

Wisdom 4-19

4:7-14

The righteous person, though he die early, will be at rest. It is not length of life that makes for an honourable old age. It is not the number of years, but understanding. A blameless life is the true ripeness of age.

It is because he was pleasing to God and dearly loved by him, that while still living among sinners he was taken up, snatched away lest evil affect his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. Being perfected in a short time, he completed a full measure of time. It is because his soul was pleasing to the Lord, that he took him quickly from the midst of wickedness.

5:3, 8-13

The unrighteous, full of remorse will say to one another, groaning and in anguish of spirit: ...

“What good has our boasted wealth brought us? All those things have vanished like a shadow, and like a rumour that passes by; like a ship that cuts through the billowy water, and when it has passed no trace can be found, no track of its keel in the waves; or as, when a bird 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; or as, when an arrow is shot at a target, the air, thus divided, comes together at once, so that no one knows its pathway. So we too, as soon as we were born, ceased to be, and we had no sign of virtue to show, but were consumed in our wickedness.”

5:14-16

The hope of the ungodly is like thistledown carried by the wind, and like a light frost driven away by a gale; it is dispersed like smoke before the wind, and it passes like the remembrance of a guest who stays but a day. But the righteous live forever, and their reward is with the Lord; the Most High takes care of them. 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.

5:23

Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth,
and evildoing will overturn the thrones of rulers.

The author warns those who abuse their power by oppressing the Jewish people that their lawless behaviour will 'lay waste the whole earth'. They, however, will not benefit from the devastation. They will suffer the fate described throughout this passage.

6:1-5

Listen therefore, you kings, and understand; take note,
you lords of the ends of the earth. [the spreading power of Rome]

Give ear, you who rule over multitudes, and boast of many nations.
Your dominion was given you by the Lord, your sovereignty is from
the Most High. It is he who will scrutinise your actions and look into
your plans.

Because as servants of his kingdom you did not rule rightly, or keep
the law, or walk according to the purpose of God, he will come upon
you terribly and swiftly, for severe judgment falls on those in high
places.

6:12-16

Wisdom is radiant and unfading, easily discerned by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. If you rise early to seek her you will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at your door.

To fix your thought on her is perfect understanding, and if you are vigilant on her account you will soon be free from care.

For she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them on their way, and comes to meet them in every thought, every aspiration.

There was no temple in Alexandria. This added to the temptation to embrace aspects of the mystical cult to the Egyptian goddess, Isis. The language here echoes the language, not of the Septuagint, but of the Isis cult. Our author wants to get his student to penetrate deeply into their Bible. He wants to adapt its teaching to a new generation, and show that Wisdom surpasses Isis.

Throughout this first section (1:1 – 6:21) the author has been stating that we are destined for immortality, for eternal communion with God. God wants us to enjoy this communion and continues to offer us a share in his divine wisdom, which will guide our thoughts, intentions and deeds.

He has presented two opposing life-paths. One path is taken by the wise, the righteous, who welcome wisdom and live accordingly. The other is taken by the unwise, the unrighteous, who reject wisdom and live accordingly. At the end of their life here on earth, the wise enjoy the communion with God for which we are created. The unwise will face the judgment they have earned by their wicked lives. They have despised wisdom and have oppressed the righteous. They will experience death. All they built up for themselves will be destroyed.

Part Two : Wisdom 6:22 – 10:21

The author offers detailed instructions on what we are to do to obtain God's gift of eternal blessedness. We are to take divine Wisdom as our bride (8:2), and live justly by seeking and obeying Wisdom.

7:1-6

I [Solomon] also am mortal, like everyone else, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth; and in the womb of a mother I was moulded into flesh, within the period of ten months, compacted with blood, from the seed of a man and the pleasure of marriage.

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. I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths. For no king has had a different beginning of existence; there is for all one entrance into life, and one way out.

7:7

Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;
I called for help, and a spirit of wisdom came to me.

While our author aims to make as many connections as he can with the ideas and language of the Hellenist culture in which he and his students are living, here we see a radically different perspective. For the Hellenists, understanding was a human achievement. Drawing on his Jewish faith and tradition, our author knows it to be a gift from YHWH, the fruit of Divine Wisdom. Yes, we must welcome it and act accordingly, but it is not something we can achieve on our own .

