

The Wisdom of Solomon (NRSV)

- 1** Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth,
think of the Lord in goodness
and seek him with sincerity of heart;
² because he is found by those who do not put him to the test,
and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him.
³ For perverse thoughts separate people from God,
and when his power is tested, it exposes the foolish;
⁴ because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul,
or dwell in a body enslaved to sin.
⁵ For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit,
and will leave foolish thoughts behind,
and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness.
- ⁶ For wisdom is a kindly spirit,
but will not free blasphemers from the guilt of their words;
because God is witness of their inmost feelings,
and a true observer of their hearts, and a hearer of their
tongues.
⁷ Because the spirit of the Lord has filled the world,
and that which holds all things together knows what is said,
⁸ therefore those who utter unrighteous things will not escape
notice,
and justice, when it punishes, will not pass them by.
⁹ For inquiry will be made into the counsels of the ungodly,
and a report of their words will come to the Lord,
to convict them of their lawless deeds;
¹⁰ because a jealous ear hears all things,
and the sound of grumbling does not go unheard.
¹¹ Beware then of useless grumbling,
and keep your tongue from slander;
because no secret word is without result,*
and a lying mouth destroys the soul.

¹² Do not invite death by the error of your life,
or bring on destruction by the works of your hands;

¹³ because God did not make death,
and he does not delight in the death of the living.

¹⁴ For he created all things so that they might exist;
the generative forces* of the world are wholesome,
and there is no destructive poison in them,
and the dominion* of Hades is not on earth.

¹⁵ For righteousness is immortal.

¹⁶ But the ungodly by their words and deeds summoned death;*
considering him a friend, they pined away
and made a covenant with him,
because they are fit to belong to his company.

2 For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves,
'Short and sorrowful is our life,
and there is no remedy when a life comes to its end,
and no one has been known to return from Hades.

² For we were born by mere chance,
and hereafter we shall be as though we had never been,
for the breath in our nostrils is smoke,
and reason is a spark kindled by the beating of our hearts;
³ when it is extinguished, the body will turn to ashes,
and the spirit will dissolve like empty air.

⁴ Our name will be forgotten in time,
and no one will remember our works;
our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud,
and be scattered like mist
that is chased by the rays of the sun
and overcome by its heat.

⁵ For our allotted time is the passing of a shadow,
and there is no return from our death,
because it is sealed up and no one turns back.

⁶ 'Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that exist,
and make use of the creation to the full as in youth.

⁷ Let us take our fill of costly wine and perfumes,
and let no flower of spring pass us by.

⁸ Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither.

⁹ Let none of us fail to share in our revelry;
everywhere let us leave signs of enjoyment,
because this is our portion, and this our lot.

¹⁰ Let us oppress the righteous poor man;
let us not spare the widow
or regard the grey hairs of the aged.

¹¹ But let our might be our law of right,
for what is weak proves itself to be useless.

¹² 'Let us lie in wait for the righteous man,
because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions;
he reproaches us for sins against the law,
and accuses us of sins against our training.

¹³ He professes to have knowledge of God,
and calls himself a child* of the Lord.

¹⁴ He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;

¹⁵ the very sight of him is a burden to us,
because his manner of life is unlike that of others,
and his ways are strange.

¹⁶ We are considered by him as something base,
and he avoids our ways as unclean;
he calls the last end of the righteous happy,
and boasts that God is his father.

¹⁷ Let us see if his words are true,
and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;

¹⁸ for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him,
and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.

¹⁹ Let us test him with insult and torture,
so that we may find out how gentle he is,
and make trial of his forbearance.

²⁰ Let us condemn him to a shameful death,
for, according to what he says, he will be protected.'

²¹ Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray,
for their wickedness blinded them,

²² and they did not know the secret purposes of God,
nor hoped for the wages of holiness,
nor discerned the prize for blameless souls;

²³ for God created us for incorruption,
and made us in the image of his own eternity,*

²⁴ but through the devil's envy death entered the world,
and those who belong to his company experience it.

3 But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them.

² In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died,
and their departure was thought to be a disaster,

³ and their going from us to be their destruction;
but they are at peace.

⁴ For though in the sight of others they were punished,
their hope is full of immortality.

⁵ Having been disciplined a little, they will receive great good,
because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;

⁶ like gold in the furnace he tried them,
and like a sacrificial burnt-offering he accepted them.

⁷ In the time of their visitation they will shine forth,
and will run like sparks through the stubble.

⁸ They will govern nations and rule over peoples,
and the Lord will reign over them for ever.

