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THE BOOK OF WISDOM



CHAPTER 17

The Book of Wisdom never existed among the Hebrews. Its style has rather the fragrance of Greek eloquence. The Jews claim that it is a work of Philo; it is then said to be a work of Wisdom because in it the coming of Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, and his passion are clearly expressed. This is the Prologue Jerome put before the Book of Wisdom; he shows firstly the origin of this book saying: 'The Book of Wisdom never existed among the Hebrews. Its style, that is, its language is so elegant that it 'has rather the fragrance of Greek eloquence', that is, its taste is more Greek than Hebrew. The Greeks are more eloquent and deeper in their statements than the Hebrews. So, since this book has a most elegant style with the deepest teachings, it is clear that it was written in Greek rather than in Hebrew. Secondly, Jerome names its author when he says: 'The Jews claim that it', namely, the Book of Wisdom 'is a work of Philo' as its compiler but that Solomon was the person who discovered it. While Philo was a Jew he was highly skilled in the Greek language. Jerome says of him in the book *De viris illustribus* that 'he was a Jew of Alexandria of the class of priests'. Thirdly, he gives the reason for the title when he says: 'it is then said to be a work of Wisdom because in it the coming of Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, and his passion are clearly expressed'. The translation is based on the Douay Rheims version of the Bible.

**THE COMMENTARY ON THE CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF WISDOM
ARE THE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SERAPHIC DOCTOR SAINT BONAVENTURE, OFM**

Chapter 17

Secondly, on the punishment of loss

For your judgments, O Lord, are great, and your words cannot be expressed; therefore undisciplined souls have erred. After treating of the punishment of the senses, here he deals with the punishment of loss, that is, the withdrawing of light; firstly, he treats of the equity of the punishment of the Egyptians, because they were punished as they deserved; secondly, that it is beyond cure, namely, because it cannot be altered: *For neither did the den that held them, keep them from fear*; thirdly, its generality because it applied to all: *But they that during that night, in which nothing could be done, and which came upon them from the lowest and deepest hell, slept the same sleep*; fourthly, its singularity, because it applied only to the Egyptians: *For the whole world was enlightened with a clear light, and none were hindered in their labours.*

The equity is shown from the meritorious cause of their sins, firstly, of a sin against God; secondly, against a neighbour: *For while the wicked thought to be able to have dominion over the holy nation*; thirdly, against themselves: *And while they thought to lie hid in their obscure sins, they were scattered under a dark veil of forgetfulness.*

For the whole world was made bright with a bright light, and none were hindered in their labours. Here the singularity of punishment is treated; and because 'when opposites are placed together they become clearer', he treats, firstly, the illumination of others; secondly, the darkness of the Egyptians: *But over them only was spread a heavy night*; thirdly, that the darkness was deserved: *But they were more grievous darkness.*

(Verse 19). I have said well that the Egyptians and not others were bound by the bonds of darkness; *for the whole world*, namely, except for the land of Egypt, *was made bright with a bright*, 'that is, clear', *light*, namely, of the sun and of the heavenly lights although elsewhere there were many sinners in the world; Matthew 5:45: 'The Father makes the sun to rise upon the good and bad'. *And none were hindered*, that is, held back, *in their labours*, a light through the thickness of the dark; or in another way: *none were hindered*, none except the Egyptians from a lack of light since elsewhere there was a brightness of light necessary for work; so John 9:4: 'Work while it is day, the night comes when no one can work'.

(Verse 20). *But over them only*, namely, the Egyptians, *was spread*, namely, by God, *a heavy night*, because it was darker and longer than usual; Job 37:19: 'For we are wrapped in darkness'. *Night*, I say, being, *an image*, that is, an exact copy, *of that darkness*, namely, of eternal darkness, *which*, namely, the image of darkness, that is, of the imagined darkness, *was to come upon them*, namely, in hell; so Matthew 25:30: 'The unprofitable servant cast you into the exterior darkness'; also Job 10:22: 'A land of misery and darkness where the shadow of death and no order but everlasting horror dwells'. And because they, not unjustly, suffered such deep darkness, *they were more grievous darkness*, that is, because of more grievous darkness, add: which they suffered, that is, the darkness to come over them in hell; so Job 34:25: 'He knows their works and therefore he shall bring night on them and they shall be destroyed'. Or: *they were more grievous darkness*, that is, more dangerous from blindness of heart'; *their own malice blinded them*, above in Wisdom 2:21; Ephesians 5:8: 'You were darkness before'; some texts have: *more grievous than darkness*, namely, exterior darkness from remorse of conscience.

