

## Wisdom Literature: Richard Clifford, SJ

Compiled and submitted by Deacon Bill Gilles, Class of 2010

In the Catholic canon, there are 5 wisdom books – Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes / Qoheleth, Sirach and Wisdom. They are lumped together because they either mention wisdom or are attributed to Solomon. Jerome dubbed them the “Wisdom Books” in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ancient literature similar to biblical books was found and included under the term “Wisdom Literature”.

Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) had much wisdom-like literature that palace scribes would copy. One type was instructions of father to son or teacher to pupil (e.g. the Instruction of Shuruppak). Shuruppak lived before the flood and is telling the son how to live a good and trouble free life.

In Egypt, they have found 23 examples of this type of literature from 2300 BC to the time of Christ. Since Israel was a cultural crossroad, their scribes would know of this literature and copy it or, at least, be influenced by it. Scribes had to be apprenticed because they not only transcribed, but they made the writing implements and medium as well as memorized all that they copied. This was not “pop literature” – it was for the learned.

Wisdom in the biblical sense is not wisdom as we understand it (i.e. theoretical knowledge gained by reading and study). For them wisdom was savvy – how best to do something. A king was wise because he could govern. A woman was wise because she could manage her household. A jeweler was wise because he could cut a stone. You were wise if you knew how to live your life without trouble.

### Characteristics of Wisdom in the Ancient World

Wisdom belongs to the gods – divine causality ruled their lives. The gods would communicate enough wisdom to humans to get “good service” from them – the alphabet, farming techniques, sewing, etc. Wisdom had to be mediated to human beings through special individuals and then disseminated to others. Often this was done through the heads of families since it was a hierarchical world.

### Israelite Adaptations

Proverbs uses metaphors more frequently and hence are not as specific as general wisdom literature. Proverbs assumes that human beings are emotionally and psychologically free and able to do what the book recommends. Proverbs uses the term “sluggard” as a reference to “everyone”. Everyone can act on the message that it is giving. The Book of Proverbs assumes you are a live person ready to go – e.g. Proverbs 4:20-27 (“My son, to my words be attentive, to my sayings incline your ear; Let them not slip out of your sight, keep them within your heart; For they are life to those who find them, to man’s whole being they are health. With closest custody, guard your heart, for in it are the sources of life. Put away from you dishonest talk, deceitful speech put far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead and your glance be directly forward. Survey the path for your feet, and let all your ways be sure. Turn neither to right nor to left, keep your foot far from evil.”). In Proverbs, the heart is not a site of emotion or affection. A hard-hearted person is a dull person. “Heart” is equivalent to the English term “mind”. Action is referred to through hands, feet and mouth / tongue / lips. Proverbs is obsessed with the tongue because you can express yourself and it exhorts you to. (Note the 60’s term “right on” comes from 4:25 in the King James Version “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.”)

### Characteristics of the Wisdom Books

1. Proverbs uses the **doctrine of the two ways** (in the Gospel of John, we see the children of the light and the children of darkness). The two ways are exclusive and exhaustive. They are two paths that lie open to all – good and evil / unrighteousness. The Path of Unrighteousness is not

protected by God – you have freedom to get on or get off. The Path of Right is protected by God and you will enjoy God’s blessings – your life is not totally in your hands. Proverbs emphasizes the importance of the choice.

2. In the Wisdom Books, “wisdom” includes justice and piety. Wisdom leads you to right treatment of neighbor and worship of God.
3. Wisdom is personified as a woman. There are 2 speeches in Proverbs – Chapters 1 and 8. Wisdom compares herself as being courted by others. This is different from the secular wisdom literature.
4. **Antithetical pairs** – Wisdom talks about “the wise and the foolish”, “the righteous and the wicked”, “the just and the unjust”, “the wealthy (rewarded by God) and the poor (not punished by God – no criticism, it is just fate)” in the same passage.  
The Song of Songs is the only biblical book when there is no distinction between men and women in terms of power. Proverbs 8 (the seduction of the young man) is totally the opposite of the Song of Songs because the man doesn’t speak – no mutuality.

The **Paradox of Proverbs** is that wisdom must be sought with all your heart, yet it is a gift.

The way to read the Bible is to be aware of the genres. For example, the Book of Esther is fiction – it has a message but it is still fiction. The **genre of Proverbs** is proverbs and instruction.

### **Structure:**

1-9 Instructions / Wisdom poems – 10 lectures and 3 poems

10-31 Proverbs except instructions at 22:17-24 and a poem at the end

### **Compilation & Writing:**

Attributed to Solomon (961-922 BC) but he is not an author of most of the Book. Solomon is remembered as a wise king. It is a tribute to the genre of proverbs. In 25:1, we have a clue: “These also are proverbs of Solomon. The men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transmitted them.” This is a compilation of collections of proverbs – an anthology gathered in the time of Hezekiah.

Most of the proverbs are probably post-exilic although Fr. Clifford thinks that they are mostly pre-exilic because most of the work in post-exilic period was retrieval, not creative.

Until about 40-50 years ago, people thought that the king’s scribes wrote them down. In the Book of Proverbs, the proverbs are generally two-liners, but in other Wisdom Literature, they are almost exclusively one-liners. Beginning 40-50 years ago, thought began to shift to the view that the proverbs were tribal not scribal. In recent years, the view has again returned to the assumption that scribes of the king copied them down. (This is because the king is almost always portrayed favorably and the proverbs are not subversive. Therefore the work was likely done under the authority of the kings.)

### **Woman Wisdom in Proverbs:**

10 instructions are found in the first nine chapters.

1:8-19 (Lecture 1) is scene-setting. There are four characters: thugs / violent men, son, mother and father (the deceitful woman and Wisdom woman come later). The son is leaving home. He needs to establish his own home – work, wife, place, etc.

Chapter 9 – used in liturgy – Wisdom has built a house and folly is inviting also, but we don’t get an answer as to which house the son chooses.

Chapters 1-9 comprise a mini-drama in which a young man must build a home. He will meet temptations on the way and will be invited into two houses. We are never told which one he chooses.

This would imply that Woman Wisdom is young because (in Chapter 8) she uses the language of the Song of Songs – she is courting the young man.

Chapter 8 contains the longest speech in Proverbs – Wisdom Woman is speaking to the young man (Note, inclusive language doesn't always work – in NRSV, “son” is translated as child but this misses the point of the story – what child is setting up a household?)

Chapter 22:17 – “look to me as someone who is with God”

In Chapter 7, there is a portrait of a man looking out a window and sees a young man greeted by a kiss and led to the kisser's bed where he is sacrificed.

