suits everyone.

**Judgment on the just and on the godless**

Mt 13:43

**5**

- <sup>1</sup>Then the just man will stand with confidence  
facing those who oppressed him,  
making light of his labors.
- <sup>2</sup>Seeing him they will be seized with a terrible fear,  
amazed to find him unexpectedly saved.  
Stricken with remorse  
and distress, <sup>3</sup>they will groan and say,  
<sup>4</sup>“He is the one we mocked,  
the one we reproached, fools that we were!  
We considered his life foolishness,  
and his death, the supreme humiliation,
- <sup>5</sup>but see: he is counted among the children of God  
and is given his lot with the holy angels!  
<sup>6</sup>How far have we wandered from the truth!  
The light of the upright did not enlighten us  
nor did its sun rise for us.
- <sup>7</sup>We trod the paths of injustice and death,  
traveling, more than enough,  
through trackless deserts,  
but we were unable to know the Lord’s ways.
- <sup>8</sup>What good has our pride been?  
What profit in the wealth we boasted about?
- <sup>9</sup>All that has passed away like a shadow,  
like a fleeting rumor.
- <sup>10</sup>Like a ship cutting the sea,  
leaving no trace of its course,  
and the mark of its keel—not seen in its wake;
- <sup>11</sup>like a bird flying across the sky  
leaving no trace of its flight;  
it beats the light air with its pinions,

Ps 89:6;  
Col 1:12

Is 58:8

Job 9:25

• **5.1** The prophets spoke of God’s judgment on many occasions, referring to a judgment on earth in which God would repay the sinner nations and groups, and redress human history.

This paragraph now speaks to us of an individual judgment after death. It insists especially on the case of martyrs: it must be said that during this epoch the memory of believers persecuted for their faith at the time of the Maccabees was still fresh. Let us not forget that if we can be at the same time Christians and at peace, in many countries our brothers and sisters suffer and often die, victims of persecutions about which the media says little.

*How far have we wandered from the truth* (v. 6). On that day, we will not wear the mask we all have on earth, a mask which hides our

hypocrisy and meanness. We will see ourselves in our nakedness and God the Father, the Lord and Knower of all, will reward or punish us. Then the wicked will see clearly that their lives were empty: *scarcely born we have disappeared* (v. 13). Before God convicts them, they will judge themselves: *their own sins will accuse them* (4:20).

On the contrary, *the upright live forever; the Most High has them in his care* (v. 15). We can compare this with the judgment parable in Matthew 25:31, with this difference that Jesus distinguishes between those who have looked after their neighbors and those who have not, whereas here the persecutors and the persecuted face each other. They are facing one another for judgment again after the wicked triumphed over the just.

cleaving a way by the force of its wings  
 but without a sign of its passing;  
<sup>12</sup>or like an arrow shot at a target,  
 with the displaced air closing in on itself  
 and no one knowing what way it passed.

<sup>13</sup>It is the same for us; scarcely born we have disappeared.  
 What sign of virtue are we able to show,  
 spent as we are in our own wickedness?"

<sup>14</sup>The hope of the godless is like chaff blown in the wind,  
 like a light frost melted in the storm,  
 like smoke dispersed by the wind;  
 it fades like the memory of a guest of a single day.

Ps 1:4;  
 Is 29:5

<sup>15</sup>But the upright live forever,  
 their reward is with the Lord,  
 and the Most High has them in his care.

Is 62:11

<sup>16</sup>This is why they receive, from the hands of the Lord,  
 a royal crown, a splendid diadem.  
 He will shelter them with his hand  
 and his arm will be their shield.

Is 28:5

<sup>17</sup>God's jealous love will display his weapon;  
 he will arm all creation to punish his enemies.

Is 59:17

<sup>18</sup>He will put on justice as his breastplate  
 and right judgment as his helmet,  
<sup>19</sup>invincible holiness will be his shield,  
<sup>20</sup>implacable anger his sword,  
 and the universe will march with him against the foolsh.

<sup>21</sup>Well-aimed bolts of lightning will strike  
 the target; the clouds will be a curved bow  
 shooting arrows.

<sup>22</sup>The hailstones of his fury will rain on  
 them, the ocean will rage against them and

the rivers engulf them without mercy. <sup>23</sup>A  
 powerful wind will rise against them and blow  
 them away like straw. In this way, lawless-  
 ness will bring the whole earth to ruin, and  
 evildoing topple the thrones of the mighty.

Is 30:27;  
 64:1

## NO TRUE WISDOM WITHOUT RELIGIOUS TRUTH

**6** <sup>1</sup>Listen, O kings, and understand; rul-  
 ers of the most distant lands, take  
 warning. <sup>2</sup>Pay attention, you who rule mul-  
 titudes and boast of the numerous subjects  
 in your pagan nations!

Ps 2:10;  
 Sir  
 33:19

Dn 2:21;  
 Rom  
 13:1;  
 Jn 19:11

<sup>3</sup>For authority was given you by the  
 Lord, your kingship is from the Most High

who will examine your works and scruti-  
 nize your intentions.

<sup>4</sup>If, as officials of his kingdom, you have  
 not judged justly or observed his law or  
 walked the way God pointed out, <sup>5</sup>he will  
 oppose you swiftly and terribly; his sen-  
 tence strikes the mighty suddenly.

• **6.1** Here begins the "discourse to the kings  
 about wisdom." As we said in the introduction  
 of Ecclesiastes, it was common to attribute the  
 Books of wisdom to Solomon. This can also

be seen in this book: the author pretends to be  
 Solomon and puts the words about wisdom on  
 Solomon's lips.

<sup>6</sup>For the lowly there may be excuses and pardon, but the great will be severely punished.

<sup>7</sup>For the Lord of all makes no distinction, nor does he take account of greatness. Both great and lowly are his work and he watches over all, <sup>8</sup>but the powerful are to be judged more strictly.

<sup>9</sup>It is to you then, sovereigns, that I speak, that you may learn Wisdom and not stumble.

<sup>10</sup>For those who keep the holy laws in a holy way will be acknowledged holy, and those who accept the teaching will find in it their defense.

<sup>11</sup>Welcome my words, desire them and they will instruct you.

<sup>12</sup>Wisdom is luminous and never tarnished; she willingly lets herself be seen by those who love her, and known by those who look for her. <sup>13</sup>She hastens to meet those who long for her. <sup>14</sup>Seek her in the morning and you will not be disappointed; you will find her sitting at your door.