END OF WISDOM 17

Note,

however, that the aforementioned chain, speaking in a moral sense, represents the progress and connection of sins, of which Isaiah 58:9 says: 'If you will take away the chain out of the midst of you'. *A whistling wind* represents a secret suggestion of the devil; Revelation 16:13: 'And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs go out from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet'.

The melodious voice of birds represents a pleasure in thoughts; Zephaniah 2:14: 'The voice of the singing bird in the window'. *A fall of water running down* represents consent to commit a sin, against which Sirach 25:34 [25] says: 'Give no outlet to your water, no, not a little'. *The mighty noise of stones tumbling down* represents the external action of a sin; Job 14:18: 'A mountain falling comes to nought and a rock is removed out of its place'. *The running that could not be seen of beasts playing together* represents a depraved custom; Job 40:15:

'There all the beasts of the earth shall play'. *The roaring voice of wild beasts* represents an open glorying in a sin committed against what Psalm 51:3 says: 'Why do you glory in malice?' *A rebounding echo* represents a remembering of a pleasurable sin; Numbers 11:5: 'We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt.

(Verse 1). *For your judgments, O Lord, are great, and your words cannot be expressed; therefore undisciplined souls have erred.* I have said well that the Egyptians were punished, but the Israelites were comforted; *for your judgments, O Lord, are great*; 'Applied to every creature of the king'; Psalm 35:7: 'Your judgments are a great deep'. *And your words cannot be expressed*, namely, by which you teach rational creatures; *cannot be expressed*, I say, fully; Romans 11:33: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God'. *Therefore*; 'Because they did not want to believe in and understand their Creator', *undisciplined souls*, that is, incorrigible in their sins; Sirach 20:9: 'And success in evil things for a person without discipline'; also Jeremiah 5:3: 'You have struck them and they have not grieved, and they have refused to accept correction'; Psalm 49:17: 'You, however, have hated discipline'; *have erred*, from the path of truth; above in Wisdom 5:6: *We have erred from the way of truth*, of which John 14:6 says: 'I am the way and the truth and the life': way by example, truth in promise, life in reward.

(Verse 2). *For while the wicked thought to be able to have dominion over the holy nation, they themselves being fettered with the bonds of darkness, and a long night, shut up in their houses, lay there exiled from the eternal providence.* I have said well that they *have erred*; *for while the wicked*, namely, the Egyptians, called *wicked* for their wicked oppression of the Israelites and the drowning of their infants, Exodus 1:14ff.; *thought*, that is, believed, *to be able to have dominion over the holy nation*, that is, the children of Israel, who are called the *holy nation*, because they were the children of Saints, according to Tobit 2:18: 'We are the children of saints; also, because sanctified by circumcision, and this sanctification is spoken of in Genesis 17:10ff.; thirdly, because by a way of life for those to be sanctified, according to Leviticus 11:44: 'Be holy for I am holy'. *With the bonds of darkness*, namely, that could be touched as in Egypt, Exodus 10:21; *and a long night*, that is, a dark time as if it were night; this time was long because for three days no one could see a neighbour, as is clear in the same passage; *shut up*, namely, by a similar effect because they were not able to go out as if they were shut up; so Exodus 10:22-23: 'For three days people could not move from the place where they were'; *shut up under their roofs*, namely, of their homes not daring to go outside; *lay there exiled from the eternal providence*, namely, as applied to themselves because they thought to block the deliverance promised by God to the Israelites. Or: *exiled* etc., that is, wanting to escape the providence of God; something they could not do because it was said above in Wisdom 16:15: *It is impossible to escape your hand. They were hidden*, that is, they thought to hide, according to Proverbs 14:19: 'The evil shall fall down before the good'; or *they were pleased*, namely, in the punishment who had been displeased in sin because by punishment there is a correction of those who became disordered in sin.

(Verse 3). *And while they thought to lie hid*, namely, from God punishing them, even though 'All things are naked and open to God's eyes', Hebrews 4:13. I say, *to lie hid in their obscure sins*, that is, unusual sins that are done especially in obscurity; Ephesians 5:12: 'For the things that are done by them in secret, it is a shame even to speak of', because, 'every one that does evil hates the light', John 3:20; for this reason sins are called 'works of darkness, Romans 13:12. *Under a dark veil of forgetfulness*, that is, with the obscurity of darkness covering them and claiming forgetfulness of others, when they were not able to help themselves; *they were scattered*, namely, one from another, *being horribly afraid*, that is, with a horrible fear, namely, because of the darkness. *And troubled with exceeding great astonishment*, namely, because of the unaccustomed novelty of the situation; above in Wisdom 5:2: *These seeing it, shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation*; Job 18:20: 'They that come after him shall be astonished at his day, and horror shall fall upon them that went before'.