Wisdom Literature generally doesn't say, “change the world or society”. It says adapt to society – the opposite of the prophets. Therefore, it can't stand alone and give a true picture of God's message,

You can't be a wise person by only saying yes – you must also say no.

“Fear of the Lord” should be translated as “Revere Yahweh”. In a world where there are many gods, you revere (public honor [ritual] and obedience / prayer) one god (note proper name) to the exclusion of others. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” means if you want to acquire wisdom, you need to revere the Lord.

**Proverbs 10-31**: Wolfgang Mieder defines a proverb as a concise saying of an apparent truth current among people. There are conflicting proverbs (e.g. “Too many cooks spoil the pot” and “many hands make light work”). The truth depends on the situation.

Proverbs depend on performance. A proverb is not a compressed piece of wisdom so much as something to help you sort out problems and move ahead.

Samuel Johnson: “Men are more frequently required to be reminded than to be informed” (e.g. “A stitch in time saves nine” is not a revelation – it makes sense when you think about it). Alexander Pope: “New things are made familiar and familiar things are made new.”

Proverbs 10:1 – “a wise son makes his father rejoice, a foolish son is his mother's sorrow.” Note the contrast of father / mother, wise / foolish, father exterior / mother interior.

17:1 “Better a dry crust with peace than a house filled with feasting and strife”

17:2 “An intelligent servant will rule over a worthless son, and will share the inheritance with the brothers.”

17:9 “He who covers up a misdeed fosters friendship, but he who gossips about it separates friends.” – i.e. “You need to keep your mouth shut sometimes and hence lose integrity and if you try to gain by gossiping you will lose a friendship. Life is complex, but there is also a paradox here. In the New Testament, we see: “whoever gains his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will gain it.”

17:11 “On rebellion alone is the wicked man bent, but a merciless messenger will be sent against him.” – not a guarantee of what will happen but the saying is “typically” true. (2300 BC: “Big fish eat little fish”)

17:12 “Face a bear robbed of her cubs, but never a fool in his folly!”

17:24 “The man of intelligence fixes his gaze on wisdom, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth.” – in Hebrew, “man of intelligence” was literally “cool man”.

17:28 “Even a fool, if he keeps silent, is considered wise; if he closes his lips, intelligent.”

Chapter 25 is obviously the work of a king's scribes since the proverbs are generally in the praise of kings:

25:2-3 "God has glory in what he conceals, kings have glory in what they fathom. As the heavens in height, and the earth in depth, the heart of kings is unfathomable."

25:6-7 "Claim no honor in the king's presence, nor occupy the place of great men; For it is better that you be told, "Come up closer!" than that you be humbled before the prince." This is echoed in the New Testament – so therefore this is a strategy that you should adopt.

30:18-19 "Three things are too wonderful for me, yes, four I cannot understand: The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, The way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden." The last represents the fact that the sexes were raised separately but at a certain age, they become interested in each other. Therefore how strange and wonderful sexual attraction is.

In 22:17-23, the style reverts back to instruction.

31:10-31 is a picture of a woman who can do it all (who has no weakness). Yet at the end, it shifts to the husband. This is the picture of one who pursues wisdom all his life.

## Fr. Clifford's Handouts:

### The Wisdom Literature of the Christian Bible

#### I. Introduction to Wisdom Literature.

- a. Definition. "Wisdom" is practical, not theoretical. A wise king knows how to govern well (Shuruppak, Solomon), a wise jeweler knows how to set gems (Exodus 35:31), a wise wife knows how to manage a household (Proverbs 31:10-31). In the hierarchical and traditional society of the Ancient Near East, fathers/kings/teachers instruct their "sons," "the simple," who do not yet have adequate experience of life. Emphasis on knowing "how the world works" so that one can avoid trouble and live happily. Also emphasis on human activity, especially words.

Yet paradoxes in wisdom books. You must seek wisdom, but God must give it to you (Proverbs 2). In Israel, wisdom is an object of constant reflection, leading to personification of Wisdom (Proverbs 1:20-33; 8; Sirach 24; Wisdom of Solomon; Baruch 3; Matt 11:25-30).

Origin of biblical personification: counselors to kings = Hebrew (Proverbs 8:30), "I was beside him like a sage." Chain of transmission from heaven to earth, the last stage being kings (and their scribes) and heads of families.

- b. Genres. Proverb: = a concise saying of an apparent truth having currency among the people (Proverbs 1-31; parts of Sirach). Instruction: a lesson/Instruction of a father/sage/king/teacher to a "son"/student/successor on how to conduct oneself and live happily. Accepts the givenness of the world (Proverbs 1-9; parts of Sirach; Ahiqar in Aramaic). Skeptical or problem-oriented -works, sometimes in dialogue form (The Babylonian Theodicy in Mesopotamia: The Eloquent Peasant and The Satire of the Trades in Egypt; Job and Qoheleth [Ecclesiastes] in the Bible). Philosophic exhortation (epideictic): essay recommending a way of life and critique of alternate ways (Wisdom of Solomon). Authors of biblical wisdom controverted: School? Tribal or scribal?

- c. Themes in Biblical Wisdom: cosmic order and "the typical"; consequences of human choice; doctrine of the two ways.

- d. Journey of Wisdom. Early Judaism. Qumran. New Testament (especially John).

#### II. Gospel of John

Of the four Gospels, John draws most explicitly on Proverbs to present Jesus as incarnate wisdom descended from on high to offer life and truth to human beings. The Gospel expresses Jesus' heavenly origin by using the categories of personified Wisdom to describe him. As Woman Wisdom was with God from the beginning, even before the earth (Proverbs. 8:22-23), so Jesus is the Word in the beginning (John 1:1), with the Father before the world existed (17:5). As Wisdom shows human beings how to walk in the way that leads to life (Proverbs. 2:20-22; 3:13-26; 8:32-35), so Jesus functions as revealer in John. Jesus speaks in long discourses like Woman Wisdom (Proverbs. 1:20-33; ch. 8). Wisdom invites people to partake other banquet, where the food and drink symbolize life and closeness to God (Proverbs. 9:1-6 + 11). Jesus does the same: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry

and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). As Wisdom seeks friends (Proverbs. 1:20-21; 8:1-4), so Jesus recruits disciples (John

Two early Christian hymns identify Jesus with God’s creative word and with heavenly wisdom: Col. 1:15-20 and John 1:1-18. The Greek word *logos*, “word” in John 1 owes as much to wisdom traditions as to traditions of the word. Sir.24:3 (“From the mouth of the Most High I came forth”) and Wisdom 9:1-2 had already made wisdom and word parallel. Proverbs. 8:22-23 (“The Lord created me at the beginning... from of old I was knit...”) and Sir. 1:1 affirmed that Wisdom comes from the Lord and remains with him forever.