⁹ Those who trust in him will understand truth,
and the faithful will abide with him in love,
because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones,
and he watches over his elect.*

¹⁰ But the ungodly will be punished as their reasoning deserves,
those who disregarded the righteous*

and rebelled against the Lord;

¹¹ for those who despise wisdom and instruction are miserable.
Their hope is vain, their labours are unprofitable,
and their works are useless.

¹² Their wives are foolish, and their children evil;

¹³ their offspring are accursed.

For blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled,
who has not entered into a sinful union;
she will have fruit when God examines souls.

¹⁴ Blessed also is the eunuch whose hands have done no lawless
deed,

and who has not devised wicked things against the Lord;
for special favour will be shown him for his faithfulness,
and a place of great delight in the temple of the Lord.

¹⁵ For the fruit of good labours is renowned,
and the root of understanding does not fail.

¹⁶ But children of adulterers will not come to maturity,
and the offspring of an unlawful union will perish.

¹⁷ Even if they live long they will be held of no account,
and finally their old age will be without honour.

¹⁸ If they die young, they will have no hope
and no consolation on the day of judgement.

¹⁹ For the end of an unrighteous generation is grievous.

4 Better than this is childlessness with virtue,
for in the memory of virtue* is immortality,
because it is known both by God and by mortals.

² When it is present, people imitate* it,
and they long for it when it has gone;
throughout all time it marches, crowned in triumph,
victor in the contest for prizes that are undefiled.

³ But the prolific brood of the ungodly will be of no use,
and none of their illegitimate seedlings will strike a deep root
or take a firm hold.

⁴ For even if they put forth boughs for a while,

standing insecurely they will be shaken by the wind,
and by the violence of the winds they will be uprooted.

⁵ The branches will be broken off before they come to maturity,
and their fruit will be useless,
not ripe enough to eat, and good for nothing.

⁶ For children born of unlawful unions
are witnesses of evil against their parents when God examines
them.*

⁷ But the righteous, though they die early, will be at rest.

⁸ For old age is not honoured for length of time,
or measured by number of years;

⁹ but understanding is grey hair for anyone,
and a blameless life is ripe old age.

¹⁰ There were some who pleased God and were loved by him,
and while living among sinners were taken up.

¹¹ They were caught up so that evil might not change their
understanding
or guile deceive their souls.

¹² For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good,
and roving desire perverts the innocent mind.

¹³ Being perfected in a short time, they fulfilled long years;

¹⁴ for their souls were pleasing to the Lord,
therefore he took them quickly from the midst of wickedness.

¹⁵ Yet the peoples saw and did not understand,
or take such a thing to heart,
that God's grace and mercy are with his elect,
and that he watches over his holy ones.

¹⁶ The righteous who have died will condemn the ungodly who are
living,
and youth that is quickly perfected* will condemn the prolonged
old age of the unrighteous.

¹⁷ For they will see the end of the wise,
and will not understand what the Lord purposed for them,
and for what he kept them safe.

¹⁸ The unrighteous* will see, and will have contempt for them, but the Lord will laugh them to scorn.

After this they will become dishonoured corpses, and an outrage among the dead for ever;

¹⁹ because he will dash them speechless to the ground, and shake them from the foundations; they will be left utterly dry and barren, and they will suffer anguish, and the memory of them will perish.

²⁰ They will come with dread when their sins are reckoned up, and their lawless deeds will convict them to their face.

5 Then the righteous will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have oppressed them and those who make light of their labours.

² When the unrighteous* see them, they will be shaken with dreadful fear, and they will be amazed at the unexpected salvation of the righteous.

³ They will speak to one another in repentance, and in anguish of spirit they will groan, and say,

⁴ 'These are persons whom we once held in derision and made a byword of reproach—fools that we were! We thought that their lives were madness and that their end was without honour.

⁵ Why have they been numbered among the children of God? And why is their lot among the saints?

⁶ So it was we who strayed from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness did not shine on us, and the sun did not rise upon us.

⁷ We took our fill of the paths of lawlessness and destruction, and we journeyed through trackless deserts, but the way of the Lord we have not known.

⁸ What has our arrogance profited us?
And what good has our boasted wealth brought us?

⁹ 'All those things have vanished like a shadow,
and like a rumour that passes by;
¹⁰ like a ship that sails through the billowy water,
and when it has passed no trace can be found,
no track of its keel in the waves;
¹¹ or as, when a bird flies through the air,
no evidence of its passage is found;
the light air, lashed by the beat of its pinions
and pierced by the force of its rushing flight,
is traversed by the movement of its wings,
and afterwards no sign of its coming is found there;

¹² or as, when an arrow is shot at a target,
the air, thus divided, comes together at once,
so that no one knows its pathway.

