

WISDOM 6:22 – 10:21

6:22 I will tell you what Wisdom is and how she came to be. I will hide no mysteries from you, but I will trace her course from the beginning of creation, and make knowledge of her clear. I will not bypass the truth in any way.

23 Nor will I travel in the company of sickly jealousy, for jealousy has nothing in common with Wisdom.

24 The multitude of the wise is the salvation of the world, and an enlightened king is the stability of any people.

25 Therefore be instructed by my words, and you will profit.

He will give a description of Wisdom in 7:22-27.

We have met the ‘mystery’ (μυστήριον) once before in 2:22, where it was translated ‘the secret purpose’ of God. Later, it will be used for ‘secret rites’ (see 14:15, 23). In 7:21 the author will use the Greek κρυπτός (from which our English ‘cryptic’) to speak of what is ‘secret’ (see 7:21; compare Sirach 4:18). As explained earlier the word ‘mystery’ includes the idea of something that God has revealed, but it can be grasped only by those who accept the limits of reason and are open to the wonder of God’s revelation.

‘Knowledge’ (γνώσις (from which our word ‘gnostic’) has appeared already in 1:7 where we were told that the spirit of the Lord knows everything, and 2:13, where the unrighteous attack the righteous man because he claims to have ‘knowledge of God’. On ‘truth’ (ἀλήθεια) see earlier 3:9 and 5:6. Ultimately ‘the truth’ is the truth about God and everything in relation to God. It is about what things really are, not what we want them or claim them to be. The nuance provided by the Greek word speaks of reality not being hidden behind a mask, or behind appearances, but being manifest.

We met the word ‘jealous’ (φθόνος) earlier (2:24) where it was translated ‘envy’: it was the devil’s envy that brought death into the world. We are envious of what others have and we lack; we want what they have, or, if we can’t have it, we don’t want them to have it either. We are jealous of what we have, and do not want others to have. God is not jealous of divine Wisdom. We have already heard how Wisdom rushes to be with all those who long for it, and delights in those who share it.

In the words of Paul to Titus:

God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

– Titus 2:4

The more wise people there are the world the more the world will experience salvation (σωτηρία). The more the king is enlightened (φρόνιμος) by Wisdom, the more the people under his rule will experience calm and stability.

Chapter six was devoted to challenging those in power to seek wisdom. The author’s words are directed to everyone, but especially to those who have the greatest influence on people’s lives.

The 'I' in 7:1-22 is Solomon (see page 198).

In verses 1-6 Solomon declares that he is human like everyone else. If he can be wise, anyone can be wise. 'Child of the earth' refers back to the creation account which tells of God forming mankind 'from the dust of the earth'. We became living beings because God breathed into us 'the breath of life' (Genesis 2:7; compare Sirach 17:1).

The 'ten months' refers to the ten lunar months during which the child is in the mother's womb. In the ancient world the existence of the female ovum was not known. It was commonly thought that the male semen injected life into the woman. She made no contribution to the life. Her role was to nourish it with her blood.

The author speaks here of the pleasures of procreation.

In verses 3-5 Solomon continues his assertion that a king is like everyone else.

¹I also am mortal, like everyone else, a descendant of the first-formed child of earth; and in the womb of a mother I was moulded into flesh, ²within the period of ten months, compacted with blood, from the seed of a man and the pleasure of marriage.

³When I was born, I began to breathe the common air, and fell upon the kindred earth; my first sound was a cry, as is true of all.

⁴I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths. ⁵For no king has had a different beginning of existence; ⁶there is for all one entrance into life, and one way out.

Solomon prefers Wisdom above all else.

⁷Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called for help, and a spirit of wisdom came to me.

⁸I preferred her above sceptre and throne, and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her.

⁹Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem, because all gold is but a little sand in her sight, and silver will be accounted as clay before her. ¹⁰I loved her more than health and beauty, and I chose to have her rather than light, because her radiance never ceases.

