

The Book of Wisdom (of Solomon)

This book is not in the Hebrew Bible as it is only found in the Greek language. It is in the Vulgate, Latin manuscripts of the late 4th Century. The Vulgate became the official Catholic translation by the 16th Century.

Since the early 2nd century AD the Church used this book as scripture.

The author while not named is supposed to be King Solomon, who is addressing fellow kings. This is a literary convention of the times to publish under the nominal patronage of a supposed great sage.

The entire book is written in Greek but there is no doubt that the author is a devout Hellenised Jew living in Alexandria (Egypt). When scripture is quoted it is from the Septuagint Greek, (LXX) or the Seventy. So the Author lived after the middle of 2nd Century BC, but before AD 54 the general consensus is that the book of Wisdom was written in the latter half of the 1st century BC. There is no conclusive evidence that this book was used by the New Testament writers but there are suggestions that the style and some thoughts were used by John's gospel and by Paul.

The author seems to be writing for Jews living among the Greek culture of Egypt which is imposing its philosophy, science and cultic religions onto the population. The Author also seems to be concerned with the pagan/gentiles who are being led astray by the new seductive cults.

The author is obviously educated in the Greek arts, which provide him with a wide range of philosophical terms that traditional Hebrew thought would not have had access to. These terms he uses to expand on old Hebrew concepts which the Hebrew language did not have the vocabulary for. About 20% of the vocabulary used in the Book is not found in the Hebrew scriptures.

Like a typical sage of old Israel, he sees Wisdom as being born of God, the source of all that is good and uprightness and accessed by prayer. But more than the sages of old he adds to the understanding of wisdom using all the contemporary science and knowledge of his time.

Retribution and justice problems seemingly are solved here. The author uses Platonic concepts of Body and Soul and the teaching of the immortality of the soul, to proclaim that God made humanity for immortality, and that it and the way of God is the reward of Wisdom.

He seems to have no real idea of resurrection of the Body. but in an attempt to merge the Greek ideas with Hebrew thought, which was at this time is beginning to have a concept of a bodily resurrection, he admits to this possibility but only in a spiritual form.

The author teaches that Wisdom is an attribute of God, that is active in the whole work of creation and continues to carry history to its ultimate purpose, unity with God.

Wisdom is an emanation of the Glory of God and the qualities of Wisdom are the same as God's. Distinct from God but at the same time the radiance of God and the same function of the Holy Spirit.

In the narrative of the history of Israel, the author tries to make sense of the facts in terms of his religious philosophy and makes a new interpretation of the scriptures. With more than a little imagination he connects different texts, stories and events to draw out new conclusions. This way of using the scriptures was eventually to become the Midrash, the method of the Rabbis of the 1st Century AD.

The time and place that this work was written, sometime in the 2nd half of the 1st Century in Alexandria, it was a centre for great scientific discovery and intellectual development, and a home to a large population of Jews. The rapid change in understanding the natural world led to the growth of new philosophies, individualism, scepticism, and challenges to traditional religious ideas. There was a crisis of faith for the Jewish people there, many left the faith and followed new ideas of

pagan cults and a search for a meaning of life in Knowledge and Wisdom. And an age old problem of how to reconcile that the wicked and godless prosper while the good and just suffer?

The author was someone who must have spent a lifetime of study of the Hebrew scriptures and Greek thought. His work is impressive and creative in his communication of ideas in the language and cultural norms of his environment.

This book seems to have been addressed to students and intellectuals as they would appreciate the allusions and logic.

The book consists of two halves, 1:1-11:1 *The praises of Wisdom* and 11:2-19:22 *God's fidelity to his people in the Exodus*. each half has 251 verses. Using classical Greek concepts of perfection he uses the Golden mean in the structure of the book, that is a mathematical ratio. This ratio is seen in classical architecture and art.

