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THE BOOK OF WISDOM



CHAPTER 9

THE BOOK OF WISDOM—A PROLOGUE BY SAINT JEROME

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 9

Thirdly, he shows how devoutly he asked God for wisdom

God of my fathers, and Lord of mercy, who has made all things with your word. After showing how he accepted wisdom and how much he loved what he had accepted, he shows here how devoutly he asked for it from God. And he touches, firstly, on the form of the petition; secondly, the reason for being heard: *You, however, have chosen me*; thirdly, on the purpose of the petition: *Send her*; fourthly, the difficulty of the purpose: *For who among humans can know the counsel of God?*

And who shall know your thought, unless you give wisdom, and send your Holy Spirit from above? Here he shows that the divine will can be known only through wisdom. He shows this by attributing to it a triple effect, namely, an effect of teaching the mind; by correcting faults: *And so the ways of them that are upon earth may be corrected*; by healing nature: *For by wisdom they were healed.*

(Verse 17). *And who shall know your thought*, that is, your counsel and will? This is equivalent to saying: No one. *Unless you give wisdom*, to enlighten the mind; Sirach 1:10: 'According to God's gift and has given her to them that love God'; James 1:5: 'God gives to all abundantly'; Daniel 2:21: 'God gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that have understanding'. *And you send your Holy Spirit*, inflaming the affections, as if to say: No one. For just as no one 'knows the things of a human person but the spirit that is within the person', as stated in 1 Corinthians 2:11; 'Neither does anyone know the things of God, apart from God and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal God'. *From above*, that is, from you who are the Most High, and from the Son who is Most High, and I call you most high as an adjective not as a noun.

(Verse 18). *And so*, namely, by the gift of wisdom and the sending of the Holy Spirit, *the ways are corrected*, that is, the works of them that are upon earth, that is, of people, and this by recalling them from evil; John 16:8: 'The Paraclete will convince the world of sin'; and he says well: *the ways of them that are upon earth*, that is, of sinners on earth; for the ways of the sinful angels cannot be corrected. *And people have learnt the things that please you*, by informing them of good; John 14:26: 'The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things'.

(Verse 19). *For by wisdom they were healed, whosoever have pleased you, O Lord, from the beginning.* I have said well: *And so the ways of them that are upon earth have been corrected; for by wisdom they were healed*, namely, from blindness in the mind and from corruption of the affections; Sirach 24:41: 'I, like a river Dorix' which means the medicine of generation. *Whosoever have pleased you, O Lord, from the beginning*, 'namely, of the world', below in Wisdom 16:12: *For it was neither herb, nor mollifying plaster that healed them, but your word, O Lord, which heals all things*; Psalm 106:20: 'The Lord sent his word and healed them'; Proverbs 3:18: 'She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her'. Hence, spiritual dogs, namely, doctors and preachers of wisdom, have healing tongues; and he says all because, according to Saint Augustine, the faith of the Mediator saved the ancients and saves us also.

End of Wisdom 9

And the earthly habitation presses down, that is, by holding it back it presses it away from the contemplation of eternal things, that is, bends it to earthly things; *the mind*, that is, the human intellect; Genesis 8:21: 'The imagination and thought of the human heart are prone to evil from youth'; so in Romans 7:24: 'Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' *The mind that muses upon many things*, that is, temporal things that are many, not eternal things that are one, according to Luke 10:41-42: 'You are troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary'.

(Verse 16). *And hardly do we guess aright*, as if to say: And this is clear because *hardly do we think*, that is, we know by calculating not with certitude; Ecclesiastes 1:8 'All things are hard'; *that are upon earth*, that is, in lower sensible realities. *And the things that are before us*, 'that is, in the open', such as the nature of higher sensible realities; *with labour do we find*; Ecclesiastes 8:16-17: 'There are some that day and night take no sleep with their eyes, and I understood that human beings can find no reason for all those works of God that are done under the sun'.

'For just as the eye of a night-owl is to the light, so is our mind to what is most evident in nature'. *But the things that are in heaven, who shall search out?* They are so remote from us; Sirach 3:22: 'Seek not the things that are too high for you'; Ecclesiastes 5:1: 'God is in heaven, and you upon the earth, therefore, let your words be few'.

In the first part he praises beauty; in the second, he specifies the gift: *Give me wisdom that sits by your throne*; in the third, he humiliates himself: *For I am your servant*; fourthly, he points out his need: *For if one be perfect among human beings, yet if your wisdom be not with him or her, he or she shall be nothing regarded*.