<sup>15</sup>To meditate on Wisdom is understanding fully grown; whoever is on the watch for her will be free of anxiety. <sup>16</sup>She goes in search of those who are worthy of her, graciously meets them on the way and is present in their every thought.

<sup>17</sup>The beginning of Wisdom is a sincere desire for discipline; concern for discipline is love of her, <sup>18</sup>and loving her means keeping her laws; <sup>19</sup>the observance of her laws assures one of immortality, and immortality brings us close to God.

<sup>20</sup>In this way the desire for Wisdom leads to kingship.

<sup>21</sup>So then, sovereigns of nations, you who are fond of thrones and scepters, honor Wisdom if you wish to reign forever.

<sup>22</sup>What Wisdom is and how she came to be, I will tell you. I shall hide nothing from you, but trace her from the beginning and clearly make her known.

<sup>23</sup>I will not mislead you and hide the truth, for I am free of gnawing envy which has nothing in common with Wisdom.

<sup>24</sup>The multitude of the wise could bring about the salvation of the world and a sensible king makes for the stability of his people; <sup>25</sup>so learn from what I say and profit from it.

**7** <sup>1</sup>I, too, am a mortal man like others, a descendant of the first human being formed from clay. My flesh was molded in a mother's womb; <sup>2</sup>her blood formed me for ten months from the seed of man, given in pleasure, the companion of sleep.

<sup>3</sup>Once born, I breathed the air common to everyone; I fell on the earth, the same for all; my first cry was like that of other infants.

<sup>4</sup>I was nourished, cared for and wrapped in swaddling clothes; <sup>5</sup>indeed, no other king began life differently. <sup>6</sup>For there is but one way into life for all and one way out of it.

#### **I prayed and wisdom was given to me**

• <sup>7</sup>I prayed and understanding was given to me; I asked earnestly and the spirit of Wisdom came to me.

<sup>8</sup>I preferred her to scepters and thrones and I considered wealth as nothing compared with her.

<sup>9</sup>I preferred her to any jewel of inestimable value, since gold beside her is nothing but a few grains of sand, and silver but mud. <sup>10</sup>I loved her more than wealth and beauty and even preferred her to light, because her radiance never dies.

<sup>11</sup>She brought with her all other good things, untold riches in her hands. <sup>12</sup>I rejoiced at all that came with Wisdom without knowing she was their mother.

<sup>13</sup>What I learned without self-interest I share freely and with no desire to conceal her value; <sup>14</sup>for she is an inexhaustible treasure for man and those who possess her have gained the friendship of God, commended to him by the fruits of her discipline.

<sup>15</sup>May God grant me to speak with discernment and reflect in a way worthy of

• **7.7** All this page is an invitation to seek Wisdom as one would seek a spouse: we remember that at this time sovereign rulers would "espouse" such and such divinity which allowed them at times to take possession, in the name of their spouse, of the treasures in its temple (2 Mac 1:14). Seeking the Wisdom of God is no different from what we do when we

• speak of union with Christ: we must not forget that he is uncreated Wisdom. This communion is not a matter of something sentimental: it is the costly and never-ending search for the one who is the Truth.

*I preferred her to any jewel of inestimable value (v. 9). See Matthew 13:44-45.*

Job  
34:17

Pro 8:17  
Sir 4:12;  
Pro 1:21

1Jn 4:10

Pro 29:4

Ps  
139:15;  
Job  
10:11

1K 3:4;  
Sir  
47:12

Lk 12:33



the gifts I have received, for he is the guide of Wisdom and the corrector of the wise.

Ps 31:16 <sup>16</sup>For we are in God's hands, we ourselves, our words, our understanding and technical knowledge.

1K 5:13 <sup>17</sup>He, in fact, has given me true knowledge of what is, of the world and the properties of the elements; <sup>18</sup>the beginning, the end and the times in between; the alternation of the solstices and the succession of the seasons; <sup>19</sup>the cycles of the year and the position of the stars; <sup>20</sup>the natures of animal species and the ways of wild beasts; the power of spirits and human reasoning; the varieties of plants and medicinal properties of roots.

### The reflection of eternal light

Heb 1:2-3; Jas 3:17 • <sup>21</sup>I have come to know everything we see and everything hidden, <sup>22</sup>because Wisdom, who designed them all, taught me.

In her is a spirit that is intelligent, saintly, unique, manifold, subtle, active, concise, pure and lucid. It cannot corrupt, loves what is good and nothing can restrain it; <sup>23</sup>it is beneficent, loving humankind, steadfast, dependable, calm though almighty. It sees everything and penetrates all spirits, however intelligent, subtle and pure they may be.

<sup>24</sup>Wisdom, in fact, surpasses in mo-

bility all that moves, and being so pure pervades and permeates all things.

Sir 24:3 <sup>25</sup>She is a breath of the power of God, a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; nothing impure can enter her. <sup>26</sup>She is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of God's action and an image of his goodness.

Heb 1:3; Jn 1:9; Col 1:15 <sup>27</sup>She is but one, yet Wisdom can do all things and, herself unchanging, she renews all things. She enters holy souls, making them prophets and friends of God, <sup>28</sup>for God loves only those who live with Wisdom.

Ps 102:27; 104:30 <sup>29</sup>She is indeed more beautiful than the sun and surpasses all the constellations; she outrivals light, <sup>30</sup>for light gives way to night, but evil cannot prevail against Wisdom.

**8** <sup>1</sup>Wisdom displays her strength from one end of the earth to the other, ordering all things rightly.

Sir 15:2 <sup>2</sup>I loved her and sought her from my youth; I strove to have her as my bride for I had fallen in love with her beauty.

<sup>3</sup>Her nearness to God tells of her noble birth. Because the Lord of all has loved her, <sup>4</sup>she is instructed in God's knowledge and chooses his works.

<sup>5</sup>If we desire riches in life, what is richer than Wisdom who is the active cause

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• 21. See commentary of Proverbs 8:22: it is the same theme. Wisdom comes from God: it is the same Wisdom that gives order to the universe and which is the presence of God in us—his presence, as always, through his Son.

*Nothing impure can enter her* (v. 25). Note the optimism found in this description. Because she is "holy and pure" the wisdom of God penetrates everything, even what is impure and imperfect, enlightening our slow and limited spirit. The Jews of the time learned from the law that they had to remain "clean" and stay away from all that is "unclean": for example, when two people touched each other, the unclean person contaminated the other (see Lev 11:1; and Hg 2:11). Here, it is the wisdom of God that overcomes darkness and impurity (see Eph 5:13). Nothing is absolutely bad in itself: it is bad if it could have been better, and it is good if in a concrete way nothing better could have been accomplished.