¹¹All good things came to me along with her, and in her hands immeasurable wealth. ¹²I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them; but I did not know that she was their mother.

¹³I learned without guile and I impart without grudging; I do not hide her wealth, ¹⁴for it is an unfailing treasure for mankind; those who acquire it attain friendship with God, commended by the gift that derives from her instruction.

While our author aims to make as many connections as he can with the ideas and language of the Hellenist culture in which he and his students are living, here we see a radically different perspective. For the Hellenists, understanding was a human achievement. Drawing on his Jewish faith and tradition, our author knows it to be a gift from YHWH, the fruit of Divine Wisdom. Yes, we must welcome it and act accordingly, but it is not something we can achieve on our own (see also 8:21; 9:4, 17; 10).

In the account given in the Book of Kings, Solomon asked God to give him ‘an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil’ (1Kings 3:9). God granted him this, and honour and riches as well (1Kings 3:12-13). Here he acknowledges the gift from God of ‘understanding’ (φρόνησις) and ‘wisdom’ (σοφία).

Nothing can compare with wisdom.

As in the Book of Kings, so here, Solomon was also given ‘immeasurable wealth’ (verse 11), which he came to see was the fruit of wisdom.

The ultimate goal of wisdom is ‘friendship (φιλία) with God’.

The gift of Divine Wisdom is expressed in the full range of human philosophy and science, theoretical and applied.

Philo writes:

All are God's possessions and not yours: your reflections, your knowledge of every kind, your arts, your conclusions, your reasonings on particular questions, your sense-perceptions, in fact all the activities of your soul, whether carried out through the senses or without them.

– De Cherubim, 71

Both 'activity' (ἐνέργεια, from which our word 'energy') and 'elements' (στοιχεῖα) are words central to Greek philosophical vocabulary.

The Book of Kings, speaking of Solomon's wisdom, says:

He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish.

– 1Kings 4:33

'Secret' translates κρυπτός, which the author uses only here. 'Manifest' translates ἐμφανής, which is found also in 6:22 and 14:17.

¹⁵God grant that I may speak in accord with his wish, and have thoughts worthy of his gifts; for he is both the guide of Wisdom and the corrector of the wise. ¹⁶Both we and our words are in his hands, as are all understanding and skill in crafts.

¹⁷For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements;

¹⁸the beginning and end and middle of times, the alternations of the solstices and the changes of the seasons, ¹⁹the cycles of the years and the constellations of the stars, ²⁰the natures of animals and the tempers of wild animals, the violent force of spirits and the thoughts of human beings, the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots.

²¹I learned both what is secret and what is manifest, ²²for Wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.

²²**There is in Wisdom
a spirit that is**

In attributing these twenty-one attributes to Wisdom, the author is drawing on Zoroastrian and Mithraic texts. The qualities are borrowed largely from Greek philosophy. Philo writes:

By using many words for Wisdom Moses has already made it manifest that the sublime and heavenly Wisdom is of many names; for he calls it ‘beginning’, and ‘image’, and ‘vision of God’.

– Legum allegoriae 1:43

intelligent,

‘Intelligent’ translates νοερός (found in the Greek Bible only here in verses 22 and 23). It derives from νοῦς, which is translated ‘mind’ (see Wisdom 4:12 and 9:15).

holy,

‘Holy’ translates ἅγιος, found already in 1:5 and 5:5. It will be found another nine times.

unique,

‘Unique’ translates μονογενής, which occurs only here in Wisdom. The other nine occurrences in the Septuagint refer to an ‘only child’.

manifold,

‘Manifold’ translates πολυμερής, a word which occurs only here in the Septuagint. The adverb occurs in the Newer Testament only in Hebrews 1:1, which speaks of God speaking ‘in many ways’.

subtle,

‘Subtle’ translates λεπτός, which the author uses only here in verses 22 and 23. We find it in the Septuagint with the meaning of ‘light’ or ‘thin’. Α λεπτόν is the smallest copper coin in circulation in Palestine in the Newer Testament times (see Mark 12:42 and Luke 12:59).

