

Eighth Part

The Wisdom Books of David and Solomon

Book III

The Book of Wisdom

Prologue

King Solomon, inspired by the Holy Ghost, wrote the Book of Wisdom during the first ten years of his reign, when he was still a model of virtue, wisdom and prudence. In this Moral Book he sets forth other aspects of the folly of worldly things and the benefits that Wisdom's possession brings.

Chapter I

Introduction to the Book of Wisdom

Love justice, you who rule the Earth.

Have sentiments worthy of the Lord, and seek Him with simplicity of heart.

Because He lets Himself be found by those who act with integrity, and manifests Himself to those who trust in Him; while perverse thoughts separate from God; and His power, put to the test, corrects fools.

Because into a malign soul Wisdom will not enter, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin; since the Holy Ghost, Teacher of Wisdom, flies from fantasies, keeps far from indiscreet thoughts, and reproves the ensuing wrongdoing.

Because even though the Spirit of Wisdom is benign, He will not leave blaspheming lips unpunished, since God is witness to man's thoughts, observer of his heart and hearer of his words.

Because the Spirit of the Lord encompasses the whole Earth and knows including what is most hidden. Thus whoever says evil things cannot hide them from Him, nor escape avenging justice.

Because the thoughts of the ungodly will be strictly judged; the words of the ungodly man reach up to God's zealous hearing for the chastisement of his wrongdoing.

Be careful, then, of grumbling, as this does great harm, and restrain the tongue from all detraction; because not one evil word spoken in private will go unpunished; and a lying tongue does the soul to death.

Chapter II

Man's destiny according to God's plan was overturned by man himself through his sins

Do not strive to hasten death by the waywardness of your life, nor draw perdition down upon your soul by the work of your hands.

Because God did not make death, nor is He glad at man's perdition.

He created all things in the Universe to subsist in His presence, and made them salutary; nothing in them was poisonous or harmful. Hell did not exist prior to the fall of the rebel angels.

God created man in original justice, which brings immortality with it; therefore it was God's plan that righteousness in man be perpetual, and he be immortal. But it was man himself who, by his disobedience to God, obtained spiritual and corporal death; and men have become corrupted to such a degree that, by their sinful disorders, they have made an alliance with death, thus becoming ever more deserving of such misery.

Chapter III

The ungodly's iniquitous ideas and deeds

1. The ungodly, intending to justify their disorders, foolishly say among themselves: *"Short and irksome is the time of our life; there is no other after death; no one has ever come back after death to tell us what passes in the other world. So then, we were born by chance; and after this life we will be as if we had never been; because our life is like smoke that promptly vanishes and our soul like a fleeting spark that propels our heart, and afterwards is forever extinguished; and once gone out, our body will be reduced to ashes, and our soul will evaporate like tenuous vapour. Therefore, life will vanish like a mist struck by the sun's rays and dispelled by its heat. Moreover, after death our name shall be forgotten, without any lasting remembrance of our deeds. Our life, then, is a shadow that passes, and after death there is no return."*

2. *"Come, then, let us enjoy the good things of life without restraint; and let us make haste to delight in creatures, according to our desires, while we live. Let us surfeit ourselves with an abundance of delicacies and rich wines, and surround ourselves with all kinds of luxuries and comforts before the flower of our life passes. Let us be crowned with the roses of pleasure before they wither, and leave everywhere the signs of our wantonness. Let none of us cease taking part in the dissolute life; in every place let us leave the signs of our exuberant orgies, for all this is the portion of our inheritance."*

3. *"Let us oppress the righteous and needy, without pardoning the widow or respecting the venerable grey hairs of the aged. Let our strength be the only law of justice, as weakness brings no benefits. Let us, then, lay traps for the righteous man, as he does not approve of our doings, but opposes them, and casts our sins against the Law in our faces, and defames us disclosing our depraved conduct; he assures that he has the knowledge of God and calls himself son of God, and has become the censor of our thoughts. So then, we cannot even bear the sight of him; because his life is unlike our own, for he observes a very different conduct."*