*She is a pure emanation of the glory of the*

*Almighty* (v. 25). For the Hebrews "glory" was something "heavy," something that imposes itself and is not pure appearance. In the language of the Greeks, "glory" becomes what is radiant: the radiance of God in the universe, and still more "on the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). Wisdom, mirror of God's activity and image of his perfection, is Christ, as Paul says in Colossians 1:5; Hebrews 1:3; John calls Christ "word of God" (see Jn 1:1). See also introduction to Ephesians.

*She enters holy souls, making them prophets and friends of God* (v. 27). It was said in 2:24 that the devil corrupted creation by introducing death. Now, the Wisdom of God overcomes the ravage of death.

*Evil cannot prevail against Wisdom* (v. 30). The Christian, rooted in God's word, brings light where darkness ruled: he must be present and active, without fear of such involvement, wherever problems of his country, his work, his daily life are being decided. Light and justice will triumph and renew the face of the world.

of everything? <sup>6</sup>If the intellect shows itself in action, still more does she who fashions everything. <sup>7</sup>If you love righteousness, every virtue is the fruit of her labor, for she teaches temperance, prudence, justice, fortitude—all that is most valuable in life.

<sup>8</sup>If someone is eager for experience, she knows what took place in the past and forecasts the future. She has the art of interpretation and knows how to solve riddles, she foresees signs and wonders, the end of ages and eras.

<sup>9</sup>This is why I decided to have her as companion for life, knowing she would be a wise counselor and encourage me in times of worry and distress.

<sup>10</sup>I thought: With her I shall have glory among the nations and, although young, honor among the elderly; <sup>11</sup>I shall be found penetrating in judgment and be admired by the powerful.

<sup>12</sup>If I am silent they will wait to hear me; if I speak, they will pay attention; though I speak at length they will put their hand on their lips.

<sup>13</sup>Thanks to her I shall win immortality, and to those who come after me I shall leave an everlasting memory.

<sup>14</sup>I shall govern peoples, and nations will be subject to me. <sup>15</sup>Terrible sovereigns will cower when they hear of my name, but to my people I shall show myself kind; in battle, courageous.

<sup>16</sup>When I come home I shall take my rest with her, for there is nothing bitter in her company and no suffering in sharing life with her, only pleasure and joy.

<sup>17</sup>Pondering over all this, I understood that I would achieve immortality by being united to Wisdom; <sup>18</sup>I would have pure delight through friendship with her, inexhaustible riches in what she does, understanding from being in her company and renown from sharing her conversation. Then I set out to seek and possess her.

<sup>19</sup>I had a pleasant personality even as a child and <sup>20</sup>was good-natured, or rather, being good, I had entered an undefiled body.

<sup>21</sup>But knowing that I could only possess Wisdom if she were given me by God—it

was a mark of intelligence to know who was the donor—I turned to the Lord and implored him, saying with all my heart:

### Give me your wisdom

**9** • <sup>1</sup>God of our fathers and Lord of mercy, whose word has created everything and <sup>2</sup>who in Wisdom formed man to govern your creation, <sup>3</sup>to rule the world in holiness and justice, passing sentence with right judgment,

<sup>4</sup>give me Wisdom that sits beside your throne and do not reject me from among your children.

<sup>5</sup>For I am your servant, son of your handmaid, a weak and mortal man with little understanding of judgment and laws. <sup>6</sup>Even the most perfect among us counts for nothing, unless he has received Wisdom that comes from you.

<sup>7</sup>You have chosen me as king for your people, as judge over your sons and daughters.

<sup>8</sup>You have ordered me to build a temple on your holy mountain and an altar in the city where you live, in imitation of the holy tent that was yours from the beginning.

<sup>9</sup>With you is Wisdom that knows your works, that was present when you made the world and is aware of what is pleasing in your eyes and what is right according to your commandments.

<sup>10</sup>Send her from the holy heavens, dispatch her from your holy throne to work beside me so that I may know what is pleasing to you.

<sup>11</sup>For she knows and understands everything; she will direct my actions with prudence and protect me with her power.

<sup>12</sup>Then my deeds will please you,

• **9.1** The necessary condition for acquiring wisdom consists in having a humble and simple heart. To those who cooperate with him, God grants uprightiness, prudence and even the authority to lead God's people. Abraham and

Moses were called to do great things.

This prayer refers to the event related in 1 Kings 3:6: the dream in which Solomon asked God for wisdom.

Sir  
42:15;  
1K 3:6  
Gen  
1:28

Ps  
116:16

2S 7:13

and I shall judge your people in justice and be worthy of the throne of my father.

Rom 11:34; 1Cor 2:16  
 13 Indeed, who can know the intentions of God? Who can discern the plan of the Lord?

14 For human reasoning is timid, our notions misleading; 15 a perishable body is a burden for the soul and our tent of clay weighs down the active mind.

Is 55:9; Jn 3:12  
 16 We are barely able to know about

the things of earth and it is a struggle to understand what is close to us; who then may hope to understand heavenly things?

Mt 11:27  
 17 Who has ever known your will unless you first gave him Wisdom and sent down your holy spirit to him?

Bar 4:4  
 18 In this way you directed the human race on the right path; they learned what pleases you and were saved by Wisdom.

### THE WISDOM OF GOD WORKS IN HISTORY

**10** • 1 Wisdom protected the father of the world, the first man to be formed, who was created alone. 2 She delivered him from his fault and gave him power to govern all things.

Gen 4:8  
 Gen 7—8  
 3 When a violent man turning in anger strayed from Wisdom, he perished in his fratricidal fury. 4 Because of the violent man, the earth was submerged by the flood, but Wisdom again saved it by piloting an upright man on a frail piece of wood.

Gen 12:1-3; 22:1-19  
 5 Again when the nations, united in evil, had been thrown into confusion, it was Wisdom who singled out a righteous man, keeping him blameless before God and steadfast, despite his pity for his child.

6 It was she who, when the godless perished, saved the righteous man and let him flee from the fire pouring

Gen 19; 2P 2:6  
 down on the Five Cities. 7 To this day the arid land, a smoking waste, witnesses to their perversity, for plants there bear unripe fruit and a pillar of salt stands as a monument to an unbelieving woman.