agile,

‘Agile’ translates εὐκίνητος, a word found in the Septuagint only here and in 13:11 (where it refers to a tree that is flexible).

lucid,

‘Lucid’ translates τρανός, a word which occurs only here, in 10:21 and in Isaiah 35:6.

unsullied,

‘Unsullied’ translates ἀμόλυντος. This is the only time it is used in the Septuagint. The verb is found with the meaning to pollute.

clear,

‘Clear’ translates σαφής. In the Septuagint it occurs only here and in Daniel 13:48, 2 Maccabees 12:40, and 4 Maccabees 3:6.

inviolable,

‘Inviolable’ translates ἀπήμαντος. In the Septuagint it occurs elsewhere only in the Books of the Maccabees.

loving the good,

‘Loving the good’ translates φιλόγαθος. The only other occurrence in the Greek Bible is Titus 1:8.

keen,

‘Keen’ translates ὀξύς (see also 8:11 and 18:1).

‘Unhindered’ translates ἀκώλυτος. This is its only occurrence in the Septuagint. The adverb is used in Acts 28:31.

‘Beneficent’ translates εὐεργετικός. This is its only occurrence in the Greek Bible.

‘Showing kingly goodwill’ translates φιλάνθρωπος (see Wisdom 1:6 and 12:19). It was a favourite word in Hellenistic manuals composed to advise a ruler how to behave. The adverb is found in Acts 27:3. English ‘philanthropy’ comes from it.

‘Steadfast’ translates βέβαιος. In the Septuagint it is found once in Esther, twice in 3Maccabees and once in 4Maccabees.

‘Unfailing’ translates ἀσφαλής (see 4:3 and 14:3).

‘Free from care’ translates ἀμέριμνος (see 6:15).

‘All-powerful’ translates παντοδύναμος (see 11:17 where it refers to God’s all-powerful hand’, and 18:15, where it refers to God’s all-powerful word).

‘Overseeing all’ translates πανεπίσκοπος, which occurs only here in the Greek Bible.

‘Penetrating’ translates χωρέω, which in the Book of Wisdom is found only here in verses 23 and 24. Its meaning is brought out well by Saint Paul when he asks the Corinthians: ‘Make room in your hearts for us’ (2Corinthians 7:2). Our word ‘choreography’ derives from it.

‘Pure’ translates καθαρός (see 14:24 and 15:7).

‘Motion’ translates κινήσις (see 2:2), and ‘mobile’ translates the related adjective, which is found only here in the Greek Bible.

‘Pervade’ translates διήκω, which is found only here in the Greek Bible.

Only a small fraction of these attributes is found in the Jewish writings. As noted in the Introduction, the author is drawing on Greek philosophy. His interest is not in precision of meaning so much as in overwhelming the reader with the beauty and power of divine Wisdom.

²³unhindered,

beneficent,

showing kingly goodwill,

steadfast,

unfailing,

free from care,

all-powerful,

overseeing all,

and penetrating
through all spirits that
are intelligent,

pure,
and altogether subtle.

²⁴For wisdom is more
mobile than any motion;
because of her
pureness she pervades
and penetrates all
things.

7:25 She is an exhalation from the power of God, a pure emanation from the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.

26 She is the radiance of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the active power of God, and an image of his goodness.

27 Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; ²⁸for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with Wisdom. ²⁹She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light of day she is found to be superior, ³⁰for day is succeeded by the night, but against Wisdom evil does not prevail.

8:1 She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.

This is daring language indeed. The author goes further than his contemporary Philo when Philo speaks of the Divine Logos. John uses similar language when he speaks of the Divine Logos in his Gospel.

‘Exhalation’ translates ἀτμίς. Hosea 13:3 uses it of the morning mist. In other texts it refers to the smoke of the incense rising heavenwards.

