



# ***THE BOOK OF WISDOM***



## ***CHAPTER 4***

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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.

*End of Wisdom 4*

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

#### **Chapter 4**

**Thirdly, on justice to oneself considered  
in a double comparison**

*O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory.* Here he treats of justice to oneself. He commends justice and condemns injustice by comparing the state of the just to the state of the unjust, firstly, before judgment, namely, in this chapter; secondly, in judgment, in the following chapter.

**Firstly, the state of the just is compared to the state of the  
unjust before judgment from three points of view**

Before judgment from three points of view: firstly, with reference to the state of the present life; secondly, with reference to the state of death: *But the just, if they be prevented by death shall be in rest*; thirdly, with reference to after death: *But the just that is dead, condemns the wicked who are living.*

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## Firstly, with reference to the state of the present life from two points of view

(Verse 19). There follows: *For the Lord shall burst them puffed up and speechless*. I have said well that *they shall fall after this for the Lord shall burst them*, 'namely, the Lord', Hosea 13:8: 'I will rend the inner parts of their liver'. I say, those puffed up with a wind of pride; 1 Corinthians 5:2: 'You are puffed up and should you not rather have mourned'. *Speechless*, of any excuse'; Matthew 22:12: 'But he was silent'.

*And shall shake them from the foundations*; 'The Lord shall overturn their lives that they thought were stable'; Job 22:16: 'Who were taken away before their time and a flood has overthrown their foundation'. *And they shall be utterly laid waste*, that is, in so far as in losing the highest place they are excluded from the height of glory like the foolish virgins of whom we read in Matthew 25:10 that 'the door was shut'.

*And they shall be utterly laid waste*, that is, punished until they pay the last penny, that is, punishment for every sin be it large or small; Matthew 5:26: 'You shall not go out from thence till you have paid the last penny'. *They shall be in sorrow*; 'In punishments; because no consolation shall comfort them'. *And their memory*, not any but a happy remembrance, with God and people, *shall perish*, according to Psalm 33:17: 'The countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil things, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth'.

(Verse 20). *They shall come* finally, namely, at the end of the world; 'To judgment'; for then they shall come out of hell. I say, *they shall come at the thought of their sins*, agitated in conscience as they recall them, *with fear*, of the punishment to be imposed; below in 5:2:

*These seeing it shall be troubled with terrible fear. And shall stand*; 'Into eternal fire'; *against them*; 'Accusing them', just as an adversary accuses his or her adversary; *their iniquities*, that is, sins committed in heart, speech or action; Jeremiah 2:19:

'Your own wickedness shall reprove you'. Sins are said to accuse the reprobate because they will be the matter of their accusation and damnation; Romans 2:15ff. 'Their thoughts between themselves accusing or also defending one another' etc.

In the first part he shows, firstly, that the state of the just is praiseworthy in itself; secondly, by a condemnation from the state of the opposite, namely, of the unjust: *But the multiplied brood of the wicked shall not thrive*.

Firstly, he commends the state of the just for its beauty, secondly, for its immortality: *The memory thereof is immortal because it is known both with God and with people*; thirdly, for its edification: *When it is present, they imitate it*; fourthly, for its reward: *and it triumphs crowned forever, winning the reward of undefiled conflicts*.

(Verse 1). *O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory*, as if to say: I have said, *dreadful are the ends of a wicked race*, but *how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory*; in admiration of this he says: *beautiful*, in its deeds; *a chaste generation* in innocence of mind; *with glory* in striving for virtues, according to a Song 4:7: 'You are all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in you'; also Luke 12:35 and 36: 'Let your loins be girt', by innocence, 'and lamps burning', from striving for virtues; 'and you yourselves like to people who wait for their lord', by zeal in good works. And I have said well that it is *beautiful*, namely, from a spiritual beauty. *The memory thereof is immortal*, from a happy remembrance; Proverbs 10:7: 'The memory of the just is with praises'. *Because it is known with God*, by approbation; 2 Timothy 2:19: 'The Lord knows who are his'. *And with people*, namely, from using their reason and being wise by praise or a continuation of praise; Sirach 44:15: 'Let the people show their wisdom and the Church declare their praise'.

(Verse 2). And I have said well that *the memory thereof is immortal*. For *when it is present*, 'namely, in the present life', *they imitate it*, as a most beautiful model; Philippians 3:17: 'Be you followers of me'. *And they desire it*, namely, to see the beautiful and chaste generation of the just, namely, to be imitated; *and when it has withdrawn itself*, from this life by death; Job 9:26: 'They have passed by as ships carrying fruits', that leave a perfume behind after their passing; Song 1:3: 'We will run after you to the odour of your ointments'.