¹³ So we also, as soon as we were born, ceased to be,
and we had no sign of virtue to show,
but were consumed in our wickedness.'

¹⁴ Because the hope of the ungodly is like thistledown* carried by
the wind,
and like a light frost* driven away by a storm;
it is dispersed like smoke before the wind,
and it passes like the remembrance of a guest who stays but a
day.

¹⁵ But the righteous live for ever,
and their reward is with the Lord;
the Most High takes care of them.

¹⁶ Therefore they will receive a glorious crown
and a beautiful diadem from the hand of the Lord,
because with his right hand he will cover them,
and with his arm he will shield them.

¹⁷ The Lord* will take his zeal as his whole armour,
and will arm all creation to repel* his enemies;

¹⁸ he will put on righteousness as a breastplate,
and wear impartial justice as a helmet;
¹⁹ he will take holiness as an invincible shield,
²⁰ and sharpen stern wrath for a sword,
and creation will join with him to fight against his frenzied foes.
²¹ Shafts of lightning will fly with true aim,
and will leap from the clouds to the target, as from a well-drawn
bow,
²² and hailstones full of wrath will be hurled as from a catapult;
the water of the sea will rage against them,
and rivers will relentlessly overwhelm them;
²³ a mighty wind will rise against them,
and like a tempest it will winnow them away.
Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth,
and evildoing will overturn the thrones of rulers.

6 Listen therefore, O kings, and understand;
learn, O judges of the ends of the earth.
² Give ear, you that rule over multitudes,
and boast of many nations.
³ For your dominion was given you from the Lord,
and your sovereignty from the Most High;
he will search out your works and inquire into your plans.
⁴ Because as servants of his kingdom you did not rule rightly,
or keep the law,
or walk according to the purpose of God,
⁵ he will come upon you terribly and swiftly,
because severe judgement falls on those in high places.
⁶ For the lowliest may be pardoned in mercy,
but the mighty will be mightily tested.
⁷ For the Lord of all will not stand in awe of anyone,
or show deference to greatness;
because he himself made both small and great,
and he takes thought for all alike.
⁸ But a strict inquiry is in store for the mighty.
⁹ To you then, O monarchs, my words are directed,
so that you may learn wisdom and not transgress.

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10 For they will be made holy who observe holy things in holiness,
and those who have been taught them will find a defence.

11 Therefore set your desire on my words;
long for them, and you will be instructed.

12 Wisdom is radiant and unfading,
and she is easily discerned by those who love her,
and is found by those who seek her.

13 She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her.

14 One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty,
for she will be found sitting at the gate.

15 To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding,
and one who is vigilant on her account will soon be free from
care,

16 because she goes about seeking those worthy of her,
and she graciously appears to them in their paths,
and meets them in every thought.

17 The beginning of wisdom^{*} is the most sincere desire for
instruction,

and concern for instruction is love of her,

18 and love of her is the keeping of her laws,

and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality,

19 and immortality brings one near to God;

20 so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

21 Therefore if you delight in thrones and sceptres, O monarchs
over the peoples,

honour wisdom, so that you may reign for ever.

22 I will tell you what wisdom is and how she came to be,

and I will hide no secrets from you,

but I will trace her course from the beginning of creation,

and make knowledge of her clear,

and I will not pass by the truth;

23 nor will I travel in the company of sickly envy,

for envy^{*} does not associate with wisdom.

²⁴ The multitude of the wise is the salvation of the world,
and a sensible king is the stability of any people.

²⁵ Therefore be instructed by my words, and you will profit.

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 moulded 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.
⁸ I preferred her to sceptres and thrones,
and I accounted wealth as nothing in comparison with her.
⁹ Neither did I liken to her any priceless gem,
because all gold is but a little sand in her sight,
and silver will be accounted as clay before her.
¹⁰ I loved her more than health and beauty,
and I chose to have her rather than light,
because her radiance never ceases.
¹¹ All good things came to me along with her,
and in her hands uncounted wealth.
¹² I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them;
but I did not know that she was their mother.
¹³ I learned without guile and I impart without grudging;
I do not hide her wealth,
¹⁴ for it is an unfailing treasure for mortals;
those who get it obtain friendship with God,
commended for the gifts that come from instruction.

¹⁵ May God grant me to speak with judgement,
and to have thoughts worthy of what I have received;
for he is the guide even of wisdom
and the corrector of the wise.

¹⁶ For both we and our words are in his hand,
as are all understanding and skill in crafts.