4. *"We are regarded by him as senseless and perverse persons, and he abstains from our ways as from filth; for he believes and proclaims the last things of man, affirms that the righteous, after death, will enjoy eternal life, and he glories to have God as Father. But let us see, then, if his words are true. We shall try him to see if what he says is really so; and thus we shall see what his end will be. For if he truly is a son of God, He will take charge of him and free him from the hands of his adversaries. Let us try him with insults and tortures to see his resignation*

and test his patience. Let us condemn him to the most infamous death; since, according to his words, his God will save him."

5. Such perversities the ungodly think and put into practice blinded by their own malice. They have not understood the mysteries of God, nor believed that there is a reward for the righteous, nor taken into account the glory that awaits saintly souls. For God created man with an immortal soul and formed him to His own image and likeness. Through the devil's envy, however, death entered the world when the evil one succeeded in seducing man, and those of the devil's party imitate his ways.

Chapter IV

Happiness of the righteous and unhappiness of the ungodly

1. The souls of the righteous, however, are in the hands of God; and the torment of eternal death will not reach them.

2. Nevertheless, the death of the righteous is seen by the ungodly as the greatest of misfortunes, they considering that body and soul are totally and definitively annihilated, and therefore deprived of the consolation of a happy and eternal life; which is a terrible error, since following the death of the righteous his soul will repose forever in eternal happiness. And if, in the sight of men, righteous men suffer torments, their hope is filled with immortality. Their tribulation is slight when compared to the reward they will receive, which shall be very great; because God refined them as gold in fire, found them worthy of Himself by their virtues and received them as victims offered in holocaust; and in due course will give them recompense. Then they will shine out brighter than the sun, will go from one part of the Universe to another with the agility of the Blessed, will judge the nations together with the Supreme Judge, will rule the peoples and the Lord will reign eternally with them. Those who trust in God understand all these truths, and those who are faithful to His love will be joined to Him; since Grace and peace are for His chosen ones.

3. The ungodly, however, will be chastised according to the measure of their wrongdoing; since they went away from God and despised what is just and upright in His sight. For hapless are those who reject Wisdom and instruction; vain is their hope, unfruitful their labours and useless their industry. Fatuous are their wives and utterly perverse their children. Accursed their race, since the race of the wicked, if not converted, has an entirely disastrous end.

4. Happier is the righteous woman, though barren, and who keeps herself unstained without defiling her couch by adultery; because she will receive her recompense when God calls saintly souls to Himself. Happier too is the celibate, whose hands have not committed villainy, nor has he thought perverse things against God; since he will be given a precious gift for his fidelity and a lofty glory in Heaven, for glorious is the fruit of good works; by them the root of Wisdom never withers.

Chapter V

Death of the chaste and death of the unchaste

1. O how beautiful and resplendent is the generation of those who love chastity! Its fruits are beneficial and sweet to eat; since they blossom from trees ornate from the exercise of the virtue of purity. The remembrance of the chaste is immortal, since their virtue is acknowledged before God and men. While on Earth they are models for imitation; and when dead are remembered with admiration. In Heaven they will be eternally recompensed with the crown of triumph included as reward for their continuous battle on Earth to safeguard chastity. The Grace to see God is reserved for those who are clean of heart.

2. O how vile and repugnant is the generation of those who love impurity! Its fruits are detrimental and bitter to eat, because they are borne by trees corrupted by wanton debauchery. The Lord will abominate those obstinate in licentiousness; since, if not converted, they shall die without honour and be eternally disgraced among the other reprobates; because God will destroy their inordinate passions, reduce them to silence and utter desolation; and their remembrance shall perish forever. Their disorders shall rise up against them, and accuse and torment them without end.