(Verse 1). *God of my fathers*, namely, by a grace of election; *fathers*, namely, the ancients; Exodus 3:6: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'. Or: *God of my fathers*, that is, you who made and chose my fathers and sanctified them. *And Lord of mercy*, that is, merciful Lord, to make it an intransitive construction; or: *Lord of mercy*, the author, to make it transitive; in Psalm 110:4: 'A merciful and gracious Lord'. I say, *Lord of mercy*, namely, from the effect of the remission of sins and of justification; for mercy is concerned with misery; Proverbs 14:34: 'Sin makes nations miserable'. *Who has made all things*, namely by the act of creation, as is clear in Genesis 1:1ff.; Psalm 32:9 'For the Lord spoke and they were made'; by your Word, that is, by your Son; John 1:1 and 3: 'All things were made by him'.

(Verse 2). *And by your wisdom*, that is, by your same Son, according to Psalm 103:24: 'You have made all things in wisdom'; *you have appointed*, that is, you have made from quite diverse parts, namely, from rational spirit and earthly clay; *humankind*, Sirach 17:1: 'God created humankind of the earth'. And note that it says other things were made by the *Word* alone, but humankind by wisdom as if it were a nobler task, and so a work demanding more planning; for this reason the Lord, as if deliberating, says in Genesis 1:26: 'Let us make humankind according to our image and likeness'. *To have dominion over the creatures that were made by you*, that is, neither over spiritual nor angelic creatures, but over corporal creatures and this from power; Genesis 1:28: 'Let him have dominion over the fish of the sea'.

(Verse 3). *And should order the world*; namely, by wisdom; humankind is placed in this world like a king in his kingdom. *According to equity*, namely, mercy, and justice; in putting things in order these two should be joined;

'Discipline and mercy are greatly weakened if one is held without the other'. *With an upright heart*, namely, by goodness and this is done by a right intention towards God; Psalm 118:7: 'I will praise you with uprightness of heart'; Job 34:14: 'If the heart of God turns against a person, God will draw out the person's spirit and breath'. *And execute judgment*, namely, over subjects. By speaking simply of judgment, he understands a 'true' or just judgment. Just as a painting of a person or a dead person is not a person, so a false or unjust judgment is not a judgment.

(Verse 4). *Give me*, 'you from whom comes every best gift', James 1:17; *wisdom*, namely, understanding, *that sits by your throne*, that is, who dwells in holy souls; above in Wisdom 7:27: *And through nations conveys herself into holy souls*. Holy souls are called the *throne of God* because God sits in them, presiding and ordering all their movements and affections; Isaiah 66:1: 'Heaven is my throne'; 'The soul of a just person is a throne of wisdom'. *And cast me not off from among your children*, but give me goodness and grace in affection; I say, *cast me not off*, like those of whom Romans 1:28 says: 'God delivered them up to a reprobate sense'; Jeremiah 6:30: 'Call them reprobate silver'. *From among your children*, namely, by excluding me from among the number and company of your children, of whom Isaiah 8:18 says: 'Behold, I and my children whom the Lord has given me'.

(Verse 5). *For I am*, as if to say: so I ask you to give me wisdom, *for I am your servant*, that is, one prepared to serve you; Psalm 118:125: 'I am your servant, give me understanding'; 1 Kings 10:8: 'Blessed are your servants who stand before you always and hear your wisdom'. *And the son of your handmaid*, that is, of the synagogue of which is said in Galatians 4:22: 'It is written that Abraham had two sons'. These words are 'of the Son to the Father', according to which a person begging wisdom for the members is already a servant according to the humanity, not a son of the one sending; Isaiah 49:3: 'You are my servant, Israel, for in you will I glory'. *And the son of your handmaid*, that is, of the Virgin Mary according to Luke 1:38: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord'. *A weak man*, in the body because of the fragility of the body; in Psalm 6:3: 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak'. *And of short time*, due to the shortness of life; Job 14:1: 'A mortal, born of a woman, living for a short time'; *and falling short*, in the soul, that is, inadequate in natural virtue, *of understanding*; 'In the perceiving'; *of judgment*, that is, of your judgments, by the example of which it is to be judged; *and laws*, namely, of eternal laws, by the ruling of which it is to be judged; Romans 11:33: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways!'

(Verse 6). *For if one be perfect*, in these words is indicated that charity will be perfect; 'In judgment'; *among human beings* who are born from a man and a woman in contrast to the Son of man, who was born solely of the Virgin, of whom Matthew 16:13 says: 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' And he says: *perfect among human beings* since he can, by his nature, be truly a man. *Yet if your wisdom will have gone or departed from a person*, namely, as from one who is not worthy and a sinner, according to Wisdom 1:4: *Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul; your wisdom*, 'Divine' not earthly. For earthly wisdom does not depart because of sin; Jeremiah 4:22: 'They are wise to do evil'. *Shall be regarded*, by God and the Saints, as *nothing*, namely, of behaviour, not of nature; below in Wisdom 13:1: *But all people are vain, in whom there is not the knowledge of God*; for it is by grace that a person is what he or she is in behaviour, that is, in conduct; so 1 Corinthians 15:10: 'By the grace of God I am what I am'; also, a person is nothing without charity, as is clear in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; and, according to Saint Augustine, a sinner is nothing from being a sinner.

