

Introduction to Wisdom Literature (Sapiential Writings)

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Wisdom, World, and Life—What is Wisdom?

Wisdom (חכמה, σοφία) is practical wisdom—knowing how to live well, how to perform one's tasks, and how to understand the secrets of the universe.

• The OT concept of wisdom as we see can include a wide range. But the chief feature of it is *the knowledge that leads one to live rightly in relation to God, and in relation to neighbor*. Why divine imperatives, such as Deuteronomy 4.6-8?

Wisdom themes: wisdom and life, prosperity resulting from shrewdness, consequences of human actions. E.g., Gen 1-11; Job 28.12-27: Wisdom is a divine attribute by which God creates and rules all things. See also Proverbs 8.22-31; the Book of Wisdom (7.22 - 8.1) pictures divine wisdom as "an aura of the might of God and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty (7.25), as an intelligent spirit (7.22) who advised God at creation (8.4).

1 Cor 1.24 speaks of Christ as the wisdom of God.

Wisdom stands for Jewish culture and religious ethos, but Jewish wisdom took on an international, transcultural flavor within the ancient Near Eastern world.

Genre/Style of James

Genres within wisdom literature: Proverbs has wisdom poem, instruction, proverb. Job has dialogue on divine justice set within a narrative. Qohelet has royal pseudo-autobiography. Sirach has vast compendium of instructions and proverbs. Book of Wisdom has philosophical exhortation to a way of life called *logos protreptikos* (λόγος προτρεπτικός). Others include skeptical inquiry, magical knowledge from transcendent sources.

MT groups wisdom in one section, why?

James: Text, James, Style

1. Characteristics (Eclecticism: borrowing from traditional material)

2. Jewishness and OT

If we take out the references to the Lord Jesus Christ in 1:1 and 2:1, the work is thoroughly Jewish.

But the use of OT is done in Christian perspective, e.g. 1:25 OT law is the "law of liberty"

The conscious literary style modeled on the Septuagint, similar to OT proverbs (1:8, 22; 4:17), as well as the juxtaposition of good and evil (3:13-18). James use of the word "wisdom" is significant (1:5; 3:13-17).

But circumcision, sabbath observance, dietary and ritual purity laws, temple worship are absent in James.

Out of 65 hapax legomena, 45 are drawn from the LXX.

3. Wisdom qualities:

(a) Timeless quality

- (b) rhetorical effect (Johnson, 8-9) of sorites or gradatio:
- (c) diatribe:
- (d) Uses natural phenomena and makes comparisons to cultural reality, e.g., checking appearance in a mirror (1:23), reining of a horse (3:3), steering of a ship (3:4), taming of wild animals (3:7), farmers waiting for rain (5:7).
- (e) brevity forces language into a compressed and sometimes paradoxical form
- (f) wisdom forms (Bauckham, 37-60):
 - beatitudes (with motive clause) or macarisms (1:12; cf. 1:25; 5:11a)
 - ‘whoever’ or ‘the one who’ sayings (2:10) (also 4:11, 5:20)
 - conditional sayings: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God (1:5), also (4:8b)
 - antithetical and paradoxical aphorisms (1:9-10a); also 3:7-8a
 - wisdom admonitions (with motive clause) (1:19b-20); also 5:9a, 5:12, 5:16a
 - aphoristic sentences:
 - statements of reciprocity (2:13a); 3:6c; 3:18)
 - debate-sayings (1:13).
- (g) similitudes and parables (Bauckham, 48-56)
- (h) examples or models (paradeigmata): Abraham, Rahab, prophets and Job, Elijah
- (i) prophetic judgment oracle, James 5:1-6

Structure and Outline

1. Homily or series of homilies (G.H. Rendall, *The Epistle of St. James and Judaistic Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927)
2. difficulty in sustaining a single theory: anti-Pauline theology (Luther); against later Pauline tradition (Donker, Martin, Popkes); Jewish ethics in Hellenistic context (Johnson); God-fearers in Hellenistic synagogues (Laws); or class conflict in Palestine (Davids).

See Bauckham, *Wisdom of James*, 63-66

A. James 1:1 Prescript

B. James 1:2-27 Introduction/Epitome (aphorism)

C. James 2:1-5:20 Exposition

2:1-5:18 (aphorism expanded: prayer of faith in 1:5-7 expanded in 5:13-18; reversal of fortunes of rich and poor in 1:9-10 in 2:1-7 and 4:13-5:6; enduring testing in 1:2-4 and 12 found in 5:7-11; wicked desire and God’s gift in 1:12-18 in 3:13-4:10; use of tongue in 1:19-20 in 3:1-12; acting out religious convictions in 1:22-27 in 2:14-26), and 5:19-20 as conclusion on models of wisdom