Part 1

1:1-11:1 *The praises of Wisdom*

- (A) Immortality is the reward of Wisdom, 1:1-6:21
 - (a) Exhortation to Justice, 1:1-15
 - (b) The wicked invite death, 1:16-2:24
 - (c) The hidden counsels of God, 3:1-4:19
 - (i) Suffering, 3:1-12
 - (ii) Childlessness, 3:13-4:6
 - (iii) Early death, 4:7-19
 - (c') Judgement (speech of the wicked), 4:20-5:23
 - (c'') Exhortation to seek wisdom, 6:1-21
- (B) The nature of wisdom and the quest for it, 6:22-11:1
 - (a) Introduction, 6:22-25
 - (b) Solomon's Speech, 7:1-8:21
 - (i) Solomon is like other men, 7:1-6
 - (ii) Solomon's prayer for help and gift of wisdom and riches, 7:7-12
 - (iii) Solomon prays for help to speak of Wisdom, 7:13-21
 - (iv) The nature of Wisdom, 7:22-8:1
 - (iii') Wisdom the source of knowledge, 8:2-8
 - (ii') Wisdom as counselor and comfort 8:9-16
 - (i') realises that wisdom is a gift of God, 8:17-21
 - (c) Solomon's prayer for wisdom, 9:1-18
 - (d) Wisdom saves her own, 10:1-11:1

Part 2

11:2-19:22 *God's fidelity to his people in the Exodus*.

- (A) Introductory Narrative, 11:2-4
- (B) Theme, Israel is benefited by the things that punish Egypt, 11:5
- (C) Illustration of the theme by 5 Diptychs 11:6-19:22 (*a pair of facing pages/images*)
 - (1) Water from the rock instead of the Nile plague, 11:6-14
 - (2) Quail instead of plague of small creatures, 11:15-16:15
 - (i) digression on God's mercy and power 11:15-16, 11:17-12:22
 - (ii) digression on false worship 12:23-27, 13:1-15:17
 - (iii) digression on serpents in the desert, 15:18-16:4, 16:5-15
 - (3) The elements are a favour to Israel rather than punishment, 16:16-29

(4) The Pillar of fire rather than the plague of darkness, 17:1-18:4

(5) The 10th Plague and the Exodus, punishment of Egypt and Glory of Israel, 18:5-19:22

Commentary on Chapter 1

1:1-15, Exhortation to Justice

Seek God and reject evil.

Love Righteousness/ uprightiness, rulers of the earth, think of God in goodness, be well disposed to God and God will be found by those who do not put God to the test. (Ps.95:8-11 Deut. 6:16-17).

The author addresses imaginary rulers, a way of getting the attention of the readers and pretending to be a ruler. Flattery gets noticed and credibility. Those who put God to the test act without faith and have no trust in God. While those with faith and trust will find God and wisdom.

Wisdom will not enter the soul of the dishonest not live in the body of one enslaved to sin. For the Holy Spirit will flee from such persons.

The Holy Spirit here is identified as Wisdom. Education for the Israelite was once the province of the sages, and is now seen as the gift of the Holy Spirit from God. While there are references to the Holy Spirit being the guide of Israel or an inner force of inspiration, wisdom is now given the function of the sages but with more power and authority. (Ne.9:20,30, Is.63:10-11)

The body is not seen by the author as evil or bad, but that it can become corrupted and dominate the soul. Here we come up against a new concept for the Jews of the time. The whole human person up until this point was understood as the soul, both, body and spirit. The author introduces Plato and the Greek concepts where the soul and spirit are distinct from the body. The body being matter and base and mortal, while the spirit and soul immortal. It is a rather woolly idea where spirit and soul are interchangeable at times. But the author has not adopted this thought, only uses the terms knowing that his readers will be aware of the Greek philosophical teachings.

The concept of Sin,

today the word sin means 'a voluntary transgression of a divine law.'

for the Hebrew there were 4 words meaning what we call sin.

1, *hatta't*, = *missing the mark, a failure or failure to meet the expectations of a relationship with another.*

2, *awon*, = *a twisted or distorted condition, deviant from the norm, sometimes used for guilt.*

3, *pesa'*, = *rebellion, violating the rights of another, infidelity to the covenant.*

4, *ma'al*, = *infidelity, a lie, folly, denial of reality, of one's profession.*

Wisdom is a spirit friendly to humanity but is able to see into the very heart of people, the spirit of the Lord fills the world. Wrong doing will be seen and punished. So have good thoughts about God and do not grumble or complain, a lying mouth destroys the soul.

God did not make death, all creation was made to live and have health. So do not cause death by one's actions. Death/ Hades/ Sheol, has no power over the world. (Greek deity Hades)

This is not to be understood as physical death but an eternal separation from God, which is seen as spiritual death what happens to the body is not discussed.

The Godless summon death (Hades) and make a covenant with him. This is a strange idea that one must worship, appease that which can do one harm.