Chapter VI

Christ the King will exterminate the ungodly during the three days of darkness preceding His Glorious Second Coming to Earth

Christ, the Anointed of the Lord God of Hosts, before judging the nations, will arm Himself with all His zeal, and arm His own as well, to avenge Himself of His enemies and put an end to Antichrist. He will take up justice as breastplate, and infallible judgement as helmet. As impenetrable shield He will grasp rectitude. God will make Himself a pointed lance of His inflexible wrath, and the whole Universe will combat with Him against the insensate. Lightning bolts will fly straight at them, fired from the clouds as from a well aimed bow, and will wound unerringly; and from God's wrath, dense and burning hail will fall. The waves of the sea will break against them; and the rivers, every one, will wildly inundate the land, and in scorching whirlwinds they shall be undone. Christ, the anointed of God, by His breath and the brightness of His Divine Countenance, will destroy Antichrist. Satan and his infernal hordes shall be vanquished and enchained for evermore, without any power over men. So it is that, because of the iniquity of the ungodly, the Universe will be purified by most tenebrous fire produced by the Lord's Anointed.

Chapter VII

The Universal Judgment: the righteous and the ungodly

1. On Judgment Day, the righteous, together with Christ, Supreme Judge, will judge the ungodly with extreme rigour. On that day, before those who persecuted them and despised their deeds, the righteous will be revealed with great honour, paramount beauty and utter happiness. The righteous will live eternally, and their

recompense will be in the contemplation of God, their minds set on the Most High. In Heaven, from the Lord's hands, the righteous will receive the kingdom of glory and the crown of loveliness.

2. At Judgment, the ungodly, when they see the righteous, with furious consternation, amid agonizing laments and without the least repentance, will say within themselves: *"They, at other times, were the butt of our derision and the object of our contempt. For we, senseless, deemed their lives madness and their end dishonour. Now we see how they are counted among the children of God and have their inheritance among the saints. So then, we lived far from the way of truth, despising the light of justice and the sun of the knowledge of Wisdom. We persisted in following the path of wrongdoing and perdition, forsaking the way of the Lord. Of what use has pride been to us? Or, what benefits has the vain ostentation of our riches brought us?"* The condemned will say such things, not because they feel sorrow for their misdeeds, rather because those in Hell as well have to acknowledge Christ's Divine Justice and bend their knees before Him as the God and Supreme Judge that He is.

Chapter VIII

Exhortation to kings, judges and all kinds of officials to seek Divine Wisdom

1. Wisdom is better than might; and the wise and prudent better than the valiant. Listen, then, O kings, and be attentive; learn all ye judges of the Earth. Give ear to my words you who rule the peoples, and who glory at the vassalage of many nations. For power and might have been given you by the Lord God of Hosts, Who will examine your works, and fathom even your most hidden thoughts. Because if you, being instruments of His universal Kingdom, neither judge with rectitude, nor keep God's Holy Law, nor follow His divine will, He will let His Holy wrath fall upon you; since those who exercise power over others will be judged with extreme rigour. Because on lesser men God will have more compassion; but the mighty will be treated with greater severity; He threatens the more powerful, then, with heavier punishment. For God does not exempt any person from His justice, nor does He respect anyone's rank; since He made the little and the great, and cares equally for all.

2. To you, then, kings and other potentates of Earth, these words of mine are addressed, so that you learn Wisdom and do not err. Because those who shall perform rightly what justice requires will be crowned with sanctity. Whoever takes these words into deep consideration and cherishes them, will be instructed. Luminous and imperishable is Wisdom. She is easily seen by those who cherish Her; and shall be found by those who seek Her. She forestalls those who covet Her, presenting Herself before them. To have the mind occupied in Wisdom, then, is consummate prudence; and whoever keeps watch for love of Her, will afterwards find deserved rest. Because She herself is everywhere seeking those worthy to possess Her, and on the way shows herself to such with pleasure, and on every occasion and dealing they have Her by their side. For the beginning of

Wisdom is also the ardent desire to be instructed in her; and to obtain instruction is already to love Wisdom; and to love Her is to keep Her laws; and to keep Her laws is perfect purity of soul, that unites with God. Wisdom, then, leads to the Eternal Kingdom.