‘Emanation’ translates ἀπόρροια. This is its only use in the Septuagint. The author took the word from Epicurus.

‘Almighty’ translates παντοκράτωρ.

‘Radiance’ translates ἀπαύγασμα, found only here, and in Hebrews 1:3, speaking of God’s Son. It was a word used in the cult of the Egyptian goddess, Isis.

‘Active power’ translates ἐνεργεία (see 7:17; 13:4; 18:22; from which the word ‘energy’).

‘Image’ translates εἰκὼν (see 2:23; from which the word ‘icon’). In the Newer Testament see especially 2Corinthians 3:18, where Paul speaks of us being transformed into Christ, the image of God.

Wisdom shares in the transcendence and immanence of God.

Holy souls participate in divine Wisdom, and so become friends of God. When they speak it is God’s words that they utter.

They enjoy God’s special love.

In the Newer Testament John picks up the idea expressed in verse 30 when he says that darkness could not overcome the light of God’s Word (see John 1:5).

It is divine Wisdom that ‘orders all things well’.

The imagery of sexual love appears in the Wisdom hymns of the Older Testament, but our author prefers to use language with deep roots in Hellenist literature, especially in the Egyptian Isis cult.

‘Love’ in verse 2 translates φιλέω - love of friendship and intimacy. We might compare:

Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call insight your intimate friend.

– Proverbs 7:4

She will come to meet him like a mother, and like a young bride she will welcome him.

– Sirach 15:2

‘Enjoying intimacy’ (verse 2) translates συμβίωσις, a word used in Hellenist literature for the intimacy of spouses.

‘Love’ in verse 3 translates ἀγαπάω - love of choice and commitment. ‘Initiate’ (μύστις, verse 4) is a word taken from the Hellenist mystery cults (see also 12:5).

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

‘Self-control’ translates σωφροσύνη, not used again by our author. In the Newer Testament see Acts 26:25; 1 Timothy 2:9, 15.

‘Prudence’ translates φρόνησις (the skilful adapting of means to achieve one’s goal - see 3:15; 4:9; 6:15; 7:7; 7:16; 8:6; 8:18; 8:21; 17:7).

‘Justice’ translates δικαιοσύνη (see 1:1; 1:15; 2:11; 5:6; 5:18; 9:3; 12:16; 14:7; 15:3).

‘Courage’ translates ἀνδρεία, not used again by our author.

Proverbs 1:3 also speaks of wisdom’s grasp of ‘the intricacies of argument’ (στροφὰς λόγων).

‘Riddles’ translates αἵνιγμα, from which our word ‘enigma’.

²I loved her and sought her from my youth; I longed to take her for my bride, and became a lover of her beauty.

³She glorifies her noble birth by enjoying intimacy with God, and the Lord of all loves her. ⁴For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works.

⁵If riches are a desirable possession in life, what is richer than wisdom, the active cause of all things?

⁶If understanding is productive, who more than she is fashioner of what exists?

⁷And if anyone loves justice, the fruits of Wisdom’s labour are virtues; for she teaches self-control and prudence, justice and courage; nothing in life is more profitable for human beings than these.

⁸If anyone longs as well for wide experience, she knows the things of old, and infers the things to come; she understands the intricacies of argument and the solutions of riddles; she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders and of the outcome of seasons and times.

⁹Therefore I determined to take her to live with me, knowing that she would give me counsel in prosperity, and encouragement in cares and grief.

¹⁰Because of her I shall have glory among the masses and honour in the presence of the elders, though I am young. ¹¹I shall be found keen in judgment, and in the presence of those who govern I shall be admired. ¹²When I am silent they will wait for me, when I speak they will give heed; if I speak at greater length, they will put their hands on their mouths.

¹³Because of her I shall have immortality, and leave an everlasting remembrance to those who come after me.

¹⁴I shall govern peoples, and nations will be subject to me. ¹⁵Dread monarchs will be afraid when they hear of me; in popular assembly I shall show myself capable, and courageous in war.