Death as seen by the Hebrew scriptures, it is generally accepted that there are no ideas of an expectation of or hope of individual survival after death until after the 2nd Century BC. Israelite

thoughts are in conflict with the beliefs of both Egypt and Mesopotamia, but are closer to those of Canaan and Mesopotamia in some aspects.

For the Israelite, the children who bear their name live on and as a member of the people and so it is a form of collective immortality. Having said that there are some passages in the Hebrew scriptures that seem to express a desire for an after life.

Ps.49 and 73 Is, 53:10-12. the first clear expression of hope in a resurrection is in the Maccabean era, Dan. 12;2. 2Macc. 12:38-45.

Chapter 2

this chapter break seems to be out of place and the theme of death 1:13-16 is continued through to 2:1-5.

This passage is from the point of view of the Godless, and a very pessimistic, cynical understanding of life and death. (Qoheleth 2;23, Sir. 40:1-2 Ps.39)

Hades, here means the abode of the dead, not the Greek deity. The godless do not even believe in the Greek pantheon, based on their philosophy and observation. 2:2-5 makes a reference to the new ideas that all matter, all living things are composed of atoms and are alive by accident and once dead everything returns to atoms and are recomposed into something else, or dispersed into the air as water is evaporated in the heat of the sun. This idea is contrary to Hebrew creation theology and Hebrew understanding of the Human person and the Gen. 2:7 story of God's breath animating clay.

2;6-11 as for the upright, the poor, the widow and the aged, the people that scripture teaches should be protected and cared for. They show contempt towards them and claim that their weakness is proof of their futility while the Godless show that Might is Right!

2:12-20 The upright annoys them and opposes their way of life. So they decide to persecute the just one to test the claim that as God is his father God will protect him. Mt.5:11, 27:40-44, Jn. 5:18

2:21-24 **The error of the Godless**

They reason and their anger and hatred blind them, they have no peace, no hope, no faith in God. Peace here is not just the absence of evil or violence, but a state of security, happiness and an intimacy with and of the presence and protection of God.

Hope, is the central focus in the life of the upright, the object of this hope is immortality, *athanasia*. A new word not found in the Hebrew scriptures, but one familiar with the Greeks. But it has the meaning of both, immortality of remembrance, or Immortality of the soul. The author is using the term in the latter sense. Blessed immortality in the companionship of God is a reward for uprightness. Ps.16:10

For God created humanity in God's image (nature) and through God's gift to be immortal. Death is the result of the Devil's envy, Gen. 3. the author's understanding of Gen. 3 and the threat of death as a spiritual death.

Wisdom Chapter 3 The hidden counsels of God, 3:1-4:19

Suffering, 3:1-12, (The destinies of the Good compared to the Bad.)

The souls of the upright are in the hands of God...they are under God's protection and dependant on God.

3:2-3, their departure like annihilation, but they are at peace.

Peace as was earlier mentioned is not just the absence of evil, war, danger, harm and anxiety, but security, happiness and protection through the intimacy of being in the presence of God.

3:4, The author is using the same terms as in 2:22, but now for the upright. They appeared to suffer punishment, but their Hope is full of **immortality**. *Athanasia*, The author here uses it in the sense of blessed immortality in companionship with God as a reward for uprightness. But this does not seem to include the idea of physical bodily immortality. He is developing Ps.16:10. 'You will not abandon me to Sheol, you cannot allow your faithful servant to see the abyss'.

The image here is dependant on the 1st and 4th Servant Song of Isaiah, 42:1, 52:13-53:12 also Ps.22:8

The author is connecting the idea that humanity is made in the image of God, *Nature* (Gen.1:26) and a new idea of immortality. He does not say that humans are immortal by nature only that we receive it as a divine gift. This is our destiny but one that can be lost by sin. Dan. 12:2-3 is a key text in the OT on resurrection of the Body, but it is not clear if the author of Wisdom meant this or even aware of the Book of Daniel.

What seems to be suffering is now given a meaning, a purpose, it is presented as a test, a refining to purify and make fit for a perfect offering to God.(Deut. 8:2-3) Ps.17:3, 26, 28 Pr.17:3

Those who are so purified will be like bright sparks, energetic and become rulers and judges and God will be their king for ever.

3:7, The spark, it is an image of triumph, but also alludes to the Epicurean doctrine that all things were formed by a chance combination of the moving atoms which generate heat and fire, which was thought to be one of the main elements of the cosmos. And as such the soul and spirit, in Greek philosophical thought was thought to be of the element of fire, or a fiery principle.