3. O kings of the peoples! Cherish Wisdom so as to reign perpetually. Cherish the light of Wisdom you who rule the peoples, and I will declare to you what Wisdom is and how She was engendered, and the mysteries of God shall not be kept hidden from you; for their knowledge and truth will be made clear to you. A wise king is the mainstay of his people. Therefore, take interest in these words of instruction, because they will be of good use to you. The unwise king will never have any part with Wisdom.

Chapter IX

Solomon speaks of the Wisdom he received from God

1. I am a mortal man, like the rest of men. However, given my rank of king, with the object of ruling my people well, I desired the Spirit of Wisdom, asked Her of God, and He granted Her to me. I preferred Her to kingdoms and thrones, and considered wealth as nothing compared to Her. I loved Her more than health and beauty, and proposed to have Her as light of my actions, since Her radiance is inextinguishable. All good came to me together with Her. And I rejoiced devoutly in all these things because Wisdom guided me; however, before receiving Wisdom, I did not know that She was mother of all these goods.

2. Because Wisdom is an infinite treasure for men; and all who make use of Her have part in God's friendship, having kept His Holy Teachings and Laws. God has granted me to express what I feel, and to have thoughts worthy of the gifts received from Him; for God is the Guide of human wisdom, and He who corrects the wise; given that we, our words and our works, are in His hands. He gave me true knowledge of many of the things that exist; since Wisdom, the Architect of it all, instructed me.

3. For what man, without the light of Wisdom, will be able to know God's counsel, or who will be able to find out what it is that God desires? Because the thoughts of man are insecure, and his suppositions mistaken; since the corruptible body burdens the soul and oppresses the mind with unprofitable thoughts. And if we scarcely succeed in conceiving the form of earthly things, and hardly understand what we have before our eyes, who will be able to examine what is in Heaven? And above all, who shall be able to know, O Lord, Your counsels, if You do not give man Wisdom, and from the heights above send down your Holy Ghost? May the paths of the dwellers of Earth thus be made straight and may they learn what things please You; because by Wisdom, O Lord, were saved as many as were acceptable to You from the beginning of the world.

Chapter X

Uncreated Wisdom is by essence God Triune Himself. Created Wisdom is the Most Divine Soul of Christ

1. In Uncreated Wisdom resides the true spirit of intelligence, which: is Holy, Unique, multiform, subtle, eloquent, agile, immaculate, infallible, suave, lover of good, discerning, irresistible, beneficent, lover of men, benign, steadfast, constant, sure, almighty, all-seeing and of spirits all-embracing. For Divine Wisdom is more agile than all things that move, and reaches everywhere, being an utterly Pure Spirit.

2. Created Wisdom is the breath of God's own virtue and emanation of God's own glory. Created Wisdom is the splendour of Eternal Light, the unblemished mirror of the Majesty of God and the Image of His Goodness.

Chapter XI

Divine Wisdom is within reach of all human beings and is of greater worth than all the wealth and learning of the world

1. Divine Wisdom, being by essence God Himself, can do all; and being immutable, renews all, and pours Herself out upon all nations among holy souls, fashioning friends of God. God, who is Wisdom itself, loves whoever dwells with Wisdom: which is more beautiful than the sun, surpasses the entire muster of stars and has no comparison with any other light, as the light of Divine Wisdom is not eclipsed by any ill-will. Divine Wisdom, then, enfolds all things from end to end, gently ordaining them.

2. It is Divine Wisdom that teaches men divine science and directs their labours. If in this life wealth is coveted, what is there more valuable than Wisdom, creator of all things? If man's industry produces many good things, it is because Wisdom has taught him the art of so doing. If a man loves virtue, that is fruit of Wisdom, for it is She who teaches Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance, and all other virtues, which are the most useful acquisitions for man in this life. If a man desires to know much, She knows all: past, present and future. Therefore, whoever possesses Divine Wisdom, possesses all.

