Introduction to Wisdom Literature

**What is wisdom? Who is Wisdom?**

**Psalm 111:10**  10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

**Proverbs 1:7**  7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Wisdom - sofi,a – Sophia

NRS **Proverbs 1:20** Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice.

“In Biblical studies, “wisdom literature” designates the books of Proverbs, Job, Qohelet (Ecclesiastes), and in the Apocrypha or deuterocanonical books, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. The Song of Songs is often included on the grounds that it, like the wisdom books, is “of Solomon”. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Qohelet – Hebrew - tl,h,äqo - “The Preacher to the Church” [Late Latin Ecclēsiastēs, from Greek Ekklēsiastēs, *preacher* (translation of Hebrew

qōhelet), From ekklēsiastēs, *a member of the ecclesia*, from ekklēsiā, *ecclesia*.

Ecclesia: the community, in the Bible it generally means community of faith, the church

**Why is Wisdom attributed to Solomon?**

**1 Kings 3:5-14**

**2 Chronicles 1:7-12**

**Characteristics of Wisdom Literature**

**Instruction** – always contain proverbs and exhortations

**Proverb collections** – proverbs (pithy sayings) were common in all ancient literature, but collections of proverbs were not.

**Dialogues on Divine Justice and Human Suffering** – Arguments proceed with concrete examples of justice and injustice and short sayings rather than with abstract reasoning.

**Pseudo-Autobiography** – narration of the deeds of a great hero, drawing morals from them. Often legendary and historical elements are blended to tell a grand story.

**Philosophical Exhortation** – typical of Greek and Latin literature. These exhortations use a variety of arguments and styles to persuade their audience. (The biblical book of Wisdom fits this model)

**Brief Forms** – The most pervasive small forms in wisdom literature are the *saying* and the *command* or *prohibition*.

**Wisdom Literature in the Bible**:

1. Few of the books say anything about the history of Israel, its major institutions of covenant and kingship, and its great personalities such as Abraham and Sarah, Moses, and David.
2. The books all share a strong didactic (instructive) tone. The word “wisdom” pervades the books (42 times in Proverbs, 18 times in Job, 28 times in Qohelet, 60 times in the book of Sirach, and 30 times in the book of Wisdom.
3. Themes or teachings of Wisdom Literature in the Bible Include: God, the cosmic order, creation, wisdom, consequences of human choices, Doctrine of the Two Ways (moral life is one of two ways – example Woman Wisdom or Woman Folly in Proverbs 1-9), Personification of Wisdom.

**Wisdom Literature before the Bible:**

Wisdom literature composes some of the most ancient texts. Some of the wisdom genres, such as the instruction and the proverb collection are attested from the first appearance of *belles lettres* (c.2600bce for Mesopotamia, some two centuries later for Egypt) and continued in use long past the biblical period.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**21 Qualities of Wisdom:**

**Wisdom 7:21-28**  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.** 24 For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. 25 For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. 26 For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. 27 Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; 28 for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

1. New Interpreters Bible Commentary, Volume V: pg. 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. New Interpreters Bible, Volume V: pg 2-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)