The idea of paradise for many Jews was that they would rule the world in the time of the Messiah.

2 Sam.7:16, Ps.89:22-27. Dan. 7:27

3:9-12 'those who are faithful will live with God in Love.'

But on the godless, who did not care about the just and rebelled against God, the real punishment of being without hope and all of their efforts to go it alone will be useless. Their punishment is listed to be what they inflicted on or thought of the weak. To be without hope, worthless work, useless and evil cursed children.

Childlessness, 3:13-4:6

For the Israelite, children were the means of their continued existence into the future, their hope was that their descendants will remember them and keep their names alive. To be childless or sterile was thought to be a curse, a punishment from God.

Now a new idea is presented, developing Is.54:1 that of faithfulness as being fruitful and a spiritual fertility. Virtue is better than children of the godless and unfaithful. It does not matter if they live long or die young, the lives of the godless are empty, and they are counted as nothing. The unlawful bed, adultery, or mixed marriages between a Jew and a Gentile. Deut. 7:3, Ezr. 9:1-2. The Eunuch traditionally was forbidden to enter the temple for worship and also from any assembly of Jews, Deut. 23:2, however, Isaiah 56:3-5 says that if they are faithful to the law of God they will not be excluded in the messianic time, they will have a house within the walls of God and an everlasting name. The author here agrees and expands the blessing.

4:7-20 Early death of the upright.

Even though the upright die young they will find rest! This is contrary to the common belief of the Israelite, to die young was thought to be a curse, to live long in the land was a blessing. Deut.4:40, 5;16, Ps.91:16, And yet simple observation of the facts was in conflict with that belief. Some good people died or were killed in their youth.

Israelite culture was supposed to venerate the elderly as the wise and mature of the people.

Sir. 25:3-4. But the author challenges this idea by saying that uprightness and understanding are real grey hairs and maturity, not age. And that it is to be loved and honoured by God who will take them away and be protected from evil and corruption. Spiritual Maturity is now to be regarded as being perfect.

Wis. 5:1-4. People without faith, cannot understand, that God's chosen will be given grace and mercy, protected as the Holy ones. God condemns those wicked in old age to become corpses without honour. Judgement is waiting for them and their crimes will confront and judge them. And unlike the righteous, memory of them will end.

The righteous will stand up to confront those who oppressed them 5:1-14

The oppressors will be filled with fear and remorse and wonder how this could be, and say that those we treated as weak and worthless could now be as Children of God in the company of the Holy One. The hope of the godless is like chaff or smoke on the wind gone with no one to remember them. See the contrast with Chapter 2.

5;15-23 **The upright will live for ever**, in the care and shelter of God. True life, is intimacy with God. This begins here and now but will have no end.

while the universe and creation will be armed to punish the enemies of God. This is a kind of prophesy of a cosmic event to evil. There is however no promise of a renewal of creation a rebooting of the world, as in Is. 59:16-19, 60:12-22 this cosmic event is final.

6:1-25 Kings should Seek Wisdom

Chapter 6 is a wonderful set of recommendations for rulers on how to be just and intelligent and caring of their subjects. 6:1-3 Sovereignty is given to you by God. Your intentions and actions will be tested by God.

The true sovereignty and power belong to God, **the power of the most high**, Jn.19:11, Rm.13:1 1Ch.29:11

6:4-11 The kings of the earth are but his servants. The Law must be followed or terrible punishment will be inflicted. The Law of justice interpreted by one's conscience must be the way or become tyrants.

The Beauty of Wisdom 6:12-25

Divine truth shines through doctrine and appeals to the human soul, those who seek will find and wisdom herself searches for those who are worthy. Understand that wisdom is divine and personified. So being close to wisdom is being close to God, and so one can receive real sovereignty and reign for ever. But the reign here is eschatological. The term refers to the end of ordinary reality and to a reunion with the Divine.

This section is a clever construct of a classical chain argument: *the attribute of each proposition becomes the subject of the next, and the conclusion links the initial subject with the last but one attribute. The first is a desire for wisdom, next being near to God and sovereignty.*

6:22-25 Describing Wisdom

Many of the contemporary mystery religions closely guarded their teachings from outsiders, but here the author wants to share this wisdom freely. He wants the greatest number of wise people to be rulers and so become the worlds salvation and a stable population.

