

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

Wisdom of Solomon 7:1–7, New Revised Standard Version, updated edition.

*7 I also am mortal, like everyone else,
a descendant of the first-formed child of earth;
and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh,
2 within the period of ten months, compacted with blood,
from the seed of a man and the pleasure of marriage.
3 And when I was born, I began to breathe the common air,
and fell upon the kindred earth;
my first sound was a cry, as is true of all.
4 I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths.
5 For no king has had a different beginning of existence;
6 there is for all one entrance into life, and one way out.
7 Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;
I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.*

Who is Sophia?

When I was in graduate school and then during my many years as an academic, I noticed over and over, hundreds of times, the disdain that highly educated people tend to have for people of faith. At faculty meetings, professors would openly say degrading things about believers, things that if they said them about other people could cost them their tenure, their careers. But it was perfectly politically correct to equate people who believe God created the world, that Jesus came to this planet to help us develop a personal relationship with God, and that loving God and loving all people are the most important principles of life, with people who are ignorant,

unintelligent, and dangerous. One time, after a faculty meeting, during which a professor had cracked a crude joke about Christians have lower levels of intelligence, I approached my peer and tried to convince this person that in fact, wisdom, a true, deep knowledge of the world, of humanity, and of society is greatly valued by the faithful. I argued that wisdom is critical to mature faith. I used a book from the Apocrypha as a reference. I'd like to talk about this book today.

The term "Silent Period" refers to the period between the last of the writing of the Old Testament and the birth of Jesus. This "Inter-Testamental Period" covers an estimated 400 years, from the time of the prophet Malachi until the birth of Jesus. But there is material that was written during this period of 400 years, during this time when most Christian Bibles offer nothing prophetic, nothing from the mouth of God. We call this very diverse collection of materials "the Apocrypha". The word is from a Greek word *apokryptein*, meaning "to hide away". These writings are all Old Testament in nature, as they concern the Chosen People living under the Old Covenant. The books that appear in the Apocrypha, which are not considered biblical to most Protestants, but are in the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Catholic Bibles, are useful to Christians for one very powerful reason: they give us a lot of insight into what was happening in and around Jerusalem when Jesus was born. These Books include some additions to the existing Old Testament books,

and several new books. My favorite is called the Wisdom of Solomon, which is written in a poetic style, and praises a life of wisdom. One of the reasons that many Christians do not consider it scriptural is because the Wisdom of Solomon is associated with Gnosticism. This twisted form of Christianity was particularly popular in the fourth century after Jesus' birth. Some followers of Gnosticism relied on the Wisdom of Solomon as a philosophical foundation for their faith. But independent of this the Wisdom of Solomon is an amazingly insightful book.

Wisdom is written as poetry, and it uses King Solomon as a literary device: the author isn't trying to make us think he is Solomon; he is simply writing from the imaginary perspective of the great, wise king of Israel. The author, whose identity is not known, was almost certainly a Jew from Alexandria in Egypt. He wrote in Greek. Wisdom was written in the century before Jesus was born, probably around the year 50 B.C. Greek and other Greek speaking peoples had taken control of Israel several hundred years before, after conquering the Persians, the previous overlords of Israel. Many Jews had become heavily Hellenized, identifying strongly with Greek culture, adopting its language, customs, clothing, and gods. As a Hellenized Jew, but one who still believed in the God of the Israelites, the author of the Wisdom of Solomon therefore wrote in Greek, not Hebrew. The author puts his words on the lips of King Solomon to give weight to his work. The Book of

Wisdom had a lot going against it when it came time to choose both Hebrew scripture and the New Testament canon. First, it was not written in Hebrew, the sacred language of the Old Testament. It was also written too late in the Jewish era to bear weight among Jews. Christians didn't like the fact that Gnostics relied heavily on the Wisdom of Solomon. Gnosis is a Greek word that means "knowledge" or "insight". Gnostics believed that the reason Jesus came to Earth was to impart secrets that reveal how people can have a divine, godlike nature, which they believed was hidden under or behind the material world around us. Gnostics relied heavily on wisdom writings, specifically, the Wisdom of Solomon, as a vehicle for helping people obtain this high level of divine enlightenment. As a result, Christians were biased against this book being in the Bible.

At the core of the Gnostics' use of the Wisdom of Solomon is a literary character called Sophia. While the Gnostics used Sophia to support their bizarre form of Christianity, others have used Sophia to illustrate much of what the Old Testament says about the value of living a wise, knowledgeable life. In this regard, Proverbs, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Job are all examples of scriptural books that are wisdom based in nature and have Sophia hidden within them. But who is Sophia? The Wisdom of Solomon is written as if it comes from the mouth of Solomon. In the book, Wisdom is personified as a living character, a female one. This character

is given the name Wisdom in our translations. But in the Greek of the Wisdom of Solomon we read the word *Sophos*, which means wisdom. Sophia is an abstract biblical character who appears in the seventh chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon:

*7 I also am mortal, like everyone else,
a descendant of the first-formed child of earth;
and in the womb of a mother I was molded into flesh,
2 within the period of ten months, compacted with blood,
from the seed of a man and the pleasure of marriage.
3 And when I was born, I began to breathe the common air,
and fell upon the kindred earth;
my first sound was a cry, as is true of all.
4 I was nursed with care in swaddling cloths.
5 For no king has had a different beginning of existence;
6 there is for all one entrance into life, and one way out.
7 Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me;
I called on God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me.*

We are hearing the voice of Solomon, via the mouth of the unknown author.