¹⁶When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her; for companionship with her has no bitterness, and life with her has no pain, but gladness only and joy.

‘Live with’ translates συμβίωσις. In the Greek Bible it occurs only here in the Wisdom of Solomon (8:3, 9, 16).

A similar idea to that found here in verses 10-12 is found in the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*:

Wisdom will exalt him above his neighbours, and will open his mouth in the midst of the assembly.

– Sirach 15:5

To lay one’s hand upon one’s mouth is an idiom for listening in hushed silence. It is an expression used by Job (21:5; 29:9; 40:4), and also Proverbs 30:32 and Sirach 5:12.

This is the third time our author has spoken of ‘immortality’ (ἀθανασία - see 3:4 and 4:1).

To ‘find rest with’ translates προσαναπαύομαι. This is its only occurrence in the Greek Bible (though see Wisdom 4:7 where the noun ἀνάπαυσις occurs. Speaking of Wisdom Ben Sira writes:

For at last you will find the rest she gives, and she will be changed into joy for you.

– Sirach 6:28

We recall the invitation given by Jesus:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

– Matthew 11:28

Throughout the Greek Bible, the ‘heart’(καρδία) was thought of (as throughout the Hebrew Scriptures) as the seat of the higher emotions, thought and decision-making.

‘Kinship’ translates συγγένεια, used 40 times in the Septuagint for ‘family’. In the Newer Testament see Luke 1:61; Acts 7:3; 7:14).

‘Training’ translates συγγυμνασία, from which our English ‘gymnasium’ – the name given to the Hellenistic training schools (which concentrated heavily on physical sports).

Verses 19-20 show that for the author the human being is a soul inhabiting a body. There is no indication that he thought of the soul as pre-existing the body. Nor does he incorporate the Greek teaching of metempsychosis (the soul inhabiting a succession of bodies), or the Hellenist idea of knowledge being a remembrance of what was seen in a preexistent state. Rather, he appears to espouse the Aristotelian notion of the soul as form of the body.

The Greek idea of the wise person attaining perfect integration of the human personality falls far short of the divine communion which our author asserts to be the gift of divine Wisdom. Acknowledging this he breaks into prayer.

¹⁷After thinking this over and pondering in my heart that in kinship with wisdom there is immortality,

¹⁸and in friendship with her, pure delight,

and in the labours of her hands, unfailing wealth,

and in training in her company, understanding,

and renown in sharing her words, I went about seeking how I might make her my own.

¹⁹I was a child of good natural disposition, and obtained an honourable soul; ²⁰or rather, being honourable, I entered an undefiled body.

²¹But perceiving that I could not possess wisdom unless God gave her to me – and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was – I appealed to the Lord and implored him, and with my whole heart I said:

We can do nothing without Wisdom

**¹“God of my ancestors and
Lord of mercy, who made all
things by your word,**

**²and by your wisdom have
formed humankind to have
dominion over the creatures
you have made, ³and man-
age the world in holiness and
righteousness, and pronounce
judgment in uprightness of
soul,**

**⁴give me Wisdom that sits by
your throne, and do not reject
me from among your children.**

**⁵For I am your servant the son
of your serving girl,**

**a man who is weak and short-
lived, with little understand-
ing of judgment and laws;
⁶for even one who is perfect
among human beings will be
regarded as nothing without
the Wisdom that comes from
you.**

In chapter 9 the author goes to the heart of the prayer of Solomon as presented in 1Kings 3:6-9 and 2Chronicles 1:8-10, and restates it in his own words. Scholars point out the literary skill of the author, of which this prayer is an outstanding example.

God’s creating by his word (verse 1) is stated clearly in Genesis 1 and by the Psalmist:

By the word of YHWH the heavens were
made, and all their host by the breath of his
mouth.

– Psalm 33:6

According to the Genesis account God made human beings to carry on his work of creation: the bringing of order out of chaos. To do this we were deputed by God to manage creation (see Genesis 12:26-28; see also Psalm 8:6-8 and Sirach 17:2-4).