#### Introduction to the Book (1:1-7)

#### I. Collection of Wisdom Lectures and Speeches (1:8-9:18)

1. Lecture I: The Deadly Alternative to Parental Wisdom (1:8-19)
2. Wisdom Poem I: The Risk of Spurning Me (1:20-33)
3. Lecture II: Seek Wisdom and Yahweh Will Keep You Safe (2:1-22)
4. Lecture III: Trust in God Leads to Prosperity (3:1-12)
5. Interlude: Wisdom’s Benefits and Prestige (3:13-20)
6. Lecture IV: Justice toward the Neighbor Brings Blessing (3:21-35)
7. Lecture V: A Father’s Example (4:1-9)
8. Lecture VI: Two Ways of Living Life (4:10-19)
9. Lecture VII: With Your Whole Being Heed My Words and Live (4:20-27)
10. Lecture VIII: The Wrong and the Right Woman (5:1-23)
11. Interlude: Four Short Pieces (6:1-19)
12. Lecture IX: The Dangers of Adultery (6:20-35)
13. Lecture X: The Deceptive Woman (7:1-27)
14. Wisdom Poem II: Become My Disciple and I Will Bless You (8:1-36)
15. Wisdom Poem III: The Two Women Invite Passersby to Their Banquets (9:1-6 + 11; 13-18;  
vv. 7-10 + 12 are assorted sayings)

#### II. The Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)

#### III. The Words of the Wise (22:17-24:22)

#### IV. Further Words of the Wise (24:23-34)

#### V. Further Proverbs of Solomon, Collected by the Servants of King Hezekiah (chaps. 25-29).

#### VI. The Words of Agur, and Four Sorts of Scoundrels (30:1-14)

#### VII. Numerical Sayings (30:15-33)

#### VIII. The Words to Lemuel, King of Massa (31:1-9)

#### IX. Hymn to the Capable Wife (31:10-31)

## **9/16/2009 Lesson I-1 “The World of Wisdom: Proverbs (1)”**

Proverbs 1-9; Boadt 472-475; MDB articles on “Wisdom, Wisdom Literature”, “Literary Forms”, “Proverbs” and especially on “Poetry” to review the parallel structure used by the Hebrews.

## **9/16/2009 Lesson I-2 “Wisdom in Cultural Contexts: Proverbs (2)”**

Proverbs 10,16,22-24,28,30-31; Boadt 475-479; MDB articles on “Blessing”, “Teach, Teaching”, “Family” and “Woman, 2. OT”; Supplementary Reading #1 “The Instruction of Amen-em-Opet”.

Psalms 1 is a wisdom psalm. Each line is a couplet whose components relate to each other. This is called parallelism. Things were dualistic in ancient Israel – not so much in the world today. We have more gray in our lives than our ancestors.

This parallelism is the poetic form of Proverbs strongly uses contrasts – rich and poor, loose woman and woman wisdom, etc.

A proverb is a poetic couplet of contrasting verses. This poetry is a rhythm of meaning not a rhythm of sound. Types of parallelism:

- Synonymous – two identical statements written in different words – 4:14 “The path of the wicked enter not, walk not on the way of evil men.”)
- Antithetical – (predominates in Proverbs, especially Chapters 10-15) – the concept of the first verse is emphasized by the contrast in the second verse – 1:7 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction”
- Synthetic – the second part of the couple expands on the first – least common and a later development) – could have been an innovation to give some variety – 1:4 “to give prudence to the naive, to the youth knowledge and discretion

A key contrast in understanding wisdom literature is order versus chaos. Creation / nature and social order are seen as rooted in God and giving order. Wisdom does not prevail in chaos. Chaos is often symbolized by the sea in ancient literature (cf. Job 7:12 “Am I the sea or a dragon that you set a guard over me?”)

It is a moral obligation to stay on the path of wisdom – it is not just an intellectual exercise.

Creation is central to wisdom. How God created the world is the root of wisdom. There are many examples of the wisdom genre in the OT outside Wisdom Books (e.g. the 2<sup>nd</sup> creation story in Genesis, the Genesis story of Joseph). The focus on creation does not put it in contrast to the Law and the Prophets (which look at God’s mighty deeds in creation). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” – fear of the Lord is the basis of the covenant. Wisdom explores the relationship of man and God in the covenant in a different way – from a different starting point.

Wisdom echoes the Deuteronomic formula (“If you do good, you will be blessed. If you do evil, you will be cursed.”) – “if you stay on the path of wisdom, you will be blessed.”

## Differences

Covenant – focus is on social relationship (i.e. community) of Israel in light of God’s mighty works. The wisdom focus is on the individual and their education and task in living. The Near East view was that “Life and living is a task.” (In Genesis, man was put in the garden to till and keep it.) The Creation task was to make your way in the order of creation. The Covenant task was to be the “People of God. The Wisdom focus is on the practical. Wisdom teaches us to succeed in the task of living.

There are two origins of wisdom in Israel:

- The courts of David and Solomon  
They needed help in managing the united kingdom and developed ways of educating scribes and administrators – “wisdom schools”
- Family  
Preceded the courts of the kings. There were no schools for the children. “Wisdom” was helping your children succeed in life – an oral tradition. (Recall that J was writing at the time of David and Solomon in order to build up the kingdom. This came after hundreds of years of oral tradition.)

There were two major currents of wisdom literature in the Ancient Near East

1. **Traditional wisdom** (Pre-exilic) – e.g. Proverbs  
Influenced by non-Judaic literature, especially Egypt (close in proximity, history of Jews living there, political / marriage alliances).  
Egypt was an early, recognized source of wisdom. Central to Egyptian wisdom was “Ma’at” – a sense of fate – an unchangeable order of the universe. It is the task of the wise person to hand down without change what has been given to him (since it is unchanging, there is no development).  
The “unchanging-ness” may be the result of the geographical and climatological nature of Egypt – everything had an order based on the ebb and flow and flooding of the Nile. Egyptians were a content people rejoicing in the flow of life. Therefore a good Egyptian was a contented Egyptian – Fr. Moriarity.
2. **Skeptical Wisdom** (examples Job and Ecclesiastes / Qoheleth) was greatly influenced by the exile – nothing was the same after it. People began to question the “order” of life. Qoheleth says that there is an order in the universe but we can’t find it out. Skeptical wisdom is more like Mesopotamian wisdom.