¹⁷ For it is he who gave me unerring knowledge of what exists,
to know the structure of the world and the activity of the
elements;

¹⁸ the beginning and end and middle of times,
the alternations of the solstices and the changes of the seasons,

¹⁹ the cycles of the year and the constellations of the stars,

²⁰ the natures of animals and the tempers of wild animals,
the powers of spirits* and the thoughts of human beings,
the varieties of plants and the virtues of roots;

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, ²³beneficent, 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.
²⁹ She is more beautiful than the sun,
 and excels every constellation of the stars.
 Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
³⁰ for it is succeeded by the night,
 but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

8 She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other,
 and she orders all things well.

² I loved her and sought her from my youth;
 I desired to take her for my bride,
 and became enamoured of her beauty.
³ She glorifies her noble birth by living with God,
 and the Lord of all loves her.
⁴ For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God,
 and an associate in his works.
⁵ If riches are a desirable possession in life,
 what is richer than wisdom, the active cause of all things?
⁶ And if understanding is effective,
 who more than she is fashioner of what exists?
⁷ And if anyone loves righteousness,
 her labours are virtues;
 for she teaches self-control and prudence,
 justice and courage;
 nothing in life is more profitable for mortals than these.
⁸ And if anyone longs for wide experience,
 she knows the things of old, and infers the things to come;
 she understands turns of speech and the solutions of riddles;
 she has foreknowledge of signs and wonders
 and of the outcome of seasons and times.

⁹ Therefore I determined to take her to live with me,
knowing that she would give me good counsel
and encouragement in cares and grief.

¹⁰ Because of her I shall have glory among the multitudes
and honour in the presence of the elders, though I am young.

¹¹ I shall be found keen in judgement,
and in the sight of rulers I shall be admired.

¹² When I am silent they will wait for me,
and when I speak they will give heed;
if I speak at greater length,
they will put their hands on their mouths.

¹³ Because of her I shall have immortality,
and leave an everlasting remembrance to those who come after
me.

¹⁴ I shall govern peoples,
and nations will be subject to me;

¹⁵ dread monarchs will be afraid of me when they hear of me;
among the people I shall show myself capable, and courageous in
war.

¹⁶ When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her;
for companionship with her has no bitterness,
and life with her has no pain, but gladness and joy.

¹⁷ When I considered these things inwardly,
and pondered in my heart
that in kinship with wisdom there is immortality,

¹⁸ and in friendship with her, pure delight,
and in the labours of her hands, unfailing wealth,
and in the experience of her company, understanding,
and renown in sharing her words,
I went about seeking how to get her for myself.

¹⁹ As a child I was naturally gifted,
and a good soul fell to my lot;

²⁰ or rather, being good, I entered an undefiled body.

²¹ But I perceived that I would not possess wisdom unless God
gave her to me—
and it was a mark of insight to know whose gift she was—

so I appealed to the Lord and implored him,
and with my whole heart I said:

9 O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy,
who have made all things by your word,
² and by your wisdom have formed humankind
to have dominion over the creatures you have made,
³ and rule the world in holiness and righteousness,
and pronounce judgement in uprightness of soul,
⁴ give me the wisdom that sits by your throne,
and do not reject me from among your servants.
⁵ For I am your servant,* the son of your servant-girl,
a man who is weak and short-lived,
with little understanding of judgement and laws;
⁶ for even one who is perfect among human beings
will be regarded as nothing without the wisdom that comes from
you.
⁷ You have chosen me to be king of your people
and to be judge over your sons and daughters.
⁸ You have given command to build a temple on your holy
mountain,
and an altar in the city of your habitation,
a copy of the holy tent that you prepared from the beginning.
⁹ With you is wisdom, she who knows your works
and was present when you made the world;
she understands what is pleasing in your sight
and what is right according to your commandments.
¹⁰ Send her forth from the holy heavens,
and from the throne of your glory send her,
that she may labour at my side,
and that I may learn what is pleasing to you.
¹¹ For she knows and understands all things,
and she will guide me wisely in my actions
and guard me with her glory.
¹² Then my works will be acceptable,
and I shall judge your people justly,
and shall be worthy of the throne* of my father.

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- ¹³ For who can learn the counsel of God?
Or who can discern what the Lord wills?
- ¹⁴ For the reasoning of mortals is worthless,
and our designs are likely to fail;
- ¹⁵ for a perishable body weighs down the soul,
and this earthy tent burdens the thoughtful* mind.
- ¹⁶ We can hardly guess at what is on earth,
and what is at hand we find with labour;
but who has traced out what is in the heavens?
- ¹⁷ Who has learned your counsel,
unless you have given wisdom
and sent your holy spirit from on high?
- ¹⁸ And thus the paths of those on earth were set right,
and people were taught what pleases you,
and were saved by wisdom.'