Wisdom Chapter 7;1-8:21

Solomon is like all mortals.7:1-6

The gist of this section argues that the author, (supposedly Solomon), has no innate quality that is to be filled with wisdom; but is a mortal like everyone else. This is a challenge to many rulers of the day who claimed to be of divine birth, and so possessed divine knowledge and wisdom. The author spells out the totally ordinary way in which he came to be. 10 months in the womb, the result of a normal conception. Birth as a helpless baby like everyone, destined to leave the world the same way as everyone at death. Jb.10:10

Respect for Wisdom 7:7-14. 1Kgs 3:9-15, Isa. 60:19-20, Lk.12:33.

'Solomon', prays for a heart to understand and to be able to discern between good and evil. He does not ask for long life, riches or power but God gives what he asks for and more besides. What he learns he wants to pass on to others freely and so gain God's friendship.

Solomon prays for inspiration 7:15-21,

The author wants to instruct people about the wisdom he has gained. His knowledge is now vast and all encompassing. He understands the structure of creation, the elements, time and space, the nature of all creatures, visible or invisible. So he prays for and receives understanding of how to teach. He begged and wisdom came to him. 1Kgs. 5:9-13.

The Nature of Wisdom 7:22-8:1 (*numbering is sometimes different in other translations*)

There is in her a Spirit... this is the start of 21 attributes of wisdom in 7 paragraphs, a perfect number. He points out 2 attributes as central, *1 Wisdom* is mobile, being divine and pure, *2 she is omnipotent*, producing holiness since wickedness cannot overcome her. The attributes listed here and the terminology are from Greek philosophical and religious origins, a world Logos/Soul.

World-Soul, ascribed to the physical universe, on the analogy of the soul ascribed to human beings and other living organisms. This concept of a spiritual principle, intelligence, or mind present in the world's body received its Classical Western expression in the writings of Plato (5th century BC) and Plotinus (3rd century AD). It may be related to the common notion of all things having a soul. It is an eastern concept that may be seen in the Hindu notion of Atman, the supreme cosmic Self. The attributes also point to the Egyptian religion of **Isis** the Goddess of Wisdom.

Isis was a protective **goddess**. She used powerful magic spells to help people in need. **Isis** was the wife of Osiris and the mother of Horus. Since every pharaoh was considered the 'living Horus, God', **Isis** was the mother of God! Several temples were dedicated to her in Alexandria, where she became the patroness of seafarers the Star of the Sea.

From Alexandria her cult spread to Greece and Rome. Images of Isis nursing the baby Horus may have influenced the early Christian artists who depicted the Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus (See the litany of the Virgin Mary, many of the titles are taken from prayers to Isis.)

Solomon's love for Wisdom 8:2-8

The Author continues his subject of a search for wisdom, his love for her is like searching for a bride. She is God's friend and collaborator, she teaches the 4 cardinal virtues of Plato: *temperance, prudence, justice and fortitude*. These will be adopted by the Church. *Catechism 1804*

The solving of turns of speech and riddles; Pr. 1:6, Sir. 39;2-3. the moral reflections told in obscure terms to make people think. The parables!

Wisdom is able to know the signs and wonders of the cosmos and of time and future.

Here God is presented as the source of all truth and knowledge, the human sciences which are dependant on God's wisdom.

Wisdom Indispensable to Rulers 8:9-21

Through wisdom's inspiration, comfort and guidance, Solomon would have fame, glory and the immortality of being remembered even in death. As a brave and wise king he would command respect from the prominent elders who would wait on his words. 1Kgs 3:7-18

8:17-21 given all the blessings that come from having wisdom as a companion he still seeks her to possess her. Even though he is of noble birth, he realises that wisdom does not come naturally with nobility but is a God given gift.

The heart for the Israeli is considered to be the seat of intellect, understanding and thought.

Having received a good soul in an undefiled body, this is a challenge to the Greek concept of pre-existence where the good soul is trapped in a corrupting evil material body which can only be freed by death. The author is showing that for him the pre-eminence of the soul, being the whole person is noble in nature. The idea of original sin is not considered here. For him the heart conceives and plots evil.

The Prayer of Solomon 9:1-18

the Author gives his version of Solomon's prayer of 1Kgs. 3:6-9 and 2Chr. 1:8-10

He has composed a poem with a very clever structure. It is divided into 3 sections;

9:1-6, God created the universe and made humanity to rule in holiness and justice. Since Solomon is a weak and simple minded he needs wisdom.