## 9/23/2009 Lesson I-3 “Wisdom Challenged – God On Trial: Habakkuk, Job (1)”

Habakkuk; Job 1-14; Boadt 481-483; MDB articles on “Job”, “Righteous, Righteousness”, “Satan” and “Curse”.

### Skeptical Wisdom Literature

Wisdom literature originated as reflections on the human condition. God’s design is not immediately apparent – wisdom must be sought, but in the end is a gift. What happens when human experience doesn’t fit with the sense of Wisdom Literature? (“I do all the right things – where’s my prosperity? Innocent suffering.”)

### Habakkuk (Minor Prophet)

Doesn’t belong with the Wisdom Literature, but Habakkuk was the first writer in the Bible to ask whether God is really just. Thus, he fits thematically with Skeptical Wisdom Literature.

3 Chapters

Habakkuk, unlike Wisdom Literature, has a clear historical context: 609-598 BCE – after the death of King Josiah of Judah (Israel, the Northern Kingdom had already fallen). Judah’s existence is threatened politically. The first deportation is about to occur. Babylonia and Media have begun to nibble at the borders of Assyria, which, despite an alliance with Egypt, is outshone by Babylonia. Egypt, after failing to help Assyria, tries to capture Judah as a buffer between itself and Babylonia. Josiah is killed in battle with the Egyptians at Megiddo in 609 (this is the expected site of Armageddon).

Josiah is followed by his son Jehoiakim, who does not continue the religious and political reform of Josiah. It is during this period when Judah is not holding to Yahweh that Habakkuk is writing. (Job is written during or just after the exile.)

**1:1-2:4 – Oracle / Dialogue** – a reflection on leadership and justice in Israel / Judah (interchangeable names after the exile since Israel no longer exists). He asks God, “Oh Lord, how long should I cry out and you not listen.” God says he will make it right soon by raising up Babylon to chastise his people. Habakkuk says, “What kind of solution is that?”

**2:5-20 – 5 Woes**

**3 – Psalm** – some suggest that this was appended on the book to soften Habakkuk’s questioning of God. The language is archaic and reminiscent of Exodus 15. The psalm lifts up the great deeds of God in history.

### Job

- Narrative prologue sets up the story to look at the question of suffering.
- 3 cycles of poetic dialogues
- narrative epilogue

Genre differs by section: the prologue and epilogue are folk tales; the dialogues are poetic speeches / drama.

Job raises questions about God’s justice since good people suffer. Some call it a debate but the two sides don’t exactly interact.

There are legal aspects and terminology in the dialogues as Job is on trial in heaven and Job wants to put God on trial on earth – especially in chapters 9 and 10.

Job is difficult to date based on content since the experience described could have happened at any time and in any place. Best dates we have are 6<sup>th</sup> to fourth centuries BCE because the language of Job is influenced by Aramaic which came into existence after the exile. (Almost ¼ of Job is difficult to know exactly what the content is because the language is so obscure.) The questions of Job are the questions of post-exilic Israel – i.e. questions of identity and the meaning of the exile (i.e. suffering).

Mood – Job experiences a sudden reversal of fortune and feels betrayed by God. This leads him to a deep sense of melancholy (this is the same as the mood of post-exilic Israel).

Story – takes place outside of Israel (possibly Edom) and “long ago”. It is intended to transcend time and place. Job appears to be two different people when viewed from the narrative and dialogue. In the narrative, he is dutiful and cool (wise) – the “patience of Job” – traditional wisdom. Even the numerology (7 sons and 3 daughters = 10 children – completeness) in the narrative supports this. In the dialogue, Job is angry and explosive. When wisdom is detached from its root, what do you get? Traditional wisdom in the form of the friends deteriorates because it / they can’t handle Job’s experience – he must have done something wrong.

“The Satan” as used in Job is a person of the court – a prosecuting attorney. Eventually, this idea of “the Satan” morphs into a “devil-type” character. Later Jewish idea of Satan is influenced by the Persian myth of a god who falls from the stars (“Fallen angel”). This gets combined with “the Satan” as an adversary.

## **9/30/2009 Lesson I-4 “Wisdom Challenged – God On Trial: Job (2)”**

Job 15-28; MDB articles on “Sin”, “Repentance”, “Sack Cloth”

### **Guideposts In Reading Job**

Job is a mystery to be encountered – a journey to be taken through to the other side – not a problem to be solved. This is about Job’s relationship with God.

After Job is on the dung heap covered with sores, the three “friends” come and pay respects to him by sitting in silence with him for a week. All four are sages / wise men but Job is a little above the others. Once Job speaks (“I curse the day I was born ...”), all are free to speak.

What follows is more like speeches than dialogue. Eliphaz then Job then Bildad, then Job then Zophar then Job is repeated three times (except there is no third speech from Zophar – lost?). The three friends are from the East which is reputed for its wisdom.

Since Eliphaz speaks first, we can assume that he is the oldest and wisest of the three. According to Frederick L. Moriarty, Eliphaz had a “complacency born of wealth.” Bildad was a “mind untroubled by the least doubt” and Zophar (probably the youngest) was “an untroubled young theologian.”

In chapters 29-31, Job rests his case – “the words of Job cease.” In 32-36, Elihu speaks because he doesn’t think that the three friends did a good job. God speaks from the whirlwind beginning in Chapter 38.

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar represent traditional wisdom. The first cycle’s speeches / ideas are mostly repeated in the following two cycles. Job’s responses are the most important aspect of each cycle.

In 4:1-11 (especially 7-11) we see that Eliphaz thinks that Job must be guilty because Job is suffering. This is the Deuteronomic formula applied to the individual rather than to a people (“retributive justice”).

This is likely the path that Job would have taken with someone before his sufferings began.

The setting and people of the Book of Job may be set outside Israel because it would have been safer because the Book is saying some strange & new things about God.

In 4:12-21, Eliphaz adds that being human means that we are sinful. Therefore, all suffering is justified – we are all devoid of wisdom.

Note that in wisdom literature, a dream is often a mediator of divine wisdom (e.g. Joseph in Genesis and Joseph in Matthew).

In 5:1-7, it is much similar to chapter 4. Suffering is just the way life is – you suffer because you are guilty. Notice that Eliphaz is calling Job a fool and the talk is becoming less respectful. 5:1 – to which of the holy ones will you turn – that is, to which member of the Divine court. Job wants someone to mediate – this becomes his plaint.

In 5:17-27 – “You should be happy that God is watching you.” A little less judgmental than the other sections. It is still saying that Job is guilty, but Eliphaz is now saying that God is instructing Job and eventually will tell him that what he lost will be restored to him.