Note that God effectively leads the just from the present life, according to Psalm 141:8: 'Bring my soul out of prison', that is, out of jail. But they bring themselves out by their desire or by desiring and asking for this; Psalm 41:3 says: 'My soul has thirsted after God, the living fountain; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?'

*And it triumphs crowned forever*, namely, with a crown of everlasting life; Revelation 2:10: 'Be you faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life'. *It triumphs*, that is, by triumphing it wins *the reward of undefiled conflicts*, that is, what is owing to undefiled conflicts, that is, not spoilt by a lack of perseverance; *winning the reward*, I say, a reward given for an approved struggle, so 1 Corinthians 9:25 says: 'They indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible one'. Or: *winning the reward*, that is, overcoming the enormity of persecutions, according to Romans 8:18: 'The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us'; that is: 'The reward is greater than the struggles and persecutions endured at present'.

*But the multiplied brood of the wicked shall not thrive*. Here he treats of the state of the unjust wicked, censuring it, firstly, in them; secondly, in its branches: *And if they flourish in branches for a time*; thirdly, in its fruits: *and their fruits shall be unprofitable*; fourthly, in their children: *for the children that are born of unlawful beds, are witnesses of wickedness against their parents in their trial*.

(Verse 3). *But the multiplied brood of the wicked shall not thrive, and bastard slips shall not take root nor any fast foundation*, as if to say: such is the beautiful and chaste generation of the just. *But the multiplied brood of the wicked shall not thrive*; Ecclesiastes 1:15: 'The number of fools is infinite'. Yet, he treats here of a triple plurality or multitude of the wicked in three words, namely, because it is spread by diverse errors in what is rational, against James 3:1: 'Be you not many masters'; also, by diverse appetites for what is desirable; Hosea 10:2: 'Their heart is divided, now they shall perish'; also, by diverse hatreds in what provokes anger; Micah 3:12: 'Jerusalem shall be as a heap of stones', that is, without the cement of love.

He treats or implies the first error by saying: *The brood*, namely, generating many errors; the second, by saying: *multiplied*, as if without the unity or bond of love; the third, by saying: *of the wicked*, in the plural, that is, without piety but with much cruelty. I say, *the multiplied brood of the wicked shall not thrive*, 'on the contrary it is harmful' says; Isaiah 30:5: 'They were no help, nor to any profit, but to confusion and to reproach'.

(Verse 18). Then he posits the second reason by saying: *They shall see him*, as if to say: and because they do not understand these things, *they shall see him*, 'To die'; *and shall despise him*, so it is said in 5:3: *These are they, whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach*; also Job 12:4: 'The simplicity of the just person is laughed to scorn'. In this way the Jews despised the dying Christ.

*But the Lord shall laugh them*, namely, the impious, *to scorn*; 'In the judgment', that is, God will judge them to be foolish people worthy of scorn; Psalm 2:4: 'The Lord who dwells in heaven shall laugh at them, and shall deride them'. And this will be not only in the general judgment but also in the particular judgment, that is, in death; so Proverbs 1:26 says: 'I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared'.

(Verse 19). *And they shall fall after this*, namely, after persecuting good people and mocking the Lord, that is, after they have afflicted good people at the present time, and in death have been laughed at by God; *they shall fall*, that is, downwards by the fall of death as they fall into hell; Psalm 36:2: 'They shall shortly wither away as grass'. *Without honour*, that is, of the company of the blessed; *and be a reproach*, namely, of the confusion of the reprobate; *among the dead*; 'Damned'; *forever*, that is, without end; Jeremiah 23:40: 'I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you and a perpetual shame which shall never be forgotten'.

*For the Lord shall burst them puffed up and speechless*. Here he touches on the commendation of the just in comparison with the wicked dead; and he deals, firstly, with separation from the body; secondly, expulsion from the world: *and shall shake them from the foundations*; thirdly, exclusion from glory; fourthly, *they shall be in sorrow*; fifthly, deletion from the memory of people: *and their memory shall perish*.