For neither did the den that held them, keep them from fear, for noises coming down troubled them, and sad visions appearing to them, affrighted them. Here is shown that the punishment is irreversible, firstly from the place; secondly, from its contrary: *And no power of fire could give them light*; thirdly, by a craftsman: *And the delusions of their magic art were put down, and their boasting of wisdom was reproachfully rebuked.*

(Verse 4). *For neither did the den that held them* etc. I have said well: *being horribly afraid* etc.; *neither did the den that held them*, namely, those who fled there on account of the hail and rain and fire. And note, that a singular is used for a plural when he says *den*, because they did not flee only to one den but to many, and they thought to hide in diverse places; *keep them from fear*; : 'Because horror always accompanies darkness; and the less one sees of what is round about, the more one fears'. *For noises coming down*, namely, into that pit, *noises*, I say, either of heavenly thunder or diabolical illusions; *troubled*, that is, thoroughly troubled them; Job 15:21: 'The sound of dread is always in their ears'. *And sad visions appearing to them.*

But how could they be seen in such darkness?

It can be said that they were not visible to the senses but to the imagination. *Affrighted them*, 'It was possible that demons could put some terrible images in them that would frighten them and increase the punishment', according to Job 7:14: 'You will frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions'.

And no power of fire could give them light, neither could the bright flames of the stars enlighten that horrible night. Here is shown that the punishment is irreversible, and this from the opposite part, namely, of fire, firstly, because it could not provide help; secondly, because rather it provided harm: *But there appeared to them a sudden fire, very dreadful, and being struck with the fear of that face, which was not seen, they thought the things which they saw to be worse.*

(Verse 15). *Moreover*, namely, apart from the aforementioned evils, *if any of them*, namely, the Egyptians, *had fallen down*, namely into a pit or some such place, *he was kept shut up in prison*, that is, being unable to go out of there, *without irons*, because all were constrained by the bond of darkness, as is clear above on verse 2.

(Verse 16). *For if anyone was a husbandman*, that is, a worker of the land, *or a shepherd*, of animals, *or a labourer in the field*, such as a reaper or vintager, *and was suddenly overtaken*, namely, outside his houses by that darkness, *he endured a necessity from which he could not fly*, namely, for need and affliction, because for three days no one moved from the place where he was, as is clear in Exodus 10:23.

(Verses 17 and 18). *For they were all bound together*, that is, bound at the one time, *with one*, that is, a common, *chain of darkness*, namely, exterior darkness. But not only a chain of exterior darkness but interior, namely, of infidelity and sins; so Proverbs 5:22: One 'is bound fast with the ropes of one's own sins'; also Psalm 118:61: 'The cords of the wicked have encompassed me'. For *whether it were a whistling wind, or the melodious voice of birds, among the spreading branches of trees, or a fall of water running down with violence.* I have said well that they bore necessity, for *whether it were a wind whispering* to itself, that is 'a whistling of a gentle air',

1 Kings 19:12; *or the melodious voice of birds, among the spreading branches of trees*, that is, a song, *melodious, melodious*, in so far as it was suitable in itself to delight rather than to terrify; *or a fall of water running down with violence*, that is running strongly just as the waters of torrents run. - Or the mighty noise of stones tumbling down, that is, falling unforeseen from high places, *or the running that could not be seen of beasts playing together*, namely, because of the thickness of the darkness, *of animals*, namely, of gentle animals such as beasts of burden; *or the roaring voice of wild beasts*, that is, of untamed animals, bears, lions or suchlike; *or a rebounding echo from the highest mountains*, that is, a repetition of the voice of animals caused by being echoed back by the mountains or rocks; *these things made them to swoon for fear*, namely, everything stated above; lived by their ears, or eyes, or by any of the senses, they feared it as something dangerous'.