Although there is some truth to what the friends say, there is little that is consoling.

Job’s Response – there are glimpses of patterns in the other cycles.

In 6:1-5, Job is blaming God – not too different from Eliphaz in the end. Job laments. He is protesting his innocence and pointing out that his relationship with God has been broken. God the beloved becomes God the predator.

6:10b – “I have not denied the words of the Holy Ones.” – yeah, I’ve made mistakes but the punishment is way out of proportion. Job insists on his integrity. (Job moves through his suffering, changes and reconciles with God.

6:11-12 – sometimes in his responses, Job will take up some of what the counselor had said. Here he says that this may be true, but what can he do?

Job often chides Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar for their false comfort and for not being friends. Job sticks to his relationship with God even when he thinks God is hounding him. “You (the friends) are not with me in my suffering.”

Chapter 7: Job addresses God with a blasphemous prayer. Notice that Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar never talk to God or to Job – they talk about God and at Job.

16:7-14 – God is seen by Job as attacking him. Can we go with Job on his journey? Our invitation is to go with the text where we would otherwise be afraid to go.

## **10/7/2009 Lesson I-5 “Wisdom Challenged – God On Trial: Job (3)”**

Job 29-42; MDB articles on “Creation”, “Leviathan”, “Behemoth”

### **Job vs. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar’s Relationship with God**

<u>Job</u>	<u>Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar</u>
Close	Distant being
Passion	Logic
Person	Idea
“mugged”	Safe
Vulnerable & injured	Abstract / traditional / smug

(Fred Moriarity) The three friends stand for the tragedy of the closed mind in a dynamic age.

Job is working through a new commitment of faith. He was of the “old school” (i.e. retributive justice – the Deuteronomic formula applied to the individual rather than to a people) but based on his experiences he sees that this isn’t working.

In 19:25 (NAB: “I know that my Vindicator lives”), the word translated as Vindicator is Go’el which has a more accurate meaning of “Blood Avenger”, so it is not quite as pious as it sounds. By calling on Go’el, Job is saying that he has been violated by God. He can’t bring God to trial because the defendant (God) would also be the judge.

What does God do when someone is caught in a morass (the Hebrews in Egypt, the Israelites in exile, Jesus on the cross)? He does something new (parts the Red Sea, uses the non-Jew Cyrus to bring the Jews back from exile, resurrects Jesus). In Job, he comes to Job in a whirlwind. When reading the last third of Job, keep the following question in mind: “Does God react the way Job, the three friends, Elihu and we expect?”

### **29:1-31:40 Job makes his final plea.**

He makes his case for the last time and then rests his case. This section begins with a lament. Job reviews what happened to him. Some of the phrases have a bit different meaning than we would have today:

- “autumn days” are not the days of decline as we would use it today. A better translation might be “harvest days” – Job means that he was at the height of his life.
- 29:7-10 – Job is saying that he was the “alpha dog” – “the man”. The seat in the square is the place at the city gate where the elders and judges would sit to hear their cases.
- 29:12-15 – “I faithfully distributed justice.” This is rooted in who God is and who God wanted them to be – “put on god’s ways” – the Covenant Code.

Job thought this way of living would last forever, assuming that retribution theology was correct. [Note Daniel 12:2 is the first time that a statement about the after life is found in the Old Testament.] Job believes that he has worked in a system of justice that works, but God’s system that he is experiencing doesn’t work – at least according to Job. Job wants retribution theology to work but he realizes that it doesn’t since he can force his suffering into the mold of that system. Job’s justice system is also society’s concept of justice but it is limited because it doesn’t take us beyond human society into the supernatural world of God.

In Chapter 30, Job contrasts what has gone on before with what is happening now – God became a predator and Job became a laughing stock. Even the evil people now despise Job. How low can you go? He goes on to blame God but he still prays to God, maintaining his integrity and his idea of justice. Job is

still thinking that retribution theology is how it should be and he again blames God for not maintaining a system of justice.

In Chapter 31, Job says that he wants to see an indictment against him so he can defend himself and, if convicted, accept the consequences. This is where God should come in the whirlwind. What we get instead is five chapters of the “wisdom” of Elihu.

### **33-37 Elihu**

- Written in a different literary style than the rest of Job.
- Strong Aramaic influence
- Elihu is mentioned nowhere else
- The name is an Israelite name (“He is God”) but the only Israelite name in Job
- Everything Elihu says is an answer to a quote from Job or God (In Yahweh’s speeches, God asks questions)
- A lot of what Elihu says is parallel to what God says – look at the difference between the two as you read and see what difference that makes to you
- Elihu assumes God is never going to appear and answer Job

#### **[Class Handout]**

**Chapter 33:** God is greater than us, Job can't be right Purpose of suffering may be to be chastened (cf. 5:17). If we are brought forth from suffering, it's not because we deserve it but because of GOD'S GRACIOUSNESS.

**Chapter 34:** Job’s sin is that of pride/arrogance in claiming, "I am innocent." God has no need of law courts (God is all seeing), but Elihu wishes Job would be "tried to the end" (34:36) so that his rebellious wickedness would be shown.

**Chapter 35:** What does God care if you sin or are righteous? Do you hurt or help God by your actions? [Aside, Are we co-creator's with God or not?] God does not heed Job's cry because it is empty!! (What a surprise to Elihu when God does appear!)

**Chapter 36:** Retribution Theology (same old stuff!) Sin: Job's former judgment on evildoers condemns Job now! Suffering as ransom for evil – Job has been spared, for his own EDUCATION! Job hasn't been allowed to die so that God may instruct him (vv. 17-23). [Possible preparation for the speeches of Yahweh.]

**36:26-37:22** God as sovereign of nature, "majestic" in the "unfolding of the seasons" (Oxford notes)

What is the difference between Elihu's declaration of God's sovereignty and transcendence and the first speech of Yahweh?

**37:23-24** Job is wise in his own conceit. Pride is again identified as Job's sin.

### **38-41 God Comes to Job**

Whirlwind – Ruah Elohim – “The Wind / Breath / Spirit of God – Genesis, Exodus, Pentecost. A whirlwind implies power, no control, intangible, no sense of where it came from or where it is going, invisible (but we can see the effects and feel it). All of these were intended by the author – God is way beyond Job’s (and our) experience. Job gets something from God – we don’t know what it is, but he is at rest. The gift may have only been God’s presence. Job’s questions don’t seem to have been answered, but he is OK with that. The important thing is that God comes.