9:7-12, God chose Solomon over his brothers to rule, so he needs to know what is pleasing to God.

9:13-18, No one can know the intentions of God or His Will. Humanity is simple and feeble, but wisdom teaches what pleases God.

The First line of this section; God of our ancestors...is an appeal to remind God of the promises made to the Patriarchs and to David. By your Word... the creative power here meaning Wisdom .

The second section, chosen to be king and To build a temple 1Chr.28:11-19 the plans of which David gives his son. This is not like the holy tabernacle / tent of Moses but a more ideal permanent model of the Heavenly one. Send wisdom from God's throne of Glory to teach so I will be worthy of my father's throne.

The third section seems to agree with the dualism of Plato that calls the Body a tent of clay. But the intention is rather to just point out that humanity is frail, earthbound and always in need of care which distracts the mind from learning the will of God.



The work of Wisdom in History

This part of the Book is a transitional section leading in to the second part of the work. The author shows how throughout history, Wisdom has intervened in the lives of humanity to save them in spite of themselves. Note the use of She, at the beginning of each paragraph. Also that no individual is named, only the upright/ just or the godless /unjust.

From the first human to Moses 10:1- 11:3

Wisdom protected the first man, the father of the world, when he alone had been created...

She rescued him from his fall. Then a wicked man deserted Wisdom and perished.

Popular Jewish tradition of the time said that before the creation of Eve, Adam fell and was raised up and given the mandate to rule the world as before the fall. (Lilith the first female)

The author writes *his own fall*, his blame, not that of Wisdom or of Eve. 10:1-2

The wicked man, (Cain), perished, according to popular tradition by his house falling on him. And because of him the world drowned, but Wisdom saved the upright one (Noah).

When the nations colluded in evil they were thrown into confusion. (Babel)

One upright man chosen by Wisdom to be preserved blameless. (Abraham) another upright man saved from the rain of fire, (Lot), the story continues through Jacob, and his spiritual struggle with God winning through his piety. Joseph the blameless, chosen and set apart by God to be a saviour of his people in times of famine.

Wisdom delivered the people, (holy and blameless?) by entering a servant, (Moses). And Wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb 10:21, Moses had a speech impediment and God loosened his tongue to be able to confront Pharaoh. Ex.4:10

The people, Israel, were chosen as God's people, infidelity notwithstanding.

11:2-19:22 God's fidelity to his people in the Exodus

The second part of the Book is a homily on the Exodus. Wisdom is not mentioned again until 14:2. It is a meditation on the significant events of the journey and the author connects the way the Israelis were treated in Egypt to the way God treats them as upright people. There are certain poetic licences taken with the texts of earlier scriptures.

10:15 Wisdom delivers a Holy people.

The people of the Exodus are declared holy, not for their fidelity or virtue but for their vocation Lev.19:1-3 and religious values that they represent.

The author is pointing out to the Alexandrian Jews that as a people they had long ago suffered oppression and slavery in Egypt and that they need the trust and faith in God. And that as before God will intervene on behalf of the just while the unjust and godless will suffer.

The author sees a plan in the events of Exodus, he sees that the people were benefited by the things that were inflicted on the Egyptians. The author shows how in their history the religion of the Israelis is superior to all others and that how the past prefigures God's final future intervention for the Just.

On the one hand the homily carefully pays attention to the biblical accounts and draws out implications for the present.

On the other hand the biblical text is creatively used, idealized and even altered to make it more edifying and interesting.

11:2-14 the miracle of water

there seems to be a fondness of Ps.106 and its account of the the Exodus.

Water turning to Blood is a punishment on the Egyptians, but is a blessing to the Israeli in the desert they thirsted like the Egyptians but only as a test, the rock gives them water and seeing that their thirst is quenched adds to the misery of their former oppressors. The punishment of the waters of Egypt turning into blood is also a reflection on the crime of infanticide by Pharaoh, the drowning of the male children in the Nile.

11:15-20 Punishment for the wicked

The plague of small creatures on the Egyptians, using their own deities against them. Almost every creature was deified for various reasons and became a confusing fearful state for the people. But the lesson here is that God orders all things with purpose and meaning and will not interfere with the normal course of Nature and return to Chaos.