(Verse 12). *And while there is less expectation*, that is, hope or confidence, *from within*, namely in the mind, because justice is absent and justice makes the just confident and secure, according to Proverbs 28:1: 'The just, bold as a lion, shall be without dread'. *The greater does it regard the power*, that is, they ponder its greater power to harm, *of that cause*, namely, frightful, *which brings the torment*, that is, is close to one because a lack of greater hope and confidence increases a fear that makes one suspicious an evil is more imminent than it is.

There is another interpretation of the text: *for a troubled conscience always forecasts grievous things*; as if to say: rightly does *wickedness bear witness of its condemnation*: that is, it is lifted up to cause grievous things for others; *a troubled conscience*, that is, an angry conscience, not tranquil; *for meaning but. For fear is nothing else but a yielding up of the helps from thought*, that is, a medicine by repressing the impulse of this presumption, and *a yielding up*, that is, a manifestation, *of the helps of thought*, that is, of a weak thought that lifts itself up by presuming beforehand that it does not need help. *And while there is less expectation from within*, that is, a lesser power of a harmful nature is hoped for by which one is being punished, namely, externally; *the greater does it regard the power*, that is, the power to harm oneself than is actually the case.

But they that during that night, in which nothing could be done, and which came upon them from the lowest and the deepest, slept the same sleep. Here is shown the generality of the punishment, firstly, from the point of view of time; secondly, from the point of view of the persons afflicted: *Moreover if any of them had fallen down, he was kept shut up in prison without irons*; thirdly, from the point of view of the causes: *Whether it were a whistling wind, or the melodious voice of birds, among the spreading branches of trees, or a fall of water running down with violence.*

(Verses 13 and 14). As if to say: the magicians were terrified in this way; *but they*, namely, the Egyptians, *during that night, in which nothing could be done*, that is, strong night because it was very dark, long and there was no escape into light; *from the lowest*, namely, from the rising of the vapours and of the heavier fumes obscuring the atmosphere; *and the deepest*, from a lack of brightness in the heavenly bodies, *which came*, that is, coming over them, *slept*, because just as one slept, so did another, and not better, *the same sleep*, that is, common. - *Were sometimes molested with the fear of monsters*, that is, of monstrous images appearing to them in sleep; Job 7:14: 'You will frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions'. *Sometimes fainted away, their soul failing them*, that is, as if they were soon to leave their bodies, and this by watching as if they were already awakened; because, 'neither watching nor sleeping could they find rest because they were surrounded by horrible monsters and visions and extreme terror'. *For a sudden*, that is, unexpected, *and unlooked for*, that is, unforeseen because quickly and unexpectedly, *fear was come upon them*, that is, from above by divine judgment; Isaiah 47:11: 'Misery shall come upon you suddenly which you shall not know'.

(Verse 5). He says therefore: *And no power of fire could give them light*; Hence, they were without lighting from an inferior source; and he says: *no power*, because there are three kinds of fire, according to Saint Augustine, namely, light, flame and coal. *Neither could the bright flames*, that is, of a given ray, *of the constellations*, that is, of the stars, *enlighten that horrible night*; so it is clear that they were without light from a higher source, even though the stars were placed above to brighten the night, Genesis 1:15ff. And it was right that they were without light, because they were rebels against spiritual light; Job 24:13 'They have been rebellious to the light', and so the sun of justice did not rise over them; so above in Wisdom 5:6: *The sun of understanding has not risen upon us.*

(Verse 6). *But there appeared to them*, namely, to the Egyptians, *a sudden fire*, namely, of heavenly flashes, *very dreadful*, namely, because of the sight of evil objects, namely, lightning; 'because the more severe the pain, so much the more are horrors feared'. *And being struck with the fear*, because of the sight of the evils imagined, *of that face, which was not seen*, that is, of images not seen externally, that the devil sent to increase fear; *they thought the things which they saw to be worse*, add: than they would be in reality; Job 18:11: 'Fears shall terrify him on every side, and shall entangle his feet'.