(Verse 15). *For the corruptible body* is continuously subject to corruption and for this reason it is compared to rottenness; Job 25:6: 'How much less a mortal who is rottenness and a human being who is a worm?' *The corruptible body is a load upon the soul*, by holding back its affection for heavenly things; Galatians 5:17: 'For the flesh opposes the spirit'.

The corruptible body is a load upon the soul. Note that the body stains the soul by original sin; Job 14:4: 'Who can make a person clean who is conceived of unclean seed?' Also, it binds a soul to the necessity of venial sin; Romans 7:15: 'The evil which I hate, that I do'. Likewise, it pushes a soul towards mortal sin; Genesis 8:21: 'The imagination and thought of the human heart are prone to evil from youth'. Likewise, it darkens the mind in the contemplation of truth; above in Wisdom 2:5: *Our time is as the passing of a shadow*, of shadow, namely, by placing an opaque body between the soul and the sun of justice. Also, it holds back the affections by a love for heavenly things, as here: *The corruptible body is a load upon the soul*. Also, it hinders and binds the motivating powers from good; Psalm 141:8: 'Bring my soul out of custody', or, out of prison; likewise Romans 7:15: 'For I do not that good which I will'. Also, it stirs up continuous war in the spirit; Galatians 5:17: 'For the flesh opposes the spirit'. Also, concern for itself disturbs the spirit, against which Matthew 6:31 says: 'Be not solicitous, therefore, saying: What shall we eat' etc. Also, it upsets the soul with its dislikes; Daniel 13:22: 'I am straightened on every side'. Likewise, by its ability to change it upsets and varies quiet; Job 14:2: 'And never continues in the same state'.

Fourthly, the difficulty of this purpose is shown in two ways

For who among humans can know the counsel of God? Or who can think what the will of God is? Here he shows the difficulty of the goal, showing, firstly, that the will of God cannot be known without wisdom; secondly, that it can only be known by wisdom: *And who shall know your thought, unless you give wisdom, and send your Holy Spirit from above?*

He shows that it cannot be known without wisdom, firstly, from the depth of divine knowledge; secondly, from the imperfection of human understanding: *For the thoughts of mortals are fearful, and our counsels uncertain*; thirdly, from a comparison with earthly things: *And hardly do we guess aright at things that are upon earth.*

(Verse 13). I have said well: *Send her out of your holy heaven; for who among humans, namely, a mere human, can know, that is, without your wisdom, the counsel of God?* This refers to foreseeing and ordering what has to be done; Isaiah 40:13: 'Who has directed the spirit of the Lord or who has been the Lord's counselor and has taught the Lord'. *Or who can think, namely, learn by thinking, what the will of God is?* This applies to doing things foreseen, as if to say: no one; so Romans 11:33: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!'

(Verse 14). *For the thoughts of mortals, namely, for as long as we remain in a mortal state, are fearful*; 'That is, fragile'; and this applies to things beyond reason. *And our counsels uncertain*; 'Because the soul is changeable and the flesh corruptible', and this applies to things that are below reason and to thinking of what is true.

Secondly, a double reason for hearing

However, you have chosen me to be king of your people, and a judge of your sons and daughters. Here he adds the multiple reasons for hearing of which the first is the imposed office of the kingdom; the second is the command to build a temple: *And have commanded me to build a temple on your holy mount.*

(Verse 7). *However, you have chosen me* etc., as if to say: of myself, without wisdom, I am incapable. *However*, meaning but; nevertheless, *you have chosen me*; 'Solomon or Christ'. *To be king of your people*, that is, our people who believe in you; Psalm 2:6: 'I am appointed king by the Lord over Zion, the holy mountain, preaching the Lord's commandment'; *and a judge of your sons and daughters*, namely, of your faithful, according to John 1:12: 'But as many as received him, he gave them power to be made the children of God to them that believe in his name'. By his office a king must also exercise judgment in other matters of the kingdom, but the office of judge applies especially in cases concerning the people.

(Verse 8). *And have commanded me*; 'You have ordered'; for David, a man of blood, was not allowed to build the temple; but Solomon, a man of peace, was chosen for this as is clear in 2 Samuel 7:13 and 1 Chronicles 29:1. *And have commanded me*, I say, *to build a temple on your holy mount*, that is, on Mount Moriah where you wanted the holy things to be; *and in the city of your dwelling place*, namely, Jerusalem, where it was to stay because there it could be more excellently worshipped; *an altar*, namely, for holocausts, and I say of holocausts to distinguish it from the brass altar that was in the fore-court before the temple in the open. *A resemblance of your holy tabernacle*, that is, according to its pattern, which, as stated in Exodus 25:8ff., was made according to the pattern of the heavenly tabernacle; so the text: 'Look, and make it according to the pattern that I will show you on the mountain'.