8 For having ignored Wisdom, not only were they kept from knowing what is good, but their ruins were left as a monument to their foolishness so that their failure might never be forgotten.

9 But Wisdom rescued her servants from their trials. 10 Along straight paths she led the upright man who fled from his brother's anger. She showed him God's kingdom and let him know the holy angels; she made him prosperous and successful in his toil. 11 Wisdom stood by him against the greed of oppressors and made him rich.

Gen 28:10  
 Gen 31:2; 31:23-29  
 Gen 32:25  
 12 She protected him from his enemies

• **10.1** The Wisdom of God is at work in world history. When an event takes place, we do not usually judge its global value: only time enables us to appreciate it. When we look at the history of a people like the Israelites, we see that God had a plan which developed step by step, even though the people were free and sometimes departed from God. Many elements are involved in the realization of God's plan: sin, punishment, penance and forgiveness.

She made him prosperous and successful in his toil (v. 10). This points more directly to Jacob. Divine Wisdom taught their children the works which were to bear fruit and be lasting; she also showed them the thousand ways which waste

time. She taught them to live in the now and to discover in the present moment the resources and joys that God wanted to give them.

In spite of the fact that, many times, they did not see beyond the path to be traveled that day, and their daily struggle against their own lies seemed useless, wisdom prepared their paths beforehand. One day they will understand how their labors were joined with the labors of many other brothers and sisters to build the Future City.

In verse 3, the reference is to Cain; in verse 4 to Noah; in verse 5 to Abraham; in verse 6 to Lot; in verse 10 to Jacob; in verse 13 to Joseph and in verse 16 to Moses.

and saved him from the traps they set for him; with Wisdom he triumphed in an arduous struggle, learning in this way that nothing is as strong as piety.

Gen  
37–39

<sup>13</sup>She did not abandon the righteous man when he was sold; still more she kept him free from sin.

<sup>14</sup>She went down into the cistern with him; she did not leave him in chains, but made him the ruler of a kingdom, giving him authority over his oppressors. She denounced as liars those who accused him falsely and gave him everlasting honor.

<sup>15</sup>It was she who rescued an innocent and holy people from a nation of oppressors.

<sup>16</sup>She entered the soul of God's servant and through him withstood terrible kings with signs and wonders.

13:21

<sup>17</sup>To the holy people she gave the wages of their labor, leading them in a wonderful way, giving them shade during the day and the light of the stars at night.

14:21

<sup>18</sup>She brought them across the Red Sea, but drowned their enemies <sup>19</sup>and later washed them ashore from the depth of the abyss.

15

<sup>20</sup>So the righteous looted the godless, singing hymns, Lord, to your holy name, and one in heart, they gave thanks for your saving hand. <sup>21</sup>Wisdom gives speech to the dumb and makes infants speak clearly.

Ps 8:3;  
Mt 21:16

**11** • <sup>1</sup>Wisdom gave success to their actions through a holy prophet; <sup>2</sup>they

crossed an uninhabited wilderness and pitched camp in inaccessible places.

<sup>3</sup>They stood up to their enemies and fought off the hostile. <sup>4</sup>When they were thirsty they called on you and you gave them water from hard flint, from a rocky cliff, a welcome relief for the parched.

<sup>5</sup>The same creatures you used to punish their enemies were of benefit to them in their trouble.

<sup>6</sup>For their enemies an ever-flowing source of river water was polluted with blood—<sup>7</sup>a stern response to the decree ordering the slaughter of infants. But, against all hope, you gave your people water in abundance,

<sup>8</sup>showing them by the thirst they suffered, how you had punished their enemies. <sup>9</sup>Their trials were no more than merciful reproofs. Through them, your people learned how severely the wicked were judged and punished.

<sup>10</sup>You tested them as does a father, while you examined their enemies like a stern king.

<sup>11</sup>Their enemies suffered at the time and also later. <sup>12</sup>When they remembered the past, theirs was a double grief and groaning. <sup>13</sup>They came to see that it was the work of the Lord when they realized that their punishment had benefited the others.

<sup>14</sup>Long before, they had exposed Moses; they had rejected him in derision; but now they admired him because of what had happened, and after they had suffered a thirst far different from that of the righteous.

<sup>15</sup>Their wickedness and foolish ideas led them astray, even to worshiping snakes and other repugnant animals; this is why you sent them hordes of similar creatures, <sup>16</sup>teaching them that punishment takes the same form as the sin.

Rom  
1:21

<sup>17</sup>In fact, your almighty power that created the world from formless matter did not lack means to unleash upon them bears

• **11.1** God's love for his people reveals itself when the very forces of nature serve to punish the Egyptians and save the Hebrews. This is shown with seven illustrations: animals, locusts and snakes, hail and manna, darkness and light, the firstborn, the sea (vv. 16-19). All this is amplified beyond measure and is not the part of the book that touches us most.

*The same creatures you used to punish their enemies were of benefit to them in their trouble* (v. 5). This can be a lesson concerning

the forces ruling our world today. Organization, speed, technology, science, emancipation: all these are instrumental in the liberation of humankind if used with wisdom. All this can turn against us, when it is used without considering the goal God established for the world.

The passage from 11:5 to 15:19 is a long parenthesis contrasting God's ways, as a friend and master of humans with the foolishness in the worship of idols.

Job 41:10 and savage lions,<sup>18</sup> or monsters freshly created, unknown and full of fury, breathing fire or noisily spitting smoke or flashing fearful sparks from their eyes,<sup>19</sup> creatures not only capable of destroying them at a single blow but whose mere appearance could make them die of fright.

### How God corrects his children

Is 40:12; Job 28:25 • <sup>20</sup>Even without this, they could have dropped dead at a single breath if pursued by your justice, or dispersed by the breath of your might; but you ordered all with measure, number and weight.

Is 40:15 <sup>21</sup>You are able to show your power at any moment and who can resist the strength of your arm? <sup>22</sup>For the entire world lies before you, just enough to tip the scales, a drop of morning dew falling on the ground.

Sir 18:12 <sup>23</sup>But because you are almighty, you are merciful to all; you overlook sins and give your children time to repent. Ps 145:9 <sup>24</sup>You love everything that exists and hate nothing that you have made; had you hated anything, you would not have formed it.

<sup>25</sup>How could anything endure if you did not will it? And how could anything last that you had not willed? <sup>26</sup>You have compassion on all because all is yours, O Lord, lover of life.

