



Wisdom

also known as the Wisdom of Solomon or the Book of Wisdom

The book falls into three parts. The first part (chapters 1–5) is addressed to the rulers of the world and emphasizes the importance of wisdom for rulers, contrasting the ungodly rulers with the saints who would receive eternal life. The second part of the book (chapters 6–9) contains a speech attributed to King Solomon relating how important wisdom was throughout his life and the third part (chapters 10–19) contrasts the Egyptians and the Israelites, showing how important wisdom was to the history of Israel.



How long will it take?

Reading time: About 1 hour.

Short of time? Just read 1.1-16; 3.1-11; 6.21–7.7; 9.1-18



Genre

Wisdom literature



Anything tricky?

The Wisdom of Solomon draws extensively on Greek philosophy in order to adapt its theology to its audience. This is not tricky as such but does lead to some unfamiliar expressions of Old Testament themes.



Inspiring quotes

¹But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them.

²In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster ³and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.

(*Wisdom 3.1-3*)

¹⁵May God grant me to speak with judgement, and to have thoughts worthy of what I have received; for he is the guide even of wisdom and the corrector of the wise. ¹⁶For both we and our words are in his hand.

(*Wisdom 7.15-16*)



About the Author

Much of the Wisdom of Solomon seems to claim to be the words of King Solomon but the Greek philosophical ideas (not to mention the fact that it was written in Greek) make this unlikely. It was probably written in Egypt, and probably in Alexandria, during the time of the Greek empire. Beyond that it is hard to identify a specific author for the book.

What do we know about him?

Some people think that the book may have more than one author, all of them Alexandrian Jews, who were trying to make their beliefs in God comprehensible in the Greek-speaking and Greek-thinking world.

The writer wants to reassure Jewish communities that their older religious traditions are as good as those of their neighbours'. The book is mainly poetry and is connected to various Greek philosophical traditions.



About the times

The language and ideas contained in the book suggest it was written sometime between the second and first century BC.



What kind of Book is it?

Wisdom literature. The strong emphasis on wisdom and its importance, especially for rulers, is similar to other books from the wisdom tradition, like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The Jewish wisdom writers believed that wisdom is God-given so, if we follow our reason with humility, we will come to God.



How is it structured?

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| 1–5 | Addressed to the rulers of the world and stressing the importance of wisdom. |
| 6–9 | The nature and character of Wisdom. |
| 10–19 | The contrast between Egypt and Israel and the dangers of idolatry. |



Look out for...

The theme of wisdom runs, as you might expect, all the way through the book. Look out for it and see if you can decide what you think the author(s) thought wisdom was.

Wisdom is also personified (portrayed as a person) in the book. Look out for this and ask yourself why this was done.

Life after death is also an important theme from time to time – reflect on why you think this might have been so important to the people writing the book.



What could this mean for me?

What do you think wisdom is today? Is it the same or different from that described here?



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did you think the book was about?
- The first six chapters of the book talk about what wisdom might be for those in authority. If you were going to write something similar today, what features would you include in it?
- What did you think about wisdom being portrayed as a woman? Was it helpful or unhelpful? If we portrayed wisdom today would we make it male or female do you think?
- What do you think are the hallmarks of wisdom?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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