God reveals himself as “pure power” – where were you? – that we can’t control. Theologians try to do this all the time – they try to control God by “knowing how God works”. If God is all powerful, then God is not necessarily safe (you can see this in C.S. Lewis’s works). God is ultimately free and sometimes there is a cost to freedom – “come with me to a new place”.

In Chapter 39, God gives Job a list of different animals and qualities about them (“mountain goats, watch for the birth pangs”, “Will the wild ox consent to serve you, and to pass the nights by your manger?”, etc.). These are not traditional nature references. The qualities incorporated into the animals could be applied to God.

In the end, Job comes to his new “Yes” to God before God restores all that had been taken.

Ending Comments: (from 10/14)

The Book of Job advanced the “questing” spirit of Judaism because it tried to figure out the meaning of innocent suffering.

Is Job’s acceptance of his situation in Chapter 42 the same as his acceptance in Chapter 1 and 2? No, he’s made a journey. His silence at the end is not “blind” acceptance. It is a response to the awesomeness of his encounter with God – he is settled in the moment. He has grown and has been moved to a new place. In retribution theology, there is no place for innocent suffering. We don’t know everything about but Yahweh suggests that God’s design can embrace everything. Even if we can’t understand it, we can accept it. There is a place in God’s design for it. (Qoheleth asks the same questions but comes to different conclusions.)

Job comes to trust God’s understanding because of his relationship with God. We are challenged to do the same.

## 10/14/2009 Lesson I-6 “The Failure of Wisdom– Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth)”

Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth); Boadt 483-85; MDB articles on “Ecclesiastes”, “Wealth”, “Work”

Qoheleth (Hebrew) / Ecclesiastes (Greek translation) has been translated as “preacher” but this doesn’t give us the right picture. Qahal (Kahal) means to “call the assembly” so Qoheleth means “the one who calls the assembly”.

For Qoheleth, it is a matter of utmost urgency to understand God’s design, but he comes to the conclusion that we can’t begin to understand it. This is a tragedy for him and hence there is a sense of melancholy throughout the book. Eight times in 11 chapters he uses the phrase “All is vanity and a striving for the wind.” For a religion founded on the belief that God has revealed himself through historical events and people, this is a tough conclusion. It strikes a dissonant chord in the symphony of the Old Testament. Qoheleth is at the furthest edge of skeptical wisdom. How did this book get into the canon of the Bible?

In 90 AD or so, when the Hebrew canon was set, Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes barely got in. This is a testament to the Jewish trust in God. They are saying that something is there despite the fact that it runs contrary to what they previously believed. “God, in the end, can’t be known. Ultimately, God is a mystery.”

Qoheleth takes traditional wisdom and brings it into the book, but then he subverts it as vanity. He rejects wisdom in many ways. He says to pursue it, but in the end it is empty. He rejects wisdom in a traditional sense yet he seeks it all his life. He makes concessions – e.g. enjoying your life is a good thing to do. Qoheleth is the Old Testament author most “in need of the resurrection”, but he doesn’t get there. Many scholars think that there was a lot of later editing that helped to get it into the canon.

### Reasons that contributed to its adoption in the canon:

1. respect for competing opinions
2. sense that it is an examination of complacent faith (and hence similar to Job)
3. example of questing spirit
4. evaluation of God as mystery
5. strong statement for the gift of life
6. includes many traditional proverbs (and some unique ones) [of course, Qoheleth then says, in effect, “What difference does it make?” (see Eccl. 3)
7. (main reason) Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes is attributed to Solomon (the attribution could have been a later addition which still shows that the Jewish community valued it even though it was contrary to prevailing thought)
  - a. Attribution of mentors and pseudonymous writing was common at this time.
  - b. Not really plausible because there are many borrowed Persian words in the text and therefore after the exile – 540 BC or later.
  - c. There is evidence that Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes was known to Sirach (180 BC)
  - d. Conclusion is that it was written between 540 BC and 180 BC and most likely in the 200’s

Knowing that more than one hand was at work in the text helps us to see that it is not the schizophrenic work of one man. There are contradictions in the text. Remember: it is the book as we have it that is the sacred text – not what was there before the final editors were done with it.

### Clues about Qoheleth:

- Definitely a believer in God – never doubts God
- Struggles with the human community, religion and what we can know
- A teacher – (probably) the leader of a school of wisdom

- Sad about the fact that he is old and there is no one for him to pass things on to
- He has no use for women
- He is probably a rich old bachelor

#### Location:

- The text says Jerusalem. This may have an attempt to connect it to Solomon, but the worship practices connect it to the second temple period (516-70 BC)
- It is possible that Qoheleth is Phoenician, because there are linguistic and literary clues that point in that direction (life is often talked about in profit and loss terms and Phoenicia was heavily merchant / seafaring; also uses the phrase “under the sun” a lot and similar text is only found in Tyre)

There is a loose literary structure which doesn't help us to understand more about the text. Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes is a collage of impressions and reflections on Qoheleth's search for meaning. It is an impressionistic piece and not structured so that it follows his theme.

In his youth, Qoheleth was enthusiastic for life and he sets out to find its meaning in pleasure, wisdom, justice, work, riches and power. He becomes a respected person but some point he becomes disillusioned and comes to hate life (2:16-17 – “Neither of the wise man nor of the fool will there be an abiding remembrance, for in days to come both will have been forgotten. How is it that the wise man dies as well as the fool! Therefore I loathed life, since for me the work that is done under the sun is evil; for all is vanity and a chase after wind.”) Eventually, Qoheleth decides that even the search is “vanity”. He says seek enjoyment, especially in your youth.

#### Considering human activity (2:1-5:12)

- Pursuit of pleasure as vanity, wisdom, justice, work
- Highest good in life is to enjoy life as an unfathomable gift
- With summary thesis statement: All is vanity and a striving at the wind
- Collection of orthodox proverbs on human activity (4:9-5:12)

#### Reflections on Humanity and Human Weakness (5:13-11:8\_

- The case of riches lost
- The case of the rich person who cannot enjoy riches
- The case of the wise, poor person
- The case of the powerful fool
- Collections of orthodox proverbs (e.g. 7:1-13; 8:1-9) (subverted)
- Summary thesis statement: All is vanity and a striving at the wind so enjoy your life while it lasts

#### Instructions about youth and aging (11:9-12:8)

#### Epilogue (12:9-14)

Qoheleth's style employs a philosophical methodology based on experience and observation which is different from most of the revelation in the Old Testament. Qoheleth is somewhat similar to Greek philosophy (use of golden mean and cyclical time, not linear time). This is a natural consequence of the environment of the time since Alexander the Great had conquered most of Asia Minor. What is not clear is whether he was influenced by Greek thought or whether his and Greek thought rose from the environment of the time.