We were to do so in ‘holiness’ (ὁσιότης; see 2:2; 5:9; 14:30), ‘righteousness’ (δικαιοσύνη; see references under 8:7), and ‘uprightness of soul’ (εὐθύτης ψυχῆς).

Verse 4 contains the central theme of Solomon’s prayer.

Verse 5 echoes the Psalmist:

YHWH, I am your servant; I am your servant,
the child of your serving girl.

– Psalm 116:16

Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your
strength to your servant; save the child of
your serving girl.

– Psalm 86:16

This is the second part of Solomon's prayer as re-expressed by our author.

Isaiah has God speak of the exiled Israelites as his sons and daughters (see Isaiah 43:6). According to the account in Chronicles the 'holy mountain' is Mount Moriah, traditionally identified with the place of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac.

Solomon began to build the house of YHWH in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where YHWH had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had designated, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

– 2Chronicles 3:1

Verse 8 gives us an insight into the mind of the author – an insight witnessed also in the writings of the Rabbis. God created everything at the beginning, including the temple (verse 8; see Exodus 25:40) and human souls (see 8:19-20). Though created in the beginning they are revealed in time according to God's design.

Wisdom was present when God made the world (verse 9).

There are echoes in verse 10 of the cry of the Psalmist:

Send forth your light and your truth;
let them lead me; let them bring me to
your holy hill and to your dwelling.
– Psalm 43:3

⁷You chose me to be king of your people and to be judge over your sons and daughters.

⁸You commanded me to build a temple on your holy mountain, and an altar in the city of your habitation, a copy of the holy tent that you prepared from the beginning.

⁹With you is Wisdom, she who knows your works and was present when you made the world; she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments.

¹⁰Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labour at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. ¹¹For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory. ¹²Then my works will be acceptable, and I shall judge your people justly, and shall be worthy of the throne of my father.

¹³For who can comprehend the designs of God? Who can discern what the Lord wills?

Verse 13 is traditional (see Isaiah 40:13-14; 55:8):

The root of wisdom—to whom has it been revealed?
Her subtleties—who knows them? ...There is but
one who is wise, greatly to be feared, seated upon
his throne – the Lord.

– Sirach 1:6, 8

The first man did not know wisdom fully, nor will
the last one fathom her.

– Sirach 24:28

¹⁴The reasoning of mortals is so limited, and our designs are likely to fail;

As is the recognition of the limits of human reasoning:

When human beings have finished, they are just beginning, and when they stop, they are still perplexed.

– Sirach 18:7

¹⁵for a perishable body wearies the soul, and this earthly tent weighs down the far-reflecting mind.

The notion that the body wearies the soul and weighs down the mind (verse 15) is found in the Platonists and the Stoics. However, our author is not following Plato in speaking in a metaphysical sense. Rather he is reflecting on our experience. In the Newer Testament Paul speaks of the body as a ‘tent’ (σκηνός; see 2Corinthians 5:1, 4). John uses the verb (σκηνόω) to speak about God’s Word (Λόγος) taking on a human body.

In verse 15 our author sees the mind (νοῦς) as the origin of personal, moral decisions. We find the thought of verse 16 expressed in the Book of Judith:

You cannot plumb the depths of the human heart or understand the workings of the human mind; how do you expect to search out God, who made all these things, and find out his mind or comprehend his thought?

– Judith 8:14

¹⁷Who has been privy to your design, unless you have given Wisdom and sent your holy spirit from on high?

Whereas in Hebrew anthropology the person is thought of as an animated body, our author, drawing on Hellenistic literature, thinks of a person as an incarnate soul. He speaks of idols as made of matter that is ‘soulless’ (see 13:17 and 14:29). Verse 17 picks up verse 10. Wisdom comes from God (see 7:15). ‘Set right’ translates διορθόω (see also Jeremiah 7:3, 5).