### Thirdly, the state after death from four points of view

*But the just that is dead, condemns the wicked that are living, and youth soon ended, the long life of the unjust.* Here he treats of a comparative commendation of the just with regard to the state after death; and firstly, in comparison with the impious still living; secondly, in comparison with those dying: *And they shall fall after this without honour, and be a reproach among the dead forever;* thirdly, with the dead: *for the Lord shall burst them puffed up and speechless;* fourthly, of those rising up: *They shall come with fear at the thought of their sins, and their iniquities shall stand against them to convict them.*

In the first section he treats firstly of the condemnation of the impious by the just; secondly, the reason for the condemnation: *For they shall see the end of the wise persons.*

(Verse 16). *But the just that is dead, condemns the wicked that are living;* 'A martyr condemns the persecutors', namely, from a comparison with a better happening, that of the people of Nineveh, Matthew 12:41. *And youth soon ended,* namely, of a just person, condemns *the long life of the unjust;* 'That is, of a persecutor', for the just person, having done more in a short time than they in much time, is judged more strictly; Revelation 2:21: 'And I gave her a time that she might do penance, and she will not repent of her fornication'.

(Verse 17). *For they shall see the end of the wise persons, and shall not understand what God has designed for them, and why the Lord has set them in safety.* Here he treats of the double reason for the aforementioned condemnation, namely, ignorance and contempt. He posits the first by saying: *For they shall see,* namely, the impious, *the end,* that is, 'death', *of the wise persons;* 'That is, of a Martyr'; so we apply to a Martyr the text of Sirach 14:22: 'Blessed is the person who shall continue in wisdom'. *And shall not understand what God has designed for them,* 'that is', 'what God has designed to give him or her in the future, namely, eternal life'; Proverbs 28:5: 'Evil people think not on judgment'. *And why the Lord has set them in safety,* namely, at the present time; 'With the arms of faith', according to the text of Ephesians 6:16: 'In all things taking the shield of faith'; also Ephesians 6:11: 'Put you on the armour of God'.

But against this: 'Because', 'if wicked people were fewer than good people, they would not dare to trouble the good'; this trouble is good for good people, because 'Abel then would not be without the malice of Cain troubling him'. Also in Psalm 128:3: 'The wicked have wrought upon my back', namely, for me a perpetual crown.

But it has to be said, that it is not the intention of the wicked for just people to get this value, because they have no intention of benefiting; the value comes from one's goodness or good will, making good use of their evil actions.

*And bastard slips shall not take deep root nor any fast foundation.* This is the reading of Rabanus and of all the ancients; also Saint Ambrose in a certain letter says to some people: 'You are noble shoots', that is, noble plants. But Saint Augustine says that they would be better called *bastard slips*; and for this reason *bastard slips* remained in the text in the new Bibles.

Note, however, that slips are plants without fruit, growing beside the stem of the vine, and so are called a shoot of a vine; or, according to some, it is said to be from a calf, because such a plant grows in ground ploughed up by calves or oxen. Bastard means the same as ignoble or degenerate; so *bastard slips*, that is, plants that are deteriorating or are unnatural, and plants from adultery, that is, wicked generations, born from spiritual adultery, namely, by a propagation from a multiple wickedness; Matthew 12:39: 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign'.

*Shall not take deep root*, in themselves, that is, with thoughts and affections moving towards heaven, rather than fixed on the earth. According to various philosophers, a human is a tree turned upside down; hence a human being should direct and thrust roots, namely, the mind and affection, upwards; so Psalm 18:15 says: 'The meditation of my heart always in your sight'; also in Psalm 121:2: 'Our feet were standing in your courts, O Jerusalem'; and in Psalm 37:10: 'Lord, all my desire is before you'; also Colossians 3:1ff. says: 'Seek the things that are above', namely, by searching with the intellect; 'mind the things that are above', by tasting with affection; Psalm 33:9: 'Taste and see'. *Nor* shall they have *any fast foundation*, or base, namely, of right faith in God; for faith is the foundation of the spiritual building; so Hebrews 11:1 says: 'Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not'; 1 Corinthians 3:11: 'For other foundation no one can lay, but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus', that is, faith from Christ Jesus. – this is to be interpreted in another way as applied to heretics and their disciples.

(Verse 4). There follows: *And if they flourish in branches for a time*, that is, in external goods etc. Such were the branches of that Babylonian tree, namely, of Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:7ff. They flourish for a time, that is, for a brief time they displayed the beginning of something good, according to Isaiah 18:5: 'It shall bud without perfect ripeness'. *Yet standing not fast*, 'that is', 'for a time'; or: *yet standing not fast*, that is, weakly rooted in good, according to the text of Ezekiel 17:10: 'Shall it not be dried up when the burning wind shall touch it?' *And through the force of winds*, that is, by a more severe persecution, *they shall be rooted out*; 'Completely torn up'; Matthew 15:13: 'Every plant that my Father has not planted shall be rooted up'.