11:21-12:2 the Mercy of God

God loves everything that is created, since his life giving spirit is in everything and is disgusted with nothing but gives all the chance to repent turning away from evil, by reminding them what they did to offend. And so learn to trust in God.

12:3-11 The Canaanites

God hates the practice of the inhabitants of the Holy Land. But since they are humans they are given lenience and not exterminated all at once. They are given the chance to repent.

12:12-18 God is King of Justice with Mercy

God just and Merciful because he is supreme absolute Power and is in control of emotion and not vengeful. God's Strength is the basis of his saving justice. Justice must be used with mercy.

12:19-22 this is the way that Israel learns to reflect on the kindness of God when dealing with others who offend.

12:23-27 gradual punishment of the Egyptians.

The Egyptians are tormented with their own stupidity of worshipping creatures. God treats them as little children and makes fools of them. Their condemnation is for their refusal to accept the true God inspite of seeing the wrong of their beliefs.

13:1-9 Idolatry of nature

How can those who study creation not see the creator?

The beauty and power of nature is impressive so why do they not contemplate the creator? They cannot see that all of creation points to God, they are obsessed with study for studies sake, and not following through to the conclusion that there is design and purpose.

For the Author as a Hebrew, he is not trying to convince the reader of the existence of God. Unique in the OT, Israel's knowledge of God comes through the experience of God's saving interventions in the history of the people, not through rational arguments. The Greeks search for God through philosophy. The author accepts this way as a possible way to come to the knowledge of the God of Israel. Paul in Rm. 1:19-25 takes up this thought. But here this is a new concept not in Exodus, that God is absolute being, pure existence that governs the world.

13:10-14:11 The Cult of Idols Is. 44:9-20, Jr. 10:1-16 Bar. 6.

The OT has many instances of ridiculing idolatry. The Author here pokes fun at those who make images in idleness and then worships things they have made. And the stupidity of sailors in a flimsy wooden boat asking a fragile wooden image for help. The author now makes a connection to Noah and the Ark in that God is the real navigator of every ship guiding and guarding.

Blessed are wooden things that serve God's purpose and intention but cursed are man made idols and those who make them. The warning that there will be a visitation on creation that is corrupted by them,

14:12-21 the origin of idols

The text here is fairly self explanatory but for a few little points. Fornication here refers to religious infidelity. Images made of a dead relative/ child as a memento is one thing, but the Greek practice also that of Egypt was to raise the dead person to the rank of a divine protector /saints.

The image of a ruler for the people to recognise, became a cultic object.

14:22-31 the result of idolatry

Corruption of morals and unnatural evil practices even human sacrifice and cannibalism. But the punishment for degrading the concept of God always follows.

Israel knows the true God 15:1-17

the Author now turns to a discussion of the difference between those who know the true God Yahweh and those wicked people who make and worship idols.

‘But you our God, are kind and true, patient and ruling the universe with mercy.’ even if we sin with idols we know we still belong to God. To know God is perfect righteousness and the first steps towards immortality. Knowledge comes through the experience of the death destroying power and might of God.

The Potter and Clay 15:7-13

The potter like the carpenter uses natural material to make good and useful things. But then out of the very same clay that he and his objects are made from, makes an idol, and so renders all his work worthless. Because he does not recognise the creator of life, a life that was lent to him, but uses his life to make a fleeting profit. The potter is more guilty since he knows how fragile are the images he makes, in spite of glazing/gilding to make them look like the metal of other images, *counterfeits*. Unlike the carpenter who believes in what he has carved the potter has no such faith only in the profit it makes him.

The Egyptian / Greek Idols 15:14-19

The former rulers were so stupid to think that hand made images in the form of dead humans could be the means to save life. The human has more worth than the dead images they worship. As for those who worship images of animals and more particularly, the snake which was cursed by God, so much more senseless.

Frog and Quails 16:1-4

The author now continues his work of contrasting punishments of the Egyptians and the Israelis. Egypt was punished by swarms of vermin, but Israel was blessed by flocks of Quail.

Locusts and Snakes 16:6-14

When Israel sinned they were punished for a while by snakes but redeemed by the token, the bronze image of the snake, not by the image itself, but the real God and saviour of all. While the bites of the locusts and flies proved fatal for the ungodly, the bites of the snakes were healed. God has power over life and death. Humans can kill but not restore life. Ps.9:13; 107:18, Deut. 32;39 1Sam. 2:6 The Author sort of ignores the wrath of God against Israel’s grumbling against God and Moses. Rather he points to God’s brief admonition of them. 16:8 suggests that these events were known to the Egyptians.