**12** <sup>1</sup>In fact your immortal spirit is in all.

<sup>2</sup>And so by degrees you correct those who sin, you admonish them, reminding them how they have strayed so that, turning away from evil they may trust in you, Lord.

<sup>3</sup>So it happened with those who once lived in your holy land. <sup>4</sup>You hated them because of their detestable practices, their sorcery and unholy worship. <sup>5</sup>They were used to the pitiless slaughter of children at

the feasts in which they ate human flesh and blood and even bowels, while they fulfilled secret rituals.

Di 20:16 <sup>6</sup>Because these parents murdered their defenseless children, you wished our ancestors to destroy them, <sup>7</sup>and the land dearest to you became the home of God's children who were worthy of it.

Ps 78:39 <sup>8</sup>But you even showed mercy to these sinners because they were human beings. You sent hornets ahead of your army to gradually destroy them.

<sup>9</sup>You could have given the wicked over to the righteous in battle, or destroyed them in one blow by means of savage beasts or with a harsh command; <sup>10</sup>but in punishing them gradually you gave them time to repent. Nevertheless you were aware of their evil nature, their innate malice and how fixed they were in their ways, <sup>11</sup>for it was a cursed race from the beginning.

In any case, it was not through fear of anyone that you left their sins unpunished. Job 9:12; Rom 9:19 <sup>12</sup>For who dares say to you, "What have you done?" Who would dare to reject your sentence? Who could reproach you for destroying the nations you formed? Who would dare rise against you in defense of the guilty?

Di 32:39 <sup>13</sup>For there is no other god besides you, one who cares for everyone, who could ask you to justify your judgments; <sup>14</sup>there is no other king or sovereign who could confront you and support those you punish.

<sup>15</sup>You are just and you rule all with justice; had you condemned those who should not be punished, you would have misused your power.

<sup>16</sup>Your strength is the source of your justice and because you are the Lord of all, you can be merciful to everyone.

<sup>17</sup>To those who doubt your sovereign power you show your strength and you confound the insolence of those who ignore it. <sup>18</sup>But you, the Lord of strength, judge with prudence and govern us with great patience, because you are able to do anything at the time you want.

<sup>19</sup>In this way you have taught your people that a righteous person must love his human fellows; you have also given your

• 20. *You ordered all with measure, number and weight.* Because God's power is absolute, it is never a manifestation of violence:

beauty, harmony and goodness are never lacking in all that comes from God.

people cause for hope by prompting them to repent of their sin.

<sup>20</sup>For if you have been careful and patient in punishing the enemies of your people when they deserved to die, and have given them a time and a place to turn from their wickedness, <sup>21</sup>with what strict attention have you not judged your people, you who bound yourself to our ancestors with oaths and Covenants full of magnificent promises.

Mt 5:7;  
7:2

<sup>22</sup>Yes, you punish us, but you punish our enemies far more severely to teach us when we judge others to remember your kindness, and when we are judged to count on your mercy.

<sup>23</sup>Those who lived foolishly and wickedly, you tormented with their own abominations. <sup>24</sup>For they had strayed into error to the point of choosing vile and disgusting animals as gods, allowing themselves to be deceived like infants.

<sup>25</sup>And, as to children with no sense, you sent them a punishment to mock them; <sup>26</sup>but if they took no warning from these corrections, they were soon to receive a punishment worthy of God. <sup>27</sup>In their suffering they became indignant at those animals they had taken as gods and who were now used to punish them. Then they saw clearly, and acknowledged as God, him whom before they had refused to know. That is why they suffered the supreme punishment.

### Against those who worship images

3:14;  
Rom  
1:19;  
Sir 17:8

**13** • <sup>1</sup>The natural helplessness of humans is seen in their ignorance of God. The experience of good things did not lead them to the knowledge of Him who is. They were interested in his works, but they did not recognize the author of them.

Dt 4:19;  
Job 31:  
26-28

<sup>2</sup>Fire, wind, air, the sphere of the stars, rushing water and the lights in the sky were held as the rulers of the world.

<sup>3</sup>If, charmed by such beauty, they took them for gods, let them know how far superior is their sovereign. <sup>4</sup>And if they were impressed by their power and activity, let them understand from this how much mightier is he who formed them. <sup>5</sup>For the grandeur and beauty of creatures lead us to ponder on their Author, greater and more magnificent.

<sup>6</sup>No doubt these people are not to be blamed severely, for possibly they strayed though they searched for God and desired to find him. <sup>7</sup>They pondered over the created things that surrounded them and were captivated by the sight of such beauty.

<sup>8</sup>Even so they are not to be excused, <sup>9</sup>for if they were able to explore the world, why did they not discover first the world's Sovereign?

<sup>10</sup>But unhappy, indeed, are those people who give to man-made artifacts the title of gods! Cursed is their hope in dead things, objects worked in gold and silver, likenesses of animals, and even useless stones carved long ago!

Dt 4:  
25-28;  
Acts  
17:29

<sup>11</sup>Take a woodcutter—he fells a tree that is easy to move, expertly strips off all the bark, and with the wood makes a utensil needed in daily life; <sup>12</sup>he uses the bits left over as fuel for cooking his food and he has a good meal. <sup>13</sup>Then he picks up an utterly useless left-over piece, all gnarled and knotted, and carves it in his leisure time, using his professional skill to give it the shape of a man or <sup>14</sup>maybe of a worthless animal. He covers it with ochre and paints the surface red, covering all its blemishes.

Is 40:20

<sup>15</sup>He then makes a suitable niche for it in the wall and fastens it in place with iron nails.

<sup>16</sup>The craftsman is careful to keep it from falling, knowing that it is unable to help itself. It needs help because it is no more than an image.

Bar  
6:25;  
6:57

<sup>17</sup>Even so, when it is a matter of his

Jer 2:27

• **13.1** Materialists ignore God. The proud believe they can achieve everything on their own. They use things as their own, without giving them a deeper meaning and without seeing them as gifts from God.

Simple and humble people see the hand of God in everything. The water, the wind, the

mountains remind them of the Perfect Being who created them; even more do the riches they discover in their loved ones. Human intelligence is meant to discover God who fills everything and is the end of everything. Paul will say something very similar in Romans 1:19.

marriage, his children and his household, the man is not ashamed to pray to this lifeless object. He prays for his health to something without strength; <sup>18</sup>for life he prays to what is dead, for help he implores something insensitive, for a successful journey he has recourse to what cannot walk, <sup>19</sup>for his profit, his concerns and success in his craft he asks help of something that has no skill whatever in its hands.