Keep straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure.

– Proverbs 4:26

¹⁸Thus it was that the paths of those on earth were set right, and people were taught what pleases you, and were saved by Wisdom.”

It is Wisdom who keeps us on the straight path, who teaches us the will of God, and who ‘saves’ (σῴζω). The author uses this important word here for the first time. It announces the theme of the rest of the book (see 10:4; 14:4-5; 16:7; 16:11; 18:5).

‘Salvation’ speaks of YHWH bringing divine help (peace, health, victory, forgiveness, life) to us in our difficulties, not on protecting us from having to face them. The classical text is Exodus 14, which describes the action of YHWH at the Red Sea.

As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to YHWH ... Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the *salvation* that YHWH will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. YHWH will fight for you, and you have only to keep still ... Thus YHWH *saved* Israel that day from the Egyptians.

– Exodus 14:10, 13-14,30

The prophet Jeremiah writes:

Thus says YHWH: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘*Save*, YHWH, your people,
the remnant of Israel.’

– Jeremiah 31:7

Reflecting on the victory of Cyrus of Persia over the Babylonian armies and the imminent return of the exiles to Jerusalem, a member of the Isaian school writes:

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,
who brings good news,
who announces *salvation*,
who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’ ...
All the ends of the earth shall see the *saving help* of our God.

– Isaiah 52:7,10

The same author recognised the universal scope of YHWH’s love:

Turn to me and be *saved*, all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.

– Isaiah 45:22

Remembering the ways in which YHWH has responded in the past brings peace and joy in the knowledge that whatever our sufferings, YHWH will save us. YHWH is the one who brings ultimate (eschatological) salvation. Jesus went through a terrible death. God did not intervene to protect him from it, but God did raise him to himself. Obviously God does not intervene to ward off the terrible consequences of the cosmic condition or of human sin. But the Christian knows that God is always present with powerful grace, and that whatever may happen to us, God’s will is to raise everyone to be with Jesus forever. If we welcome this grace, we, too, will be raised to eternal life. This was Paul’s message at the beginning of his first missionary journey:

You descendants of Abraham’s family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this *salvation* has been sent.

– Acts 13:26

Luke concludes Paul’s preaching in Rome with the same message:

Let it be known to you then that this *salvation* of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.

– Acts 28:28

¹It was she [Wisdom] who closely guarded the first-formed father of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression, ²and gave him the power to be master over all things.

³An unrighteous man who shunned her in his anger, perished because in rage he killed his brother.

⁴When the earth was flooded because of him, Wisdom once again came to the rescue, steering the righteous man in a plain wooden hulk.

⁵It was she who, when the nations in wicked agreement were put to confusion, recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God, and kept him strong in the face of his compassion for his child.

⁶It was she who rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were perishing. He escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities. ⁷Evidence of their wickedness still remains: a continually smoking wasteland, plants bearing fruit that does not ripen, and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving soul. ⁸For because they passed wisdom by, they not only were hindered from recognizing the good, but also left for humankind a reminder of their folly, so that their failures could never go unnoticed.

In Chapter 10 we have an ode to the saving power of Wisdom. In verses 1-14, the author draws on the Book of Genesis for the primeval myths from Adam to the Flood, and the prehistory of the Patriarchal period, from Abraham to Joseph. Israel's story is presented as determined by the providential guidance of Wisdom (rather than by the direct intervention of God).

The emphatic pronoun 'she' (αὐτή) used for Wisdom is repeated throughout the chapter.

Israel's heroes are not named. Our author is presenting them as types. Verses 1-2 speak of Adam. It was not an external menace that threatened Adam but his own transgression. Saved by Wisdom he was able to carry on the mission for which he was created (see Genesis 1:26; also Wisdom 9:2).

Verse 3 speaks of Cain (see Genesis 4), who, in verse 4 is blamed for the violence that brought creation to the verge of chaos.