He uses a dialectical (contrasting) style which causes much dynamic tension and a sense of urgency. He's also a teacher / ideologue. He is conversant in ideas, so he challenges the unexamined faith of traditional wisdom.



## **10/21/2009 Lesson I-7 “Wisdom Reaffirmed: Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) (1)”**

Sirach 1-4,14-18,20-23; Boadt 486-87; MDB articles on “Ben Sira”; Supplementary Reading #2 “Why Do Christians Have Different Bibles?”

Qoheleth was a radical, questioning, struggling author dealing with what he believed and a present that didn't make sense. Ben Sirach is an attempt to rescue the Wisdom Tradition from the “hole” Qoheleth had dug. Ben Sirach takes Q's concerns seriously – finds creative ways to salvage the Wisdom Tradition and its beauty without ignoring its concerns.

“The Wisdom of Jeshua ben Sirach” is the Hebrew name – actually, “ben Sira”. Latin name is Ecclesiasticus, which means “Church Book”.

It's the 1<sup>st</sup> Deuterocanonical book that we will study this year: “second canon” or “secondary canon”. These books are not as central as the primary canon in Catholicism but are still sacred; not used as much in the liturgy. Protestantism: these books are not part of the regular canon; often not in the bible, or are present in a separate section.

Deuterocanonical books are not in the Hebrew bible; many were originally written in Greek. For the Jerusalem rabbis, anything Greek was suspect. The Septuagint included the deuterocanonical texts (70 rabbis in Alexandria); they translated Hebrew into Greek and included some other Greek texts.

The prologue of Ben Sirach is written by the grandson (of Sirach or of the author, who is the son of Sirach), who says that he has translated this into Greek because “no one speaks Hebrew anymore”. This may refer to Jews in the Diaspora. He may have translated from a Hebrew version that was itself earlier translated from an original Greek version.

Previous Wisdom literature did not need a historical context to be understood – Ben Sirach does. Sirach is the author's father. Ben Sirach was written around 180 BCE. Its weaving of Traditional with Skeptical Wisdom reflects the times and creates a new synthesis of Wisdom Literature.

Babylon had taken over the Mideast.

- 595 BCE - exile of the elite Jews to Babylon
- 587/6 BCE - destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem and exile of (much of) the rest.
- Jews spent 40-50 yr in Babylon – some escaped to Elephantine and to Egypt = start of Diaspora
- Nebuchadnezzar – 1<sup>st</sup> king of exile, very strong
- Nabonides – 2<sup>nd</sup> king of exile, weak and a religious fanatic (if not crazy); deserted Marduk for Sin (“sheen”)
- 552 BCE – leaves capitol to live in desert (monk-like); Belshezzar left to rule people – this weakened the empire and the people did not like this.
- Medea (to the east) gets stronger during this time. Persia is in the southern part of Medea and Cyrus the Persian leads a revolt against Medea, which is naively backed by Nabonides, who is glad to see Medea weakened but doesn't foresee that Cyrus will keep on going to Babylon.
- Cyrus conquers the outlying areas - in 539 BCE goes into Babylon where the disgruntled people open the city to him (“Cyrus the Liberator”); afterward he gets the whole empire, including Judah, and says that everyone can worship as they wish = end of Exile.
- Some Jews went back to Jerusalem (25 square miles only!), others stayed in Babylon.
- 445 BCE Nehemiah re-built Jerusalem.

Post-exilic reconstruction of Israel – people are impoverished and struggling for 100+ years. They are re-thinking their faith because the exile has shaken them. There is no more Davidic king (governors only), which was the source of their unity and nationhood = this is where the hope for the Messiah begins.

They rebuild the Temple and re-establish Temple worship – AND – do other things: things that they could have anywhere and they re-capture their identity as the People of God. Ever since Post-Exodus, Israel was to be distinct, the people of God, a people set apart.

So: How can we do this now? With no self-rule and only 25 sq mi? How are we to be a “people set apart”?

- Answer: Temple worship (but it won't last)
- Synagogues are born: study, learn, meditate on Scripture
- Reading of the Law (Torah) becomes the central practice

Torah had been completed by “P” during the Exile. Ezra gathered the community by reading the Torah. Early post-exile had a survival attitude: “circle the wagons” against outside attack (2nd Isaiah had a different, open mentality about reconstruction) Ezra used the Torah to push away outside influences (including foreign wives).

Post-exilic leaders had an anti-syncretic attitude (syncretism: take on attitudes and customs from neighbors, look beyond your community) until 332 BCE: Alexander the Great and his policy of “Hellenization” (Hellenos = Greece). Alexander believed that the humanistic philosophy of Greece was the most civilizing force in the world – therefore: gymnasiums (schools), theater, etc. Alexander expanded Greek culture throughout the empire – if you wanted the new goods, you had to barter in Greek for them. In contrast with many cultures, Greek became the common language.

This “Everybody be Greek” idea didn't go over well with the Jews, who were trying to be a “people apart”. Alexander's successors were even more Hellenizing, so 300 yr later people are still speaking Greek (time of Jesus).

2<sup>nd</sup> C BCE Hellenizing forces come to a head. Israel is first controlled by the Ptolemy's, then by Seleucid empire. Antiochus III, then Antiochus IV who is a fanatic about Hellenization:

- Puts statue of Zeus in the Temple (“abomination of desolation”)
- People must eat pork under penalty of death
- This all incites the Maccabean revolt and Israel is independent for ~ 100 yr.

Ben Sirach is writing just before the Maccabean revolt – not at greatest crisis yet (no evidence of that in writing). Ben Sirach is a scribe – class of teachers – study of Law is important so scribes are important: they study and teach the Torah, not just write it down. Scribe must also be a person of leisure = “necessary for the pursuit of Wisdom” 38:24-5. Wisdom is focused on the study of Torah, like everything else in this period.

Ben Sirach's contribution is that the study of Torah is the “only way to find Wisdom”; Ben Sirach adapts the Wisdom Tradition, including the questions raised by Qoheleth and Job, to a new age and uses it to confront Hellenization. His answer to Hellenization is the Wisdom of the Torah!