7:22

There is in Wisdom
a spirit that is
intelligent,
holy,
unique,
manifold,
subtle,
agile,
lucid,
unsullied,
clear,
inviolable,
loving the good,
keen,

7:23-24

unhindered,
beneficent,
showing kingly goodwill,
steadfast,
unfailing,
free from care,
all-powerful,
overseeing all,
and penetrating through all spirits
that are intelligent,
pure,
and altogether subtle.

For wisdom is more mobile than any
motion; because of her pureness she
pervades and penetrates all things.

7:25-26

She is an exhalation from the power of God, a pure emanation from the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.

She is the radiance [Hebrews 1:3] of eternal light,
a spotless mirror [2Corinthians 3:18] of the active power of God,
and an image of his goodness.

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; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with Wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light of day she is found to be superior, for day is succeeded by the night, but against Wisdom evil does not prevail [see John 1:5]. She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.

I loved [φιλέω] her and sought her from my youth; I longed to take her for my bride, and became a lover of her beauty. She glorifies her noble birth by enjoying intimacy [συμβίωσις] with God, and the Lord of all loves [ἀγαπάω] her. For she is an initiate [μύστις] in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works.

If riches are a desirable possession in life, what is richer than wisdom, the active cause of all things?

If understanding is productive, who more than she is fashioner of what exists?

8:7

And if anyone loves justice, the fruits of Wisdom's labour are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for human beings than these.

The division of virtues into four classes goes back to Plato, and was espoused by the Stoics. However, for them virtue was the fruit of human effort. Our author sees all virtue (ἀρετή, moral excellence) as given by Wisdom to those who have wooed and won her as a bride (verse 7 and verse 2).

9:1-18 Solomon's Prayer - see 1Kings 3:6-9

9:9-12

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.

Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labour at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory.

Then my works will be acceptable, and I shall judge your people justly, and shall be worthy of the throne of my father.

9:13-19

For who can comprehend the designs of God? Who can discern what the Lord wills? The reasoning of mortals is so limited, and our designs are likely to fail; for a perishable body wearies the soul, and this earthly tent weighs down the far-reflecting mind.

We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and we labour hard to know what is at hand. Who, then, has worked out what is in the heavens? Who has been privy to your design, unless you have given Wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?

Thus it was that the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by Wisdom.”

Whereas in Hebrew anthropology the person is thought of as an animated body, our author, drawing on Hellenistic literature, thinks of a person as an incarnate soul.

Part 3 : Wisdom 10-19

Wisdom 10:1 – 11:22 Speaks of Wisdom from Adam through to Moses

11:23-26

But you show mercy to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent. 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. How could anything have endured if you had not willed it so? How would anything not called forth by you have been preserved? You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you Lover of the soul.

12:1

For your incorruptible spirit is in all things.

12:2

For this reason you correct little by little those who trespass, and you remind and admonish them by means of the very things in which they go wrong, so that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in you, O Lord.

12:3-11 Moves from Egypt to Canaan

12:13

There is no god besides you, whose care is for all people

12:18

Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with clemency, and with great forbearance you govern us

How naturally futile all who are ignorant of God, unable from the good things that are seen to recognise the Existing One, not recognising the Artificer, though gazing on what He has made. 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. 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. If people were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is the one who formed them. For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.

13:6-9 An objection dismissed

Yet these people are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. 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.

On the contrary, not even they are to be excused; ⁹for if they had the power to know so much that they could investigate the Eon, how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?

The Eon is the divine dynamic power that penetrates the cosmos.

13:10 – 14:31

Even worse than worshipping nature is the worship of objects crafted by humans.

15:1-3

But you, our God, are kind and true, long-suffering, and governing all things with mercy. 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. ³For to know you is complete justice, and to be aware of your power is the root of immortality.

15:7-13 Returns to the topic of idols

15:14 – 16:29 Returns to the topic of the journey through the wilderness

16:7 You are the Saviour of all.

16:12 It was your word, O Lord, that heals all people.

17:1 – 19:22 Returns to God's punishment of Egypt

18:4 speaks of the Israelites as those through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world.

18:14-16

While gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful Word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a relentless warrior carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, stood and filled all things with death, touching heaven while standing on the earth.