(Verse 5). *For the branches not being perfect shall be broken*, namely, with no hope of recovery from the most severe persecution; Job 15:30: 'The flame shall dry up his branches'; or: *the branches not being perfect shall be broken*, that is, their teaching and works lack the perfection of charity; Colossians 3:14: 'Above all these things have charity which is the bond of perfection'. *And their fruits*, namely, their own, that is, their evil deeds, according to Matthew 7:17: 'The evil tree brings forth evil fruit'; *unprofitable*, so that they do not refresh; Isaiah 59:6: 'Their works are unprofitable works'. *And sour to eat*, so that they do not delight but torment; Deuteronomy 32:32: 'Their grapes are grapes of gall, and their clusters most bitter'. Ezekiel 18:2: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the teeth of the children are set on edge'. *And fit for nothing*, so that no benefit comes from them; Ezekiel 15:5: 'Even when it was whole it was not fit for work, how much less when the fire has devoured and consumed it'.

(Verses 14, 15). *For their souls pleased God*; behold, the cause of the completion, namely, grace and divine love. I say, *pleased*, by faith of heart within and meekness of behaviour externally; Sirach 1:34-35: 'That which is agreeable to God is faith and meekness'.

*Therefore God hastened to bring them out of the midst of iniquities*, that is, from the world that is full of iniquity; 1 John 5:19: 'The whole world is seated in wickedness'.

*But the people*; 'Persecutors' see 'the punishment' *and understand not 'future glory'*, *nor lay up such things in their hearts*, that is, within their hearts, although sometimes they may hear it preached; Isaiah 57:1:

'The just person perishes and no one lays it to heart'; *such things*, namely, that follow; above in chapter 3:2-3: *In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, but they are in peace*.

*That the grace of God*, namely, for acting well; 1 Corinthians 15:10: 'But by the grace of God, I am what I am'; *and God's mercy is with the Saints*, to deliver them from evil; Sirach 51:4: 'And you have delivered me, according to the multitude of the mercy of your name'; *and that God has respect for the chosen*, namely, for reaching the crown;

'That is, a worthy reward'. And note that the *saints* are named for their present justice; *the chosen*, for their eternal predestination, according to Ephesians 1:4: 'He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity'.

(Verse 12). *For the bewitching of vanity obscures good things and the wandering of concupiscence overturns the innocent mind*, as if to say: it was well necessary for such to be taken; *for the bewitching of vanity*, from outside, that is, frivolous and flattering praise by which wicked people are said to bewitch their children with praise; *obscures good things*, namely, of the just, even though it does not destroy them; I say, *obscures*, because it causes the defects and imperfections of good things to remain unnoticed, and for this reason to take pride in them;

Galatians 3:1: 'O senseless Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth'; 1 Corinthians 15:33: 'Evil communications corrupt good manners'.

*And the wandering of concupiscence*, for within, namely, desire that makes a person fickle; James 1:8: 'A double-minded person', namely, who partly follows reason, partly sensuality, 'is inconstant in every way'. I say, *the wandering of concupiscence*, that is, desire, *overturns*, namely, from good to evil, *the innocent mind*, that was previously good and simple; James 1:14: 'Everyone is tempted by his or her own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured'.

(Verse 13). *Being made perfect in a short space*, that is, perfect in grace in a brief time; Isaiah 10:22: 'The destruction abridged shall overflow with justice'; *they fulfilled a long time*, namely, by a completion of merit, because in a short time they acquired merit that others acquired over a long time; or: by a completion of a reward, because they reach eternity which surpasses long periods of time in perfection.

(Verse 6). *For the children that are born of unlawful beds*, as if to say: truly *the multiplied brood of the wicked shall not thrive*. *All the children that are born of the unlawful*, not only by a birth of propagation but also of imitation, of which John 8:44 says: 'You are of your father the devil'. *Are witnesses of wickedness against their parents*, by being like them in evil, *in their trial*, that is, in the trial of divine judgments since God, a just judge, will question their actions; see below in chapter six; also their words, Matthew 12:36: 'Every idle word that they shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment';

Wisdom 1:9: *For inquisition shall be made into the thoughts of the ungodly: and the hearing of their words shall come to God, to the chastising of their iniquities.*

Heretics who are the *multiplied brood* because they are divided into diverse sects of diverse heresies; these are of no value to the Church, rather they are harmful because they persecute it.

The *bastard slips* are their followers born from the same false teaching. They *shall not take deep root* because they are not planted in the God-man who is Christ. Their *branches* are not firm because, even if they seem to have some good, they are torn away from the Church in a time of persecution.