15:15;  
Ps 115:4

**14** <sup>1</sup>Imagine someone who is about to set sail and cross the raging sea. He calls upon a piece of wood far more fragile than the boat that carries him.

<sup>2</sup>In fact, this boat has been built with gain in mind and proceeds from the wisdom of the shipwright. <sup>3</sup>But it is your providence, Father, that guides it, for you are the one who prepares a path through the sea and a safe way over the waves. <sup>4</sup>By this we understand that you are able to save us from any danger, and even the unskilled are able to sail.

Ps  
107:29

<sup>5</sup>People are the work of your wisdom and you do not want them to remain idle. So they trust their lives to a small plank of wood and cross the sea safe and sound on a raft.

Gen 6:1;  
Bar 3:  
26-28

<sup>6</sup>At the beginning of time when proud giants perished, the hope of the world took refuge on a raft and, led by your hand, left to the world the seed of a new race. <sup>7</sup>Blessed be the wood by which salvation was carried out!

<sup>8</sup>But cursed be the idol and its maker, the idol made by human hands, this corruptible thing that is called a god, and the craftsman for having fashioned it.

<sup>9</sup>They are hateful to God, both the godless and the fruit of his godlessness; <sup>10</sup>the maker will be punished together with his work.

Is 2:18

<sup>11</sup>Therefore the idols of the nations will also be judged. They have come to be the most abominable among the creatures of God. They are a stumbling block to the spirit of man, and the feet of the foolish are caught in the snare.

34:16

<sup>12</sup>The invention of idols was the origin of licentiousness; when they were invented, life became corrupt. <sup>13</sup>For in the beginning they did not exist and they will not exist forever. <sup>14</sup>Human vanity introduced them into the world, and God has set a term for them.

<sup>15</sup>Suppose a father, overwhelmed by grief for a child so swiftly taken from him, has an image made of him. From that time on a dead creature will be honored as a god, because the father handed on to his dependents secret rites and celebrations. <sup>16</sup>Time will consolidate this unholy practice and eventually it will be observed by law.

It has also happened that sculptured images were venerated by order of sovereigns. <sup>17</sup>Those who lived far away and were unable to honor them personally had copies made, that they might honor them as if present by means of their image.

<sup>18</sup>The ambition of the artist helped the veneration grow among those who did not even know the sovereign. <sup>19</sup>As he wished to please his master, he made the portrait more attractive than reality, <sup>20</sup>and the people, seduced by the perfection of art work, began to worship someone previously honored as a man.

Dn 3:1

<sup>21</sup>In this way the image became a pitfall for the living, for people bent down, either by misfortune or tyranny, gave to stones and wood the incommunicable Name.

3:14

<sup>22</sup>But it was not enough for them to err in their knowledge of God; in the great trouble to which ignorance condemned them, they have called such an evil situation peace.

Rom  
1:21;  
1:24-32

<sup>23</sup>With the sacrificial murder of children in their initiations, with secret mysteries and wild ceremonial orgies, <sup>24</sup>they no longer keep their lives and marriages pure; they treacherously murder one another or wound others through adultery.

<sup>25</sup>Everywhere it is a welter of blood, murder, fraud and theft, corruption, treachery, riots, perjury; <sup>26</sup>on all sides harassment of good people, forgetfulness of favors, the pollution of souls and sins against nature, widespread disorder in marriage, adultery, debauchery.

<sup>27</sup>Indeed the worship of gods which do not even deserve a name, is the beginning, cause and effect of every evil.

<sup>28</sup>Others delight in raving or uttering false prophecies; they live wickedly and casually perjure themselves. <sup>29</sup>As they deal with lifeless images, they do not fear any punishment for their false oaths, <sup>30</sup>but a double punishment awaits them: as idolaters for their base concept of God, as frauds for taking false oaths in defiance of all that is holy.

<sup>31</sup>Though the idols by which they swore are powerless, justice that pursues sinners always overtakes the sin of the wicked.

<sup>34:6</sup> **15** <sup>1</sup>But you, our God, are kind and true; you bear evil patiently and order everything with mercy. <sup>2</sup>Even when we sin we belong to you and acknowledge your power, but aware that we belong to you, we shall not sin.

<sup>Jn 17:3</sup> <sup>3</sup>To know you is perfect righteousness and to acknowledge your power is the root of immortality.

<sup>4</sup>So we have not been led astray by a deceptive invention of human act—the sterile labor of painters—these idols daubed with colors, <sup>5</sup>the sight of which stirs yearning in fools attached to the lifeless face of a dead image.

<sup>6</sup>Really, idol-makers and those who serve and worship them are looking for disgrace and deserve to have false hope.

<sup>7</sup>The potter, laboriously working the soft clay, fashions each object for our use, and from the same clay he shapes vessels, some for food, and others for what is thrown away. The potter makes vessels for both clean and unclean uses and decides to what purpose each one is shaped. <sup>8</sup>The same way and from the same clay he fashions a helpless god; cursed labor of a man recently formed from clay, who will shortly return to clay when he is called to give up his soul.

<sup>9</sup>He has no thought of dying soon, no thought of the short duration of life. None at all. He competes with those who work on silver and gold and, like the smith, he feels proud to make a counterfeit of God.

<sup>10</sup>Ashes, that is what his heart is; <sup>11</sup>hope cheaper than dust; <sup>12</sup>his life worth as much as clay, for he has not acknowledged his Maker, who has breathed into him an active soul, a living spirit. <sup>13</sup>He looks on life as a game and its duration a market full of bargains, for as he says, “a man must make the most of life whether by fair means or foul.”

<sup>13</sup>For these, more than others, know that they sin in fashioning with the same clay, vessels and sculptured gods.

<sup>14</sup>But utterly foolish and more pitiable than the soul of a newborn infant were the enemies that oppressed your people.

<sup>Ps 115:4</sup> <sup>15</sup>They received as gods all the idols of the nations—idols that have no eyes to see, no

nostrils to breathe the air, no ears to hear, no fingers to feel with, or feet that are able to walk. For these gods are the work of a man, a creature of borrowed breath made them.