10 Wisdom* protected the first-formed father of the world, when
he alone had been created;
she delivered him from his transgression,
² and gave him strength to rule all things.

³ But when an unrighteous man departed from her in his anger,
he perished because in rage he killed his brother.

⁴ When the earth was flooded because of him, wisdom again
saved it,
steering the righteous man by a paltry piece of wood.

⁵ Wisdom* also, when the nations in wicked agreement had been
put to confusion,
recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless
before God,
and kept him strong in the face of his compassion for his child.

⁶ Wisdom* rescued a righteous man when the ungodly were
perishing;

he escaped the fire that descended on the Five Cities.*

⁷ Evidence of their wickedness still remains:

a continually smoking waste-land,
plants bearing fruit that does not ripen,
and a pillar of salt standing as a monument to an unbelieving
soul.

⁸ For because they passed wisdom by,
they not only were hindered from recognizing the good,
but also left for humankind a reminder of their folly,
so that their failures could never go unnoticed.

⁹ Wisdom rescued from troubles those who served her.

¹⁰ When a righteous man fled from his brother's wrath,
she guided him on straight paths;
she showed him the kingdom of God,
and gave him knowledge of holy things;
she prospered him in his labours,
and increased the fruit of his toil.

¹¹ When his oppressors were covetous,
she stood by him and made him rich.

¹² She protected him from his enemies,
and kept him safe from those who lay in wait for him;
in his arduous contest she gave him the victory,
so that he might learn that godliness is more powerful than
anything else.

¹³ When a righteous man was sold, wisdom* did not desert him,
but delivered him from sin.

She descended with him into the dungeon,

¹⁴ and when he was in prison she did not leave him,
until she brought him the sceptre of a kingdom
and authority over his masters.

Those who accused him she showed to be false,
and she gave him everlasting honour.

¹⁵ A holy people and blameless race

wisdom delivered from a nation of oppressors.

¹⁶ She entered the soul of a servant of the Lord,
and withstood dread kings with wonders and signs.

¹⁷ She gave to holy people the reward of their labours;
she guided them along a marvellous way,
and became a shelter to them by day,
and a starry flame through the night.

¹⁸ She brought them over the Red Sea,
and led them through deep waters;

¹⁹ but she drowned their enemies,
and cast them up from the depths of the sea.

²⁰ Therefore the righteous plundered the ungodly;
they sang hymns, O Lord, to your holy name,
and praised with one accord your defending hand;

²¹ for wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute,
and made the tongues of infants speak clearly.

11 Wisdom* prospered their works by the hand of a holy prophet.

² They journeyed through an uninhabited wilderness,
and pitched their tents in untrodden places.

³ They withstood their enemies and fought off their foes.

⁴ When they were thirsty, they called upon you,
and water was given them out of flinty rock,
and from hard stone a remedy for their thirst.

⁵ For through the very things by which their enemies were
punished,
they themselves received benefit in their need.

⁶ Instead of the fountain of an ever-flowing river,
stirred up and defiled with blood

⁷ in rebuke for the decree to kill the infants,
you gave them abundant water unexpectedly,

⁸ showing by their thirst at that time
how you punished their enemies.

⁹ For when they were tried, though they were being disciplined in
mercy,
they learned how the ungodly were tormented when judged in

wrath.

¹⁰ For you tested them as a parent* does in warning,
but you examined the ungodly* as a stern king does in
condemnation.

¹¹ Whether absent or present, they were equally distressed,
¹² for a twofold grief possessed them,
and a groaning at the memory of what had occurred.

¹³ For when they heard that through their own punishments
the righteous* had received benefit, they perceived it was the
Lord's doing.

¹⁴ For though they had mockingly rejected him who long before
had been cast out and exposed,
at the end of the events they marvelled at him,
when they felt thirst in a different way from the righteous.

¹⁵ In return for their foolish and wicked thoughts,
which led them astray to worship irrational serpents and
worthless animals,
you sent upon them a multitude of irrational creatures to punish
them,

¹⁶ so that they might learn that one is punished by the very things
by which one sins.

¹⁷ For your all-powerful hand,
which created the world out of formless matter,
did not lack the means to send upon them a multitude of bears,
or bold lions,

¹⁸ or newly-created unknown beasts full of rage,
or such as breathe out fiery breath,
or belch forth a thick pall of smoke,
or flash terrible sparks from their eyes;

¹⁹ not only could the harm they did destroy people,*
but the mere sight of them could kill by fright.

²⁰ Even apart from these, people* could fall at a single breath
when pursued by justice
and scattered by the breath of your power.
But you have arranged all things by measure and number and
weight.

²¹ For it is always in your power to show great strength,
and who can withstand the might of your arm?