*Their fruits shall be unprofitable* because simple people are poisoned by their teachings and explanations. Their *children are witnesses of wickedness against their parents* because the errors of the master shall be more severely condemned on account of the increase of followers.

## Secondly, the state of sin from three points of view

*But the just person, if he or she be prevented with death, shall be in rest.* He considers here a comparable commendation of the just with reference to the state of death; he shows, firstly, that for the Saints there is no harmful hastening of temporal death; secondly, he gives the reason for the hastening when it says: *One pleased God*; thirdly, the foolish opinion of the people watching: *the people see this*.

(Verse 7). *But the just person, if he or she be prevented with death, shall be in rest*, as if to say: this is so for children born of unlawful beds; however used for but; *if the just person be prevented with death*, that is, prevented before the time of death, according to Isaiah 38:12: 'Whilst I was but beginning he cut me off'. He said well: *prevented* because a just person is not able to die from a sudden unexpected death, since Psalm 15:8 says of a just person: 'I set the Lord always in my sight for he is at my right hand that I be not moved'; also in Psalm 118:190: 'My soul is continually in my hands', as if to say: I am ready to hand it over whenever God wishes that I should die. I say, *the just person, if he or she be prevented with death, shall be at rest*, namely, of eternal quiet; Psalm 65:12: 'We have passed through fire and water, and you have brought us out into a refreshment'.

(Verses 8, 9). *For venerable old age is not that of long time, nor counted by the number of years, but the understanding of a person is grey hairs. And a spotless life is old age*, as if to say: a preoccupation with death is not an obstacle; 'Praise is not given to the age of the body but to maturity of life and uprightness of behaviour'; I say *venerable*, that is, worthy of veneration before God, Angels and the just; *is not that of a long time* in number of days; Job 32:9: 'They that are aged are not the wise'; *nor counted by the number of years*, that is, nor in a large number of years. Isaiah 65:20: 'For the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner being a hundred years old shall be accursed'. *But the understanding of a person is grey hairs*, that is, in the place of the grey haired;

'As if: fortunate is the grey haired who is fortunate in understanding', according to Daniel 13:50: 'God has given you the honour of old age', that is, discretion and wisdom that one is accustomed to find in the aged, according to the text of Job 12:12: 'In the ancient is wisdom and in length of days prudence'; also Sirach 25:8: 'Much experience is the crown of the aged'. -- *And a spotless life* making up for the vicissitude of age, *is old age*, 'as if to say: fortunate is the old person who is pure and simple'; Proverbs 16:31: 'Old age is a crown of dignity when it is found in the ways of justice'.

*One pleased God and was beloved, and living among sinners was translated*, namely, through true faith, according to the text of Hebrews 11:6: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God'; *was beloved*, for perfect love, according to Proverbs 8:17: 'I love them that love me'; *and living*, namely, by grace, not dying from sin; *among sinners*, namely, unstained and this indeed is great for in Psalm 17:27 is written: 'With the perverse you will be perverted'; but a just person is like a lily among thorns because he or she does not lose the radiance of purity nor the odour of his or her reputation; Song 2:2: 'As the lily among the thorns so is my beloved among the daughters'. *Was translated* from the exile of this world to a heavenly home, from death to life, from struggle to a crown.

Note that there is a multiple translation: the first, from sin to grace; 1 John 3:14: 'We know that we have passed from death', namely, of sin, 'to life', of grace, because we love the brethren'. The second is from imperfect grace to perfect grace; 2 Corinthians 3:18: 'We are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord'. The third is from perfect grace to glory; he refers to this here: *Was translated*.

(Verse 11). *Such were taken away* as if to say: not only *translated* but taken because they die suddenly as if they are taken away through violence beyond the debt of nature. There is a taking of Saints during their life; so 2 Corinthians 12:2 says: 'I know a man in Christ Jesus above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not, God knows) such a one caught up to the third heaven'; and in death as in the present text: *Such were taken away lest wickedness should alter their understanding*; and after death, of which we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: 'We shall be taken up with them in the clouds to meet Christ'. I say, *such were taken away lest wickedness*, that is, blatant iniquity, *should alter their understanding*, by turning it away from truth and sincerity of faith; *or deceit*, that is, a pretence of tranquillity 'A pretence of tranquillity is not tranquillity but a double iniquity because it is an iniquity and a pretence'. I say, lest *deceit beguile their soul*, namely, by turning away their affection from a love of God; 2 Corinthians 11:3: 'I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve by his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted'.