Chapter XII

Divine Wisdom guided the Patriarchs and other righteous of the People of Israel

It is Divine Wisdom that: rescued Patriarch Adam and Matriarch Eve his spouse, from their sin, and gave Adam the power to govern over all things; preserved Patriarch Noah and his family from perishing in the universal Flood by leading them into the Ark; exalted the heroic virtue of Patriarch Job, restoring and multiplying his goods; chose Patriarch Abraham and conserved him strong in Faith, and made his wife Sarah fecund; freed the righteous Lot from perishing in the chastisement of Sodom; fortified Patriarch Isaac, victim figure of Christ; led Patriarch Jacob by sure ways, showed him the Kingdom of God, enriched him amid his fatigues and protected him from his enemies; did not forsake Patriarch

Joseph when sold by his brothers, neither when prisoner in Egypt, instead gave him the government of this nation.

Chapter XIII

Divine Wisdom guided Moses, Caudillo of the People of Israel

1. Divine Wisdom chose Moses to be Caudillo of the People of Israel; helped him to free the Israelites from the Egyptians' oppression, chastising the latter with plagues by means of extraordinary prodigies. Great, O Lord, are Your judgments and ineffable Your works! For when the villainous Egyptians persisted in oppressing Your People, they were plunged into total darkness for seven days; while the Israelites were illuminated by the brightest light.

2. Divine Wisdom guided and protected Moses and his people when miraculously crossing the Red Sea; drowned the Egyptian army in the depths of the sea; promulgated Holy Law through Moses; directed the People of Israel's steps during the years of their desert wanderings, and nourished them with manna when needed; chastised those who dared disobey Holy Law; and brought his People into the Promised Land.

Chapter XIV

Divine Wisdom converted many inhabitants of Canaan territory, and exterminated others, during the conquest carried out by the Israelites under the orders of Caudillo Joshua

1. Oh how good and gentle, O Lord, is your Spirit in all things! Hence You admonish those who have gone astray and correct the faults they commit, so that casting aside malice they may believe in You, O Lord. Because You looked on with indignation at the ancient dwellers of Your Holy Land because of their idolatry and other abominations; but before humbling them by Your power by means of Your armies under Joshua's orders, You exhorted them with wise and holy counsels through Most Holy Melchisedech, so as to obtain their conversion and also avoid their extermination. In Your infinite mercy You sent as well countless plagues of horseflies against those who persisted in rejecting Your Word, in order, by the agonizing stings of these insects, to seek to bow the stubborn necks of many of them through suffering. Thanks to this chastisement, when the armies of Israel led by Joshua arrived, the hearts of many of the inhabitants of Canaan who had not previously accepted Your counsels by preaching, were better disposed towards accepting the true God; and were therefore converted and joined the Chosen People. But those who did not amend through these reproofs and upbraiding, came to experience a chastisement worthy of God's power, being exterminated by Your people's armies.

2. And who shall say to You, Why did you do this? Or who will oppose Your judgments? Or who will dare to defend evil men before You? Or who will censure You for having exterminated nations which You created? Because there is no other God but You, and You care for all things to show that there is no injustice at all in Your judgments. There is no king or prince who can call You to account for those whom You have caused to perish, since You are righteous, and dispose

all things rightly, and do not chastise unwarrantedly; since Your power is the fount of justice; and just as You are Lord of all, You are indulgent towards all.

3. You exercise Your justice, then, when men do not believe You to be sovereignly powerful, and You confound the rashness of those who do not acknowledge You. But as You are the sovereign Lord of all, You judge with equanimity and govern us with supreme moderation. Thus You have taught Your people that their judges must also be humane; and have given confident hope to Your children, seeing that when You judge them for their sins, You give them time for penance. Since, if You chastised Your people's enemies with so much circumspection, giving them time to repent of their wickedness, with how much more care will You judge the children of Your people, to whose forebears You made great promises under oaths and covenants?