<sup>16</sup>Man cannot even make a god that resembles himself; <sup>17</sup>a mortal’s unholy hands produce a dead god. He is, in fact, superior to what he worships, since he at least lives, but they will never live. <sup>Ps 104:29</sup>

<sup>18</sup>People worship the most repulsive animals, the most stupid of all who, unlike other animals, are devoid of beauty; <sup>19</sup>these are unattractive creatures who have missed the blessing of God and are not fit to give him praise.

### How God treats his people and the Egyptians differently

**16** <sup>1</sup>That is why this people received the punishment they deserved through similar animals and hordes of tormenting insects. <sup>2</sup>But in contrast to this punishment it was kindness you showed to your people by providing quails—a delicious food—for them. <sup>16:9; Num 11:10</sup>

<sup>3</sup>As for the Egyptians, in spite of their fierce hunger, they were restrained by disgust from eating because of the repulsive sight of the creatures sent against them. But the Israelites after being deprived for a time were then given the finest food.

<sup>4</sup>It was necessary for their oppressors to suffer severe want, but enough for your people to know how the enemy was punished. <sup>5</sup>Indeed when they experienced the fury of wild animals and the bites of writhing snakes, your anger did not endure. <sup>Num 21:4</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Their temporary affliction served as a warning; then they were given a sign of salvation to remind them of the prescriptions of your law. <sup>7</sup>For whoever turned toward it was saved, not by the image he saw, but by you, Lord, the Savior of all. <sup>Num 21:9; Jn 3:14</sup>

<sup>8</sup>In that way you taught our enemies that it is you who deliver us from every evil. <sup>9</sup>They were, in fact, killed by the sting of insects and flies for which there was no cure since they deserved punishment from these creatures. <sup>10</sup>Your children instead were not overcome, even by the fangs of venomous serpents, for your mercy intervened and healed them. <sup>8:16; 10:4; Rev 9:3</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Bites quickly healed reminded them of your commands, lest they fall into deep oblivion and forget your kindness. <sup>12</sup>No



Ps 107:20 herb, no ointment healed them but your word, Lord, that heals all.

<sup>13</sup>You are Lord of life and death; you bring down to the gate of the netherworld and bring back again. <sup>14</sup>Man in his wickedness is able to kill but he cannot bring back the departed spirit or rescue the snatched soul. <sup>15</sup>It is impossible to escape your hand.

9:24 <sup>16</sup>The godless, refusing to acknowledge you, were scourged by the strength of your arm, lashed by relentless downpours, hail, and pitiless storms, and consumed by fire.

<sup>17</sup>But this was the most astounding: water, powerful to quench, made fire burn more fiercely. For the elements fight on the side of the righteous.

<sup>18</sup>At times the flame abated to spare the insects thrust against the wicked, that they might know they were pursued by God's sentence.

<sup>19</sup>At other times, in the midst of water the flame rose more fiercely than fire to destroy the harvest of an unholy land.

16; Ps 78:25; 105:40 • <sup>20</sup>But to your people you gave the food of angels and from heaven sent bread already prepared and suiting all tastes, having every flavor. <sup>21</sup>In this way you revealed your loving kindness to your children. <sup>22</sup>Satisfying all needs, this bread provided what each one wanted.

That food, having the appearance of snow and ice, resisted fire and did not melt; thus they understood how their enemy's harvest was destroyed by fire in the midst of hail, while lightning flashed in the falling rain. <sup>23</sup>This same fire seemed to forget its own nature in order to spare the food of the righteous.

<sup>24</sup>Your creation is at your service for you are its Author. It works to punish the wicked and withdraws for the benefit of those who put their trust in you.

Dt 8:3; Mt 4:4 <sup>25</sup>In the service of your bounty which attends to everything, creation made itself manifold and adjusted to the wish of everyone. <sup>26</sup>Then the children you love learned that it is not crops of whatever kind which nourish humankind, but your word that sustains those who trust you.

16:21 <sup>27</sup>That food which resisted fire, simply melted in the warmth of a fleeting sun-

beam, <sup>28</sup>teaching us that we must rise before the sun to give thanks and pray to you at dawn. <sup>29</sup>The hope of the ungrateful will melt like winter frost and flow away like water that is not being used.

**17** <sup>1</sup>How great are your purposes and how difficult to explain! People who have not learned about them have gone astray. Rom 11:33

<sup>2</sup>While the godless thought they had the holy nation in their power, they themselves were prisoners, captives of a long night, shut in under their own roofs, banished from eternal providence. 10:21

<sup>3</sup>Although they counted on their sins remaining hidden under the veil of forgetfulness, they were scattered and at the same time dismayed and terrified by visions. <sup>4</sup>The dark places where they sheltered could not protect them from fear, they heard horrific noises and were confronted with ghastly and mournful apparitions. <sup>5</sup>No fire could give them light, while the sparkling radiance of the stars dared not shine on that horrible night. <sup>6</sup>All that shone for them was an inextinguishable and terrifying fire and, in their terror, when this vision ended, they imagined their situation to be worse than it was.

<sup>7</sup>Their magic arts failed and their pretense to intelligence was utterly confounded; <sup>8</sup>those who claimed to eliminate the fear and disturbance of the sick mind were themselves afflicted with a ridiculous fear.

<sup>9</sup>Although there was nothing to cause this fear, they were terrified by the buzz of insects and the hiss of snakes; <sup>10</sup>they died convulsed with fear, refusing to look even at the air from which no one may escape. <sup>11</sup>Wickedness is cowardly and is condemned by itself; pursued by conscience it always assumes the worst. <sup>12</sup>For fear is no more than giving up the help that reason is able to give. <sup>13</sup>Inasmuch as this help is lacking interiorly, the unknown cause of one's torments seems greater.

<sup>14</sup>So all that night, a night issued from the powerless netherworld that took hold of them while they slept and made everyone powerless, <sup>15</sup>they were either pursued by monstrous ghosts or paralyzed by a

• **16.20** What an amplification of the manna that God gave the Hebrews in the desert! Such rhetoric scarcely moves us, yet this Jewish way

of seeing things prepared for what Jesus would say in John 6.

sudden, unexpected fear. <sup>16</sup>Whoever had fallen lay there, shut in a prison not made of iron.

<sup>17</sup>Whether plowman or shepherd or someone working by himself, he had to submit to an inevitable fate; <sup>18</sup>all were bound by the same chain of darkness.