Solomon says that he, like everyone else, is simply a mortal human. When he was born, he breathed air like anyone else. He cried, he was nursed, and he wore swaddling clothes. He was a king, and like all other kings, he was born from a woman and fathered by a man. It is the only way that any human can become alive. Because of his low origins, which were like that of any other person, the man who would become King Solomon turned to God, prayed, and asked for the gift of wisdom. Through wisdom, God can free us from the bonds of ignorance,

and help us build a world fit for those made in God's image, a place where we can thrive. Solomon became known as the King who was particularly wise.

We are not Gnostics. We don't see ourselves as obtaining some magical level of wisdom that will make us divine, like God. But we know the value of wisdom, of learning how our minds, combined with the teachings of God and Christ, can help us live more joyous lives that follow Christ's two big laws, to love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds, and to love all people in the same way.

Consider this, from later in Chapter 7 of the Wisdom of Solomon:

²¹ *I learned both what is secret and what is manifest,*

²² *for wisdom, the fashioner of all things, taught me.*

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,

unique, manifold, subtle,

mobile, clear, unpolluted,

distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,

irresistible, ²³ beneficent, humane,

steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,

all-powerful, overseeing all,

and penetrating through all spirits

that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.

In the original Greek of the Wisdom of Solomon, the word here for wisdom is *sophias*, a form of *Sophos*. Sophia. The transliteration, that is, the conversion of the Greek characters into English ones, of *Sophos* is "Sophia". The character of Solomon has learned what is both secret and obvious. He learned all this through wisdom – that is, Sophia, the female characterization of wisdom. Sophia is holy,

unpolluted, and irresistible. Perhaps most importantly, she frees us from anxiety because Sophia can embody all that is intelligent, pure, and subtle.

It's intriguing that this was written a bit over 2,000 years ago. Our society does not preach wisdom. People today get news in very tiny bursts, often from social media, and not from any independent, unbiased news source. Even conventional news organizations are highly slanted now politically, with TV networks, newspapers, and online news organizations all individually known for their political slant. News is sensationalized to increase viewership. What we are told is simplified and superficial. We can see why the Israelites were so big on wisdom, why it became a part of their sacred writings. A society that is more thoughtful, more contemplative, and less likely to make decisions based on insufficient and twisted information, is a healthier society. And when done right, faith is a beautiful way to make a society knowledgeable. Many modern churches do take a superficial approach to faith today because understanding the tenets of our faith, studying the collective knowledge base of Christianity, that is, the Bible, and developing a mature relationship with God takes time – a lot of time.

Here is something from Chapter 13 of the Wisdom of Solomon. Remember that the author is placing his words in the mouth of the wise King Solomon, and

wisdom is seen as something so critical to human survival and to faith itself that wisdom is personified as a living being, Sophia:

*13 For all people who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature,
and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know the one who
exists,
nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works;
² but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air
or the circle of the stars or turbulent water
or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world.
³ If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be
gods,
let them know how much better than these is their Lord,
for the author of beauty created them.
⁴ And if people were amazed at their power and working,
let them perceive from them
how much more powerful is the one who formed them.
⁵ For from the greatness and beauty of created things
comes a corresponding perception of their Creator.*

Not knowing God, not spending the time to develop an understanding of who God is, this is primary way in which people deny themselves wisdom. In other words, it not only takes wisdom to fully embrace God in one's life, the practice of doing so, of incrementally developing a true and deep faith in God will itself greatly enhance one's wisdom. They are intertwined. There is a symbiotic relationship between faith and wisdom. A person who isn't wise is a person who does not know God. With wisdom comes an ability to recognize God in the creations of God, in nature.

A wise person learns the power and beauty of our God by witnessing the power and the beauty of God's creations. Conversely, knowing God brings wisdom.

I never succeeded in convincing my professor peer that wisdom and faith are intimately tied, that an ignorant person can at best have only very shallow faith, and that having faith opens one up to true enlightenment and deep wisdom. But having that debate did solidify my own feelings and help me deflect the constant pressure I felt as a professor in an extraordinarily anti-Christian environment. What the ancients wrote in Scripture – that we desperately need wisdom – is even more relevant today. That's because society is now driven by a superficial reliance on technology and a shallow understanding of who we are as people. We are made in God's image. If, as a culture, we could come to a mature understanding of what that means, the level of wisdom in our world would skyrocket. We wouldn't hate. We wouldn't harm others for selfish reasons. We wouldn't lack empathy and love if we were truly wise. Jesus taught us the core of what it means to be like the King Solomon of the Wisdom of Solomon, how to live a life of true wisdom. Correspondingly, true belief in God, a deep, sincere, and mature belief is what lifts us up above the ignorant brutalities of this world.

Sophia is Wisdom personified. Sophia has a name because Wisdom is a living thing inside of us. Wisdom sits right next to the Holy Spirit, that element of our

Trinity that gives us inspiration and guides us through life. Wisdom is that human companion of the Holy Spirit. God creates us with minds that if we train them properly, if we fill ourselves with wisdom, enable us to leverage the fire of the Holy Spirit in amazing ways. Then a powerful cycle is engaged. The more we gain wisdom, the more we gain faith, and the more we gain faith, the wiser we become. So, invite Sophia into your life. Other than having faith in God, it will be the wisest decision you will ever make.

Please pray with me.

God, bring us wisdom. Open our minds to the true meaning of being made in your image. Let us live to that standard. And may our growing wisdom serve to deep our trust in you and our reliance on living by your laws. Amen.