Which you have prepared; 'By Moses', *from the beginning*, not of creation but of the giving of the Law; 'When you led the children of Israel from Egypt'; the *tabernacle* in the desert, represents the Church militant, but the *temple* in Jerusalem represents the Church triumphant. The reason for this is that the tabernacle in the desert was moveable, but the temple in Jerusalem was not moveable.

(Verse 9). *And with you*, he prepared, *your wisdom*, namely, uncreated Wisdom, which is your Son', of whom 1 Corinthians 1:24 says: 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God'. *Which knows your works*, as working together in everything, according to Psalm 103:24: 'You have made all things in wisdom'. *Which also was present*, present with you, *then*, namely, *when you made the world*; Proverbs 8:29-30: 'When God balanced the foundations of the earth, I was with God forming all things'; and in the same passage: 'And I was delighted every day, playing before God at all times'. *And knew that which was agreeable to your eyes*, namely, referring to counsels; *to your eyes*, namely, referring to your mind and affections, that is, of your mercy and truth, 'in every work of God there are mercy and truth'; Sirach 42:1: 'He found grace before the eyes of the Lord'. *And what was right*; 'That is, right and just'; in your commandments; Psalm 18:9: 'The justices of the Lord are right, rejoicing hearts'.

Thirdly, the purpose for the request is treated in two ways

Send her out of your holy heaven, and from the throne of your majesty, that she may be with me, and may labour with me, that I may know what is acceptable with you. Here he shows the purpose for the request, namely, why he asked for wisdom; and, firstly, he asks for wisdom so as to know and do the will of God. Secondly, he shows the value in obtaining such a goal: *For she knows and understands all things.*

(Verse 10). He says, therefore: *Send her*, namely, wisdom. Note that there is a double sending of Wisdom, one visible in flesh of which John 10:36 says: 'Whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world'; another is into the mind and this is what he requests here. *Out of your holy heaven*, that is, from yourself, you who are heaven by containing all things;

Psalm 18:7: 'His going out is from the end of heaven'; also James 3:17: 'The wisdom that is from above, first indeed is chaste, then peaceable, modest' etc. He says *out of the heavens* in the plural on account of the great number of contents and what the contents achieve, just as the days of eternity are spoken of in the plural; Micah 5:2: 'His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity'. *And from the throne of your majesty*; 'From yourself who while seated and quiet govern all things'; Isaiah 18:4: 'I will take my rest and consider in my place as the noon light is clear'.

And note that uncreated Wisdom is sometimes said to be in the bosom of the Father, as in John 1:18: 'The only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father has declared to us'; sometimes it is said to be born from the womb as in Psalm 109:3: 'From the womb before the day star I begot you'; sometimes it is said to proceed from the mouth of the Almighty, Sirach 24:5: 'I came out of the mouth of the Most High, the first born before all creatures'; sometimes it is said to be sent from heaven, as here; sometimes it is said to sit among the holy souls, hence above in Wisdom 9:4: *Give me wisdom that sits by your throne* etc. The first is for concealing, the second for consubstantiality, the third for manifestation, the fourth for enlightenment, the fifth for tranquility.

That she may be with me, interiorly in the essence of the soul by dwelling and sanctifying it by grace; Sirach 24:13: 'Let your dwelling be in Jacob, and your inheritance in Israel, and take root in your elect'. *And may she labour with me*, by perfecting the motivating power of the soul for work; Sirach 51:11: 'I remembered your mercy, O Lord, and your works which are from the beginning of the world'. *That I may know*, namely, that you would make me know by enlightening the cognitive power of the soul, *what is acceptable before you*, or with you; Psalm 142:10: 'Teach me to do your will'.

(Verse 11). *For she knows all things*, namely, things that pertain to knowledge of the mind, such as inferior things, *and understands*, things pertaining to understanding in the intellect, such as superior things, as above in Wisdom 7:23: *Overseeing all things. And shall lead me soberly in my works*; 'Lest I offend', she guides me to good work; as in Wisdom 8:7: *For she teaches moderation* etc. *And shall preserve me by her power*; By protecting 'from adversaries'; Psalm 126:1: 'Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it'; also: Behold he that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep'.

(Verse 12). *So shall my works be acceptable*; 'Before God', as works done from his love. *And I shall govern your people justly*, namely, by governing subjects correctly; hence above in Wisdom 8:14: *I shall set the people in order and nations. And I shall be worthy of the thrones of my father*, by imitating him; *thrones* is plural because of the thrones of the present kingdom, according to Proverbs 8:15: 'By me kings reign'; and of the future kingdom; 'From reward of the heavenly kingdom'.