Everything held them paralyzed by fear: the sighing of the wind and the tune-ful song of the birds in spreading branches, the continuous noise of rushing water <sup>19</sup>and the terrible crash of falling rocks, the swift, invisible bounding of animals and the terrifying roar of wild beasts, the echo rebounding from the mountains—all was a cause of fear.

<sup>20</sup>The whole world shone in brilliant light and continued its work without hindrance; <sup>21</sup>they alone were covered in the darkness of night, the image of night that would be their lot. But even heavier than the darkness was the burden they were for themselves.

**18** <sup>1</sup>Meanwhile, for your holy ones there was great light. The Egyptians heard their voice without seeing them; they called them fortunate because they had not suffered; <sup>2</sup>they also thanked them, for in spite of the injustice done to them they had not retaliated, and asked their pardon for previous wrongs.

<sup>3</sup>In contrast to this darkness, you gave your holy people a pillar of fire as a guide in their unmapped journey, as a mild sun during their glorious migration. <sup>4</sup>The enemy deserved to be without light and imprisoned in darkness for having imprisoned your sons, the people through whom the imperishable light of your laws would be given to the world.

<sup>5</sup>They had intended to kill the infants of your holy people—and of those exposed only one child was saved. Because of that you retaliated by doing away with a multitude of their sons who perished together in the raging sea.

<sup>6</sup>That night had been foretold to our ancestors, and knowing in what promise they trusted, they could rejoice in all surety.

<sup>7</sup>Your people waited for both the salvation of the just and the downfall of their enemies, <sup>8</sup>for the very punishment of our enemies brought glory to the people you have called—that is, to us.

<sup>9</sup>The holy race secretly offered the Pass-

over sacrifice and really agreed on this worthy pact: that they would share alike both blessings and dangers. And forthwith they began to sing the hymns of their fathers.

<sup>10</sup>Then came discordant echoes from their enemies: plaintive voices mourning their children. 11:6

<sup>11</sup>The same sentence struck slave and master alike; the common man and the king endured equal suffering. <sup>12</sup>They mourned together for innumerable victims, all stricken with the same kind of death.

The living were not enough to bury them, for the flower of their race had perished in an instant.

<sup>13</sup>Although sorcery had turned them into unbelievers, after the death of their first-born they acknowledged that your people were the children of God.

<sup>14</sup>While all was in quiet silence and the night was in the middle of its course, <sup>15</sup>your almighty word leapt down from the royal throne—a stern warrior to a doomed world. <sup>16</sup>Carrying your fearful command like a sharpened sword and stretching from heaven to earth, he filled the universe with death. Rev  
19:11

<sup>17</sup>Immediately they were overwhelmed with terrible dreams and hallucinations and assailed by sudden fears. <sup>18</sup>Thrown half-dead, some here and some there, they made known why they were dying, <sup>19</sup>for the dreams that had troubled them had also instructed them, lest they perish without knowing the reason for their misfortune.

<sup>20</sup>Indeed the righteous, too, experienced death when a scourge struck a great number of them in the desert, but God's anger was short-lived.

<sup>21</sup>A blameless man hastened to their defense. Using the weapons of his sacred office—prayer and atonement incense—he confronted the divine Wrath, putting an end to their affliction, and was thus recognized as your servant.

<sup>22</sup>He vanquished your Wrath, but not by physical strength or by the force of arms. He won over the Punisher by reminding him of the sworn promises and Covenants made with our ancestors.

<sup>23</sup>The dead were already piled up, one on top of the other, when he intervened, beating back Wrath and cutting it off from the living. <sup>24</sup>For the whole world was represented on his flowing robe, the glorious names of the fathers on the four rows of

13:21

Is 2:3;  
2:51:22;  
14:26

stones, and your majesty engraved on the diadem on his head.

<sup>25</sup>The Destroyer, afraid of these, recoiled; a mere taste of Wrath had been sufficient.

**19** <sup>1</sup>Instead, a pitiless fury raged against the wicked to the very end, for God knew beforehand what they would do: <sup>2</sup>that after allowing them to leave and hastening their departure, they would then pursue them.

<sup>3</sup>While the Egyptians were still mourning at the graves of their dead, they had the mad idea of pursuing them as fugitives.

<sup>4</sup>A well-deserved fate drove them to this extreme, making them forget what had happened and completing their punishment with further torment. <sup>5</sup>While your people would experience a miraculous journey, their oppressors would suffer an extraordinary death.

<sup>6</sup>All creation in its different forms was fashioned anew at your command, in order to protect your people. <sup>7</sup>The cloud covered the camp with its shadow, dry land emerged where water had been. A safe passage was opened through the Red Sea, the tempestuous flood became a green plain <sup>8</sup>where the whole nation of those protected by your hand passed across, witnessing your astounding deeds.

<sup>9</sup>They were like horses led to pasture, or like frolicking lambs, praising you, their Lord, who had delivered them. <sup>10</sup>For they still remembered what they had seen in their exile: how the earth, in place of animals, had produced mosquitoes, and rivers, instead of providing fish, produced frogs.

<sup>11</sup>Later your people were to see a new

way for birds to appear, for when they hungered for food, <sup>12</sup>quails came out of the sea to satisfy their need. <sup>16:13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Punishment befell the sinners after they had been warned by violent thunder; deservedly they suffered for their own wickedness, for they had given proof of a most cruel hatred towards strangers.

<sup>14</sup>Others had not welcomed unknown strangers, but the Egyptians enslaved guests who had been good to them. <sup>15</sup>The former will be condemned for dealing badly with strangers; <sup>16</sup>worse still, the Egyptians who had welcomed them with celebrations and treated them as equals, but later made them suffer cruelly. <sup>45:17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>For this they were afflicted with blindness like the men of Sodom who came to the door of the righteous man Lot and found themselves in utter darkness, each one groping around to find his own door. <sup>19:11</sup>

<sup>18</sup>The elements interchanged their qualities as on a harp the notes change their tones while retaining their own pitch. Clearly this is what happened as is shown by a scrutiny of events.

<sup>19</sup>Creatures living on the land became aquatic and those that swam emerged on dry land. <sup>20</sup>Fire burned more fiercely in water when water ceased to quench. <sup>21</sup>On another occasion flames did not burn frail animals that passed through them nor did they melt the heavenly food that normally would have melted like frost.

• <sup>22</sup>For in every way, Lord, you have exalted and glorified your people, never disdaining them, but standing by them always and everywhere. <sup>45:17; 45:25</sup>

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• **19.22** The book concludes abruptly on this hope that the people of God will never be abandoned.

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