²² Because the whole world before you is like a speck that tips the
scales,
and like a drop of morning dew that falls on the ground.

²³ But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things,
and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent.

²⁴ For you love all things that exist,
and detest none of the things that you have made,
for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.

²⁵ How would anything have endured if you had not willed it?
Or how would anything not called forth by you have been
preserved?

²⁶ You spare all things, for they are yours, O Lord, you who love
the living.

12 For your immortal spirit is in all things.

² Therefore you correct little by little those who trespass,
and you remind and warn them of the things through which they
sin,
so that they may be freed from wickedness and put their trust in
you, O Lord.

³ Those who lived long ago in your holy land

⁴ you hated for their detestable practices,
their works of sorcery and unholy rites,

⁵ their merciless slaughter* of children,
and their sacrificial feasting on human flesh and blood.
These initiates from the midst of a heathen cult,*

⁶ these parents who murder helpless lives,
you willed to destroy by the hands of our ancestors,

⁷ so that the land most precious of all to you
might receive a worthy colony of the servants* of God.

⁸ But even these you spared, since they were but mortals,
and sent wasps* as forerunners of your army

to destroy them little by little,

⁹ though you were not unable to give the ungodly into the hands of the righteous in battle, or to destroy them at one blow by dread wild animals or your stern word.

¹⁰ But judging them little by little you gave them an opportunity to repent,

though you were not unaware that their origin* was evil and their wickedness inborn, and that their way of thinking would never change.

¹¹ For they were an accursed race from the beginning, and it was not through fear of anyone that you left them unpunished for their sins.

¹² For who will say, 'What have you done?' or will resist your judgement?

Who will accuse you for the destruction of nations that you made? Or who will come before you to plead as an advocate for the unrighteous?

¹³ For neither is there any god besides you, whose care is for all people,*

to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly;

¹⁴ nor can any king or monarch confront you about those whom you have punished.

¹⁵ You are righteous and you rule all things righteously, deeming it alien to your power to condemn anyone who does not deserve to be punished.

¹⁶ For your strength is the source of righteousness, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all.

¹⁷ For you show your strength when people doubt the completeness of your power, and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it.*

¹⁸ Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness,

and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose.

¹⁹ Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.

²⁰ For if you punished with such great care and indulgence* the enemies of your servants* and those deserving of death, granting them time and opportunity to give up their wickedness,

²¹ with what strictness you have judged your children, to whose ancestors you gave oaths and covenants full of good promises!

²² So while chastening us you scourge our enemies ten thousand times more, so that, when we judge, we may meditate upon your goodness, and when we are judged, we may expect mercy.

²³ Therefore those who lived unrighteously, in a life of folly, you tormented through their own abominations.

²⁴ For they went far astray on the paths of error, accepting as gods those animals that even their enemies* despised; they were deceived like foolish infants.

²⁵ Therefore, as though to children who cannot reason, you sent your judgement to mock them.

²⁶ But those who have not heeded the warning of mild rebukes will experience the deserved judgement of God.

²⁷ For when in their suffering they became incensed at those creatures that they had thought to be gods, being punished by means of them, they saw and recognized as the true God the one whom they had before refused to know.

Therefore the utmost condemnation came upon them.

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.

⁶ Yet these people are little to be blamed,
for perhaps they go astray
while seeking God and desiring to find him.

⁷ For while they live among his works, they keep searching,
and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen
are beautiful.

⁸ Yet again, not even they are to be excused;

⁹ for if they had the power to know so much
that they could investigate the world,
how did they fail to find sooner the Lord of these things?

¹⁰ But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are those
who give the name 'gods' to the works of human hands,
gold and silver fashioned with skill,
and likenesses of animals,
or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand.

¹¹ A skilled woodcutter may saw down a tree easy to handle
and skilfully strip off all its bark,
and then with pleasing workmanship
make a useful vessel that serves life's needs,

¹² and burn the cast-off pieces of his work
to prepare his food, and eat his fill.

¹³ But a cast-off piece from among them, useful for nothing,
 a stick crooked and full of knots,
 he takes and carves with care in his leisure,
 and shapes it with skill gained in idleness;^{*}
 he forms it in the likeness of a human being,
¹⁴ or makes it like some worthless animal,
 giving it a coat of red paint and colouring its surface red
 and covering every blemish in it with paint;
¹⁵ then he makes a suitable niche for it,
 and sets it in the wall, and fastens it there with iron.
¹⁶ He takes thought for it, so that it may not fall,
 because he knows that it cannot help itself,
 for it is only an image and has need of help.
¹⁷ When he prays about possessions and his marriage and
 children,
 he is not ashamed to address a lifeless thing.
¹⁸ For health he appeals to a thing that is weak;
 for life he prays to a thing that is dead;
 for aid he entertains a thing that is utterly inexperienced;
 for a prosperous journey, a thing that cannot take a step;
¹⁹ for money-making and work and success with his hands
 he asks strength of a thing whose hands have no strength.