And the delusions of their magic art were put down, and their boasting of wisdom was reproachfully rebuked. Here is shown that it is irreversible by the craftsman, namely, of magical art; and, firstly, the confusion of the magicians is shown; secondly, the substance of the confusion, namely, fear: *For they who promised to drive away fears and troubles from a sick soul, were sick themselves of a fear worthy to be laughed at*; thirdly, the cause inciting fear externally: *For though no terrible thing disturbed them, yet being scared with the passing by of beasts, and hissing of serpents, they died for fear: and denying that they saw the air, which could by no means be avoided*; fourthly, the disposition increasing fear internally: *For frequently the worst things hold one's attention, notwithstanding conscience.* In that text three things that increase fear are treated, of which the first is remorse of conscience; the second, the unease that follows remorse: *a troubled conscience always forecasts grievous things*; the third is the distrust of help caused by both: *For fear is nothing else but a yielding up of the succours from thought.*

(Verse 7). *And of their magic art*, that is, of the magicians themselves, *were put down*, namely, the evils mentioned above, *the delusions*, namely, in this that they tried to get rid of these evils but could not; so they were extremely afraid; Exodus 8:19: 'This is the finger of God'. *And their boasting of wisdom*, that is, the boasting of the magicians over their wisdom, *reproachfully rebuked*, add: *was*, that is, the reason for their reproachful rebuke; Proverbs 11:2: 'Where pride is, there also shall be reproach'; Jeremiah 9:23: 'Let not the wise glory in their wisdom'.

(Verse 8). And I have said well that they were rebuked with reproach; *for they*, namely, the magicians, *who promised to drive away*, namely, by their magical skills, *fears*, namely, interior, *and troubles*, namely, external, *from a sick soul*, namely, sick from fear and trouble; *were sick themselves of a fear*, in themselves, *worthy to be laughed at*, by others. So the words of Luke 4:23 can be applied to each of them: 'Doctor, cure yourself'; Proverbs 25:14: 'Like clouds and wind without rain is one who boasts of a gift never given'.

(Verse 9). *For though no terrible thing*, that is, with images appearing or the miracles of Moses, *disturbed them*, namely, because they were accustomed to terrible things, just as Balaam was not afraid when the ass spoke, as is clear in Numbers 22:29. *With the passing by*, however, *of beasts*, namely, sudden and violent, namely, of bears and lions and suchlike, *and hissing of serpents*, which they could not see, *being scared*, namely, internally; *for fear*, namely, externally, *they died*, namely, languishing away because of the aforesaid; Deuteronomy 28:65-66: 'The Lord will give you a fearful heart, and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness, and you shall fear night and day'. *And*, that is, also, *denying that they saw*, because of the darkness that could be touched, *the air, which could by no means be avoided*, namely, because of the need to breathe in and breathe out.

(Verse 10). *For frequently the worst things hold one's attention*, by thinking and waiting before an event, *the worst things*, namely, punishments imposed for sins; he says *the worst things*, because they are evils in life, worse in death, and worst after death; or: innate evils, worse those inflicted by another person, but the worst are inflicted by God; for this reason Hebrews 10:31 says: 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'. Notwithstanding conscience, according to Jeremiah 2:19: 'Your own malice shall reprove you'. *For whereas wickedness is fearful*, that is, it is associated with fear, so that evil always follows sin or evil accompanies punishment; so just as 'perfect charity excludes fear', as stated in 1 John 4:18; so wickedness causes or induces it;

Psalm 13:5: 'There have they trembled for fear, where there is no fear'; also Leviticus 26:36: 'The sound of a flying leaf shall terrify them'; *it bears witness of its condemnation*, namely, against the one responsible; so Romans 2:15: 'Their conscience bearing witness', namely, of the one responsible, that is, testifies that such a one is worthy of condemnation; so above in Wisdom 5:4: *We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour*; also Genesis 42:1: 'We deserve to suffer these things because we have sinned against our brother'. Others have: *witness is given in condemnation of all*. *For a troubled conscience*, troubled by sin or with remorse for sin, *always forecasts*, that is, suspects before they happen, *grievous things*, that is, annoying things yet to happen; so Cain says, Genesis 4:14: 'Everyone, therefore, that finds me, shall kill me'.

(Verse 11). *For fear is nothing else but a yielding up of the helps from thought*. Note that this is a causal statement, not a statement of an essence; for fear is not a presumption but is caused by a presumption, that is, a presumed suspicion of future evil. So here he describes fear in two ways: firstly, by its cause which is a presumption of a future evil; secondly, by its effect which is a yielding up or manifestation of a thought of diminishing help. *For fear is nothing else but a yielding up of help*, that is, a presumption or suspicion of future evil or of what is to happen and that promotes fear, and a yielding up of the thought of help, namely, of those weakening, that is, a thought proclaiming a lack of help both to the one who is fearful and to others, namely, those who notice the person's fear and are unable to help. So this fear makes one call out asking for help, as is clear in Peter who, when he began to sink, called out and said: 'Lord, save me', Matthew 14:30.