Verse 4 speaks of the Primeval Flood. Noah is the first person in the Genesis narrative to be called 'righteous' (see Genesis 6:9).

Verse 5 speaks of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The 'righteous man' here is Abraham (see Genesis 12). In the face of his compassion for his son, Isaac, he went ahead in obedience to what he (mistakenly as it turned out) believed to be God's will (see Genesis 17).

Verses 6-8 speak of the destruction of the 'Five Cities': Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Zoar (see Genesis 10: 19; 14:2). The righteous man who was rescued is Lot, Abraham's nephew. The 'pillar of salt' is a reference to Lot's wife (see Genesis 19:26). She is presented as a symbol of the 'unbelieving soul'.

The language of verses 6-7 echoes that of 4:4-6.

The 'righteous man' of verse 10 is Jacob, who fled from the wrath of his brother Esau (see Genesis 27:41-45).

Verses 10-12 go beyond the account found in Genesis. Scholars suggest that our author is drawing on the *Testament of Levi* (second century BC).

Some of the language of verse 10 echoes that of 5:5.

The oppressor in verse 11 is Laban (see Genesis 31).

The 'arduous contest' (verse 12) is a reference to Jacob's struggle at the river Jabbok as he dared to cross into the Holy Land (see Genesis 32:22-32).

The righteous man of verse 13-14 is Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers (see Genesis 37:27-28). For the dungeon in which Joseph was placed see Genesis 40.

The Pharaoh gave Joseph 'authority over the land of Egypt' (Genesis 41:45).

⁹Wisdom rescued from troubles those who served her.

¹⁰It was she who guided on the straight path a righteous man, a fugitive from his brother's wrath. She showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of holy ones; she prospered him in his labours, and multiplied the fruit of his toil. ¹¹When his oppressors in their greed tried to get the better of him, she stood by him and made him rich. ¹²She protected him from his enemies, and kept him safe from those who lay in wait for him; in his arduous contest she gave him the victory, so that he might learn that godliness is more powerful than anything else.

¹³It was she who would not abandon a righteous man sold into slavery, but delivered him from sin. She descended with him into the dungeon, ¹⁴and when he was in prison she did not leave him, until she brought him the sceptre of a kingdom and authority over his masters. Those who accused him she showed to be false, and she gave him everlasting honour.

¹⁵**It was she who rescued a holy people and blameless race from a nation of oppressors.**

¹⁶**She entered the soul of the servant of the Lord, and withstood dread kings with wonders and signs.**

¹⁷**She gave to holy people the reward of their labours;**

she guided them along a marvellous way, and became a shelter to them by day, and a starry flame through the night.

¹⁸**She led them across the Red Sea, and guided them through deep waters; ¹⁹but she drowned their enemies, and cast them up from the depth of the sea.**

²⁰**Therefore the righteous plundered the ungodly; they sang hymns, O Lord, to your holy name, and praised with one accord your defending hand;**

²¹**for Wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute, and made the tongues of infants speak clearly.**

Abraham was kept 'blameless' by Wisdom (see verse 5). It was Wisdom who rescued Abraham's descendants from slavery in Egypt (verse 15).

The 'servant of the Lord' (verse 16) is Moses. The 'dread king' is Egypt's Pharaoh.

It was Wisdom who inspired the Israelites to take from the Egyptians what was rightly theirs, 'the reward of their labours' (verse 17), before heading into the wilderness (see Exodus 11:2; 12:35-36). The Psalmist sings:

YHWH brought Israel out with silver and gold.

– Psalm 105:37

The author sees Divine Wisdom in the cloud cover and the pillar of fire (see Exodus 13:21-22).

The fate of the Egyptian army is recounted in Exodus 14:23-28.

A legend not found in Exodus has the arms of the Egyptians carried by the tide over to the east bank of the Red Sea to be gathered up by the Israelites (see Josephus *Antiquities* 2.16.6).

Exodus 15 has the song of Moses, a hymn of praise in which everyone joined including the mute and the infants (verse 21).