



Handout for week of 6/25/18 Mk. 5: 21-43 & Wid. 1: 13-15; 2: 23-24

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Wisdom 1: 13 For God did not make Death, he takes no pleasure in destroying the living. 14 To exist -- for this he created all things; the creatures of the world have health in them, in them is no fatal poison, and Hades has no power over the world: 15 for uprightness is immortal.

2: 23 For God created human beings to be immortal, he made them as an image of his own nature; 24 Death came into the world only through the Devil's envy, as those who belong to him find to their cost.

COMMENTARY:

Whoever examines attentively the Book of Wisdom can readily see that its unknown author was not a Palestinian Jew, but an Alexandrian Jew.

Monotheistic as the writer is throughout his work, he evinces an acquaintance

with Greek thought and philosophical terms (he calls God "the Author of beauty": xiii, 3; styles Providence *pronoia*: xiv, 3; xvii, 2; speaks of *oule amorphos*, "the formless material" of the universe, after Plato's manner: xi, 17; numbers four cardinal virtues in accordance with Aristotle's school: viii, 7; etc.), which is superior to anything found in Palestine. His remarkably good Greek, his political allusions, the local coloring of details, his rebuke of distinctly Egyptian idolatry, etc., point to Alexandria, as to the great center of mixed Jewish and heathen population, where the author felt called upon to address his eloquent warning against the splendid and debasing Polytheism and Epicurean indifference by which too many of his fellow Jews had been gradually and deeply influenced. And this inference from internal data is confirmed by the fact that the Book of Wisdom is found not in the Palestinian, but in the Alexandrian, Canon of the Old Testament. Had the work originated in Palestine, its powerful arraignment of idolatry and its exalted teaching concerning the future life would have naturally secured for it a place within the Canon of the Jews of Palestine. But, as it was composed in Alexandria, its worth was fully appreciated and its sacred character recognized only by the fellow-countrymen of the author.

It is more difficult to ascertain the date than the place of composition of the Book of Wisdom. It is universally admitted that when the writer describes a period of moral degradation and persecution under unrighteous rulers who are threatened with heavy judgment, he has in view the time of either Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-204 B.C.), or Ptolemy VII Physicon (145-117 B.C.), for it is only under these depraved princes that the Egyptian Jews had to endure persecution. But it is confessedly difficult to decide which of these two monarchs the author of Wisdom had actually in view. It is even possible that the work "was published after the demise of those princes, for otherwise it would have but increased their tyrannical rage" (Lesêtre, "Manuel d'Introduction", II, 445).

[The book](#) opens with the opposed pairs righteousness/unrighteousness and death/immortality: those who do not follow righteousness will fall into "senseless reasoning" and will not be open to wisdom; wisdom is not an inherent human quality nor one that can be taught, but comes from outside, and only to those who are prepared through righteousness.^[20] The suffering of the righteous will be rewarded with immortality, while the wicked will end miserably.^[21] The unrighteous are doomed because they do not know God's purpose, but the righteous will judge the unrighteous in God's presence.^[22] Lady Wisdom dominates the next section, in which Solomon speaks.^[22] She existed from the [Creation](#), and God is her source and guide.^[22] She is to be loved and desired, and kings seek her: Solomon himself preferred Wisdom to wealth, health, and all other things.^[23] She in turn has always come to the aid of the righteous, from Adam to the Exodus.^[1] The final section takes up the theme of the rescue of the righteous, taking the Exodus as its focus: "You (God) have not neglected to help (your people the Jews) at all times and in all places." (Wisdom of Solomon, 19:22).^[1]