With Ben Sirach, the study of the Torah includes:

- Obey the Law
- Concepts of morality
- Have a right relationship with God – “Fear (revere) the Lord”

Opening Poem of Ben Sirach: personification of Wisdom Woman (Sofiah)

- Includes material from Proverbs and the Yahweh speeches of Job

- 3 “pillars” of this book: Ch 1, Ch 24, Ch 51
  - o ABA form, middle (B) is most important: Ch 24 – the Law as the Path to Wisdom
  - o Affirms the distance and inaccessibility of Wisdom
- but there is one who does know Wisdom - God
- and we know God through the Torah! V 11-20: “Fear of the Lord”

Very important: v. 9: Wisdom is poured out on creation and dwells with ALL via Israel

- This idea counters Hellenization: instead of spreading Greek culture, this is about spreading Wisdom
- This is NOT Ezra’s circle-the-wagons idea
- It’s more like Isaiah’s idea, which will be more fully developed in Christ

Bottom line of Ben Sirach: the Law and a right relationship with God.

Not addressed in class (from outline):

1. Ben Sirach’s advertisement for his profession/school
2. Ben Sirach’s teachings on social relations
  - How to avoid getting into trouble (in the Hellenistic period)
  - Stream of misogyny (Fr. Daniel J Harrington)

### **10/28/2009 Lesson I-8 “Wisdom Reaffirmed: Sirach (2)”**

Sirach 24-26, 30, 34-36, 38-39, 42.51; Supplementary Reading #3 “Canon Quiz”

After life hints(nuggets)- Author of Daniel contemporary of Ben Sirach. Daniel 12:2 Belief in Resurrection, when will justice come? Where did Elijah go? Enoch? Moses? Witch of Endor used to speak to Samuel. Sheol is just the grave, shadowy non-existence

What is the relationship between God’s word and wisdom? Wisdom seems to be force of God’s creativity. “Stick and stones” vs. “Pen mightier than the sword” – which is right? Words have power – spoken words have creative power. Isaac gave death bed blessing to wrong son and he couldn’t change it – the word and effect are one. Contracts were sealed with words of ritual – keeping the spoken word keeps order in the community.

Names – knowing name has power – God gives Jacob a new name “Israel” to create a new identity, Abram to Abraham

10 commandments – 10 words – how God reveals himself – word connects

God’s work is creative. Wisdom is connected to word of God. God’s creative breath is Ruah elohim God’s word to us is wisdom – his purpose and design – personification of wisdom helps us understand Ben Sirach reflects post exilic Israel, answers questions of that time – defensive posture against Hellenization. Ben Sirach was telling the Israelites that their search for wisdom will be in the Jewish tradition not in Aristotle or Plato.

Rescuing people from the loss of the Temple, written about 44-50

“In praise of great men” – 12 kinds of men, Abraham, Moses prophet reflect holiness & glory of God Simon High Priest about 219-196 BCE – 22 verses on him, climax of book

BS was an arrogant scribe (6:29-31) he contributes to question of suffering “doctrine of pairs” Chapter 23 Sirach does not say God created equal

Gnosticism – Good God / Bad God (Dualism)

Apocalyptic-fallen angel

What about evil? Evil comes from disobedience to God

## 11/04/2009 Lesson I-9 “Wisdom Revised: The Book of Wisdom”

Wisdom; Boadt pp. 488-91; MDB Articles on “Wisdom of Solomon”, “Soul”, “Spirit”, “Midrash”, “Resurrection”

Qoheleth was struggling within the Hebrew tradition and so is not capable of imagining life after death. BW is full of many Greek ideas, philosophy and language. This makes it even more puzzling that it is in the canon.

BW or The Wisdom of Solomon (as patron of wisdom)

In 6-9 we see the author looking at the passage in 1 Kings 3 (Solomon prays for wisdom) and reflecting on it.

BW was written during the highest impact of the Greek influence – the pre-existence of the soul, split of body and soul. BW was probably written around 50 BC in Greek by an educated Jew in Alexandria like Ben Sirach but 130 years later. (Recall Sirach was written at a time of tension but not war or outright violence).

In 175 BC, the Seleucid throne was taken by Antiochus IV. In 167 BC, the Maccabean revolt took place resulting in independence from 165-63 BC. The culture in Alexandria was saturated with Greek culture and language. It was an educational center of the Roman world. There was a lot of anti-Jewish feelings. They were characterized as backward yokels resisting the “true knowledge”. Therefore BW was anti-Egyptian thought.

No consensus among the experts on BW. Three major parts:

1. Chapters 1-6: the righteous and unrighteous are contrasted.
2. Chapters 7-10: Sofia is celebrated. This is the pseudo-Solomon section. The author takes on the character of Solomon.
3. Chapters 11-19: A review of history of Israel (like the famous men in Sirach) but without the names. He shows how the righteous and the unrighteous fare. Wisdom is the force in the world that works through history and brings us to our individual fates.

Unlike BS (wisdom is tamed by yoking it to the law, temple, fear of the Lord and human kindness), BW seeks common ground with the Hellenists’ ideas and impulses of the day.

BS – the focus is on things distinctively Jewish

BW – marries Jewish ideas to Hellenistic ideas – looks for good in Hellenistic culture and then shows how the Jewish culture is similar.

Reason for writing – to strengthen the faith of the Jews in Alexandria

Questions addressed:

1. How can the Diaspora Jews, whose religion is tied to the land of the Israel, survive outside that land?
2. How can they be faithful to Yahweh and be good neighbors / citizens?
3. Can we engage in / profit from an exchange of ideas with the culture around us?

“Greekisms” in BW:

PS has a strong sense of a search for meaning. In Hellenism, he sees insights, ideas and impulses to understand the world as something that can be embraced outside the “conclave” of Judaism.

1. Immortality of the soul (not the same as the resurrection of the body) is a hope of life after death. It is an attempt to reconcile the God of Life with death on earth. PS has a slightly different spin. The Greek soul is immortal and there is nothing that you can do to kill it – transmigration of souls – a soul can enter another body. PS says that immortality is a gift from God attained through wisdom – we advance to our true destiny. “Death is an aberration that comes through the devil’s

envy.”

If we are wise, we are righteous. PS doesn't talk as much about the law as BS.

2. Pre-existence of the soul: Body and soul are split (8:19-20 “Now, I was a well-favored child, and I came by a noble nature; or rather, being noble, I attained an unsullied body.”) PS is unclear as to what happens after death.
3. World soul = wisdom. Daniel Harrington sees Sofia as the Greek idea of world soul – similar to the Holy Spirit – the glue that holds the world together.  
It is a “natural condition” for all humanity to be infused by the Spirit of the Lord (we Christians see that the Holy Spirit dwells in us through faith and sacraments)
4. Greek idea of physics – 4 elements of fire, water, air and earth. The plagues are God perverting the elements for his purposes.
5. Greek literary forms: diatribe, allegory (in the Jewish history section especially)

BW is the opposite of practical wisdom – wisdom is an intellectual tradition. “it is God who gave me unerring interactive elements, astronomy, etc.