Hail and Manna 16:15-29, Ex.9:24-25, Ex. 16.

The elements punish the Egyptians by terrible rain and hailstones mixed with lightning. Their crops and produce were destroyed but not the creatures sent to plague them. In contrast God sent on the Israelis in the desert, a rain of food, Manna. Snow and Ice, hoarfrost, is the way Manna is described, Ex.16:14. Manna was said to melt in the sun, but not by the fire of cooking. God teaches morality by means of Nature and Creation. All this is to teach that while God sent bread from heaven, it is not ordinary food that gives nourishment but the word of God. Deut 8:3-4. And that one must meet God at the dawn. The practice of Morning Prayer thanking God before sunrise. Ps. 5:3 The image of melting Manna is like the hopes of the ungrateful.

The Terror of darkness and the pillar of Fire 17:1-18:4, Ex.10:21-23, Ex.13:21-22

The image of the plague of darkness inflicted on the Egyptians, described here caused great fear and panic, even death, through being haunted by their sins. It was like being cast into Hades powerless to move, all their skills and learned arts useless. A people who worshipped Ra the Sun God, now trapped in solid darkness, while the rest of the world shone with the light of day. The dark separates the people from their God and are plagued by noise and ghosts. What is fear? Not knowing the cause of suffering and being stripped of reason.17:12. On the other hand the Israelis in the desert are guided at night by a pillar of fire and a cloud that protects them from the heat by day.

This section can also be a warning to the contemporary Egyptians not to rely on their sciences and cults, since rejection of the living God will bring on them the same despair of finding themselves in the dark.

The first born of the Egyptians die. 18;5-19 Ex. 11, Ex. 12:29-31, Ps.78:51

this section relates how the Egyptians tried to destroy the Israelis by drowning the infant boys in the Nile. But through faith one is saved to be saviour and ruin of their enemies. The Israelis are glorified by the vengeance of God.

The cry of the enemy at the loss of their children is an echo of the cry of the Israeli for theirs. The same punishment for slave and master. For the Egyptians every family it touched, commoner and King with not enough living left to bury the dead. Only then did they recognise that the people were God's children. The all powerful word carried out the command of God. The Egyptians were warned and so they knew why they were dying.

Threat of Destruction in the Desert 18:20-25 Nb.17:6-15

Once in the desert, a revolt by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, almost caused the destruction of all the people, but the intervention of Aaron saved all but the rebellious. The weapons of sacred office, Prayer and Incense. The role of the high priest no longer just to offer sacrifice, but as an intercessor. 2Mc.3:31-34. This story is a reminder that being of the chosen does not guarantee immunity from punishment for rebellion, one of the major sins.

The Red Sea 19:1-12 Ex. 14, Nb.11:31

This section is a summary of the reasons why God punished the ungodly. God knew that they would change their minds and chase the people as if they were runaway slaves, forgetting that they had chased them out of the land. Contrary to popular belief of the contemporary population of the Greek/Egyptians, this was not blind inevitable fate, but the fault was theirs for not taking the opportunity to believe in the true God. So having hard hearts, they deserved punishment. The cloud preserved the children in the camp and sheltered by the hand of God they passed through the sea as on a green plain. They remembered their exile the plagues and later they would see more miracles birds coming out of the sea. Nb.11:31.

The Guilt of Egypt more that Sodom. 19:13-17

The guilt of Sodom was for treating foreigners with hatred instead of welcome. Gn.19:1-11. They violated the law of hospitality. The Egyptians, having invited Israel as guests and benefactors enslaved them and so deserved greater punishment. Gn.45:16-20, 47:1-12.

A New Harmony in Nature. 19:18-22

In Greek philosophy, the elements of the cosmos vibrate with each other to create a harmony which in turn creates the universe of all matter. The author here is suggesting that the elements of the Exodus, the miracles, have changed the harmony of the cosmos to be at the service of the people of God. Thereby there is a new creation a parallel to that of Gn, 1.*darkness covered the waters, a cloud covered the camp, Land appeared out of the waters, dry land appeared out of the Red Sea.* Conclusion, God has made a great people who have the help and protection of God at any time or place.

The abrupt ending is strange, but it maintains the symmetry of the structure the author has created for this work. See the structure outline on page 2.