Chapter XV

Divine Wisdom disposes all and is patient and merciful

You, Lord, dispose all things in fair measure, number and weight; because only You have Supreme Power: and who shall be able to resist the might of Your arm? The whole world is before You as a tiny grain of sand and as a drop of morning dew falling to the ground. But You have mercy towards everyone, the same as You can do everything; and You close Your eyes to the sins of men to give them time to repent and do penance. Because You love all You have created and abhor nothing of what You have made, except those who have been unfaithful to You by choosing eternal damnation. And how could anything endure if You did not so will? Or anything be conserved without Your command? Because You are indulgent towards everyone, for all things are Yours, O Lord, who hold us so dear.

Chapter XVI

Folly and aberration of idolatry. Blessed is the Wood of the Saviour's Cross

1. Certainly all men are vain in whom the Wisdom of God is not found; and who by the good things to be seen and the consideration of created things, do not recognize their Architect; but contrariwise, hold as gods governing the Universe, either fire, or wind, or constellations of stars, or seas, or sun or moon. For if, enchanted by the beauty of such things, they imagine them gods, they ought to know through them how much more beautiful is their master, since He who created them all is the Lord, Creator of all beauty and One True God. Or if they marvel at the virtue and natural influence of these creatures, they should understand through them that He who created them surpasses them in power; since by the greatness and beauty of the creature, man can attain the knowledge of the existence of the Creator. If they, with their ample human science, can penetrate certain mysteries of creatures, how is it that they do not see more readily, by their means, the Lord who created them? But yet more vain are those who consider works made by the hand of man to be gods; such as all kinds of idolatrous figures of gold, silver, stone, wood and so forth. And for greater folly,

offer vows to such idols made by their hands and consult them about their goods, about their children, their marriages, health of the sick and other series of entreaties. They are not ashamed to pray to things devoid of power to help them, and put their vain hope in them.

2. But You, O God, in Your Divine Wisdom, ordered Noah to build an Ark of salvation out of wood: so that with the hope of the entire Earth taking refuge in a barque governed by Your Hand, the immaculate Seeds from which the world was to be supernaturally reborn, be conserved. For blessed the Wood of the Cross of the Divine Saviour that was made and used for the Redemption of the world; but accursed the wood of an idol made by human hand, and accursed the artificer who formed it, and accursed whoever deemed it as god. For the invention of idols was the origin of idolatry, and their discovery the corruption of life, because neither were there any in the beginning, nor will there always be.

Chapter XVII

Idolatry, cause of all evil. Wisdom of God, cause of all good

1. Men, by the inordinate love of their own esteem, or to satisfy their concupiscence, or out of vain hope, or to curry favour with kings and potentates, and from other different motives and aims, gave to many creatures and works formed by their hands the intransferable name of God. Idolatry, in any of its varied manifestations, is the cause of murders, robberies, deceits, perversions, infidelities, disturbances, perjuries, harassment of the good, forgetfulness of God, defilement of souls, uncertainty about births, inconstancies in marriage, disorders of adultery and vice. The abominable worship of idols, then, is the cause, beginning and end of all evils. Idolaters, if not converted, will have their just chastisement, for given up to their idols they bring discredit on the true God, scorning truthfulness, justice and holiness, attributes of the Supreme Maker.

2. O God our Lord! You are benign, truthful and patient, and govern all by Your mercy; for, if we sin, we count on the help of Your Grace to repent, and You are swift to pardon us; and if we do not sin, we know it is Your Grace that sustains us. Because to know You with living Faith, hope in You with full confidence, and love You with perfect Charity is consummate integrity for our soul; and the possession of Divine Wisdom, the root of our eternal immortality.