14 Again, one preparing to sail and about to voyage over raging
 waves
 calls upon a piece of wood more fragile than the ship that carries
 him.
² For it was desire for gain that planned that vessel,
 and wisdom was the artisan who built it;
³ but it is your providence, O Father, that steers its course,
 because you have given it a path in the sea,
 and a safe way through the waves,
⁴ showing that you can save from every danger,
 so that even a person who lacks skill may put to sea.
⁵ It is your will that works of your wisdom should not be without
 effect;

therefore people trust their lives even to the smallest piece of wood,
and passing through the billows on a raft they come safely to land.

⁶ For even in the beginning, when arrogant giants were perishing,
the hope of the world took refuge on a raft,
and guided by your hand left to the world the seed of a new generation.

⁷ For blessed is the wood by which righteousness comes.

⁸ But the idol made with hands is accursed, and so is the one who made it—
he for having made it, and the perishable thing because it was named a god.

⁹ For equally hateful to God are the ungodly and their ungodliness;

¹⁰ for what was done will be punished together with the one who did it.

¹¹ Therefore there will be a visitation also upon the heathen idols,
because, though part of what God created, they became an abomination,
snares for human souls
and a trap for the feet of the foolish.

¹² For the idea of making idols was the beginning of fornication,
and the invention of them was the corruption of life;

¹³ for they did not exist from the beginning,
nor will they last for ever.

¹⁴ For through human vanity they entered the world,
and therefore their speedy end has been planned.

¹⁵ For a father, consumed with grief at an untimely bereavement,
made an image of his child, who had been suddenly taken from him;

he now honoured as a god what was once a dead human being,
and handed on to his dependants secret rites and initiations.

16 Then the ungodly custom, grown strong with time, was kept as a law,
and at the command of monarchs carved images were worshipped.

17 When people could not honour monarchs* in their presence, since they lived at a distance, they imagined their appearance far away, and made a visible image of the king whom they honoured, so that by their zeal they might flatter the absent one as though present.

18 Then the ambition of the artisan impelled even those who did not know the king to intensify their worship.

19 For he, perhaps wishing to please his ruler, skilfully forced the likeness to take more beautiful form,

20 and the multitude, attracted by the charm of his work, now regarded as an object of worship the one whom shortly before they had honoured as a human being.

21 And this became a hidden trap for humankind, because people, in bondage to misfortune or to royal authority, bestowed on objects of stone or wood the name that ought not to be shared.

22 Then it was not enough for them to err about the knowledge of God, but though living in great strife due to ignorance, they call such great evils peace.

23 For whether they kill children in their initiations, or celebrate secret mysteries, or hold frenzied revels with strange customs,

24 they no longer keep either their lives or their marriages pure, but they either treacherously kill one another, or grieve one another by adultery,

25 and all is a raging riot of blood and murder, theft and deceit, corruption, faithlessness, tumult, perjury,

26 confusion over what is good, forgetfulness of favours,

defiling of souls, sexual perversion,
disorder in marriages, adultery, and debauchery.

²⁷ For the worship of idols not to be named
is the beginning and cause and end of every evil.

²⁸ For their worshippers* either rave in exultation,
or prophesy lies, or live unrighteously, or readily commit perjury;

²⁹ for because they trust in lifeless idols
they swear wicked oaths and expect to suffer no harm.

³⁰ But just penalties will overtake them on two counts:
because they thought wrongly about God in devoting themselves
to idols,
and because in deceit they swore unrighteously through contempt
for holiness.

³¹ For it is not the power of the things by which people swear,*
but the just penalty for those who sin,
that always pursues the transgression of the unrighteous.

15 But you, our God, are kind and true,
patient, and ruling all things* in mercy.

² For even if we sin we are yours, knowing your power;
but we will not sin, because we know that you acknowledge us as
yours.

³ For to know you is complete righteousness,
and to know your power is the root of immortality.

⁴ For neither has the evil intent of human art misled us,
nor the fruitless toil of painters,
a figure stained with varied colours,

⁵ whose appearance arouses yearning in fools,
so that they desire* the lifeless form of a dead image.

⁶ Lovers of evil things and fit for such objects of hope*
are those who either make or desire or worship them.

⁷ A potter kneads the soft earth
and laboriously moulds each vessel for our service,
fashioning out of the same clay
both the vessels that serve clean uses

and those for contrary uses, making all alike;
but which shall be the use of each of them
the worker in clay decides.

⁸ With misspent toil, these workers form a futile god from the
same clay—
these mortals who were made of earth a short time before
and after a little while go to the earth from which all mortals are
taken,
when the time comes to return the souls that were borrowed.

⁹ But the workers are not concerned that mortals are destined to
die
or that their life is brief,
but they compete with workers in gold and silver,
and imitate workers in copper;
and they count it a glorious thing to mould counterfeit gods.

¹⁰ Their heart is ashes, their hope is cheaper than dirt,
and their lives are of less worth than clay,

¹¹ because they failed to know the one who formed them
and inspired them with active souls
and breathed a living spirit into them.

¹² But they considered our existence an idle game,
and life a festival held for profit,
for they say one must get money however one can, even by base
means.

¹³ For these people, more than all others, know that they sin
when they make from earthy matter fragile vessels and carved
images.

¹⁴ But most foolish, and more miserable than an infant,
are all the enemies who oppressed your people.

¹⁵ For they thought that all their heathen idols were gods,
though these have neither the use of their eyes to see with,
nor nostrils with which to draw breath,
nor ears with which to hear,
nor fingers to feel with,
and their feet are of no use for walking.

¹⁶ For a human being made them,

and one whose spirit is borrowed formed them;
for none can form gods that are like themselves.

¹⁷ People are mortal, and what they make with lawless hands is dead;

for they are better than the objects they worship,
since* they have life, but the idols* never had.

¹⁸ Moreover, they worship even the most hateful animals,
which are worse than all others when judged by their lack of intelligence;

¹⁹ and even as animals they are not so beautiful in appearance
that one would desire them,
but they have escaped both the praise of God and his blessing.

16 Therefore those people* were deservedly punished through
such creatures,
and were tormented by a multitude of animals.

² Instead of this punishment you showed kindness to your people,
and you prepared quails to eat,
a delicacy to satisfy the desire of appetite;

³ in order that those people, when they desired food,
might lose the least remnant of appetite*
because of the odious creatures sent to them,
while your people,* after suffering want a short time,
might partake of delicacies.

⁴ For it was necessary that upon those oppressors inescapable
want should come,
while to these others it was merely shown how their enemies
were being tormented.

⁵ For when the terrible rage of wild animals came upon your
people*
and they were being destroyed by the bites of writhing serpents,
your wrath did not continue to the end;

⁶ they were troubled for a little while as a warning,

and received a symbol of deliverance to remind them of your law's command.

⁷ For the one who turned towards it was saved, not by the thing that was beheld,
but by you, the Saviour of all.

⁸ And by this also you convinced our enemies that it is you who deliver from every evil.

⁹ For they were killed by the bites of locusts and flies, and no healing was found for them, because they deserved to be punished by such things.

¹⁰ But your children were not conquered even by the fangs of venomous serpents,
for your mercy came to their help and healed them.

¹¹ To remind them of your oracles they were bitten, and then were quickly delivered,
so that they would not fall into deep forgetfulness and become unresponsive* to your kindness.

¹² For neither herb nor poultice cured them, but it was your word, O Lord, that heals all people.

¹³ For you have power over life and death; you lead mortals down to the gates of Hades and back again.

¹⁴ A person in wickedness kills another, but cannot bring back the departed spirit, or set free the imprisoned soul.

¹⁵ To escape from your hand is impossible;

¹⁶ for the ungodly, refusing to know you, were flogged by the strength of your arm, pursued by unusual rains and hail and relentless storms, and utterly consumed by fire.

¹⁷ For—most incredible of all—in water, which quenches all things, the fire had still greater effect, for the universe defends the righteous.

¹⁸ At one time the flame was restrained, so that it might not consume the creatures sent against the

ungodly,
 but that seeing this they might know
 that they were being pursued by the judgement of God;
¹⁹ and at another time even in the midst of water it burned more
 intensely than fire,
 to destroy the crops of the unrighteous land.

²⁰ Instead of these things you gave your people food of angels,
 and without their toil you supplied them from heaven with bread
 ready to eat,
 providing every pleasure and suited to every taste.

²¹ For your sustenance manifested your sweetness towards your
 children;
 and the bread, ministering* to the desire of the one who took it,
 was changed to suit everyone's liking.

²² Snow and ice withstood fire without melting,
 so that they might know that the crops of their enemies
 were being destroyed by the fire that blazed in the hail
 and flashed in the showers of rain;

²³ whereas the fire,* in order that the righteous might be fed,
 even forgot its native power.

²⁴ For creation, serving you who made it,
 exerts itself to punish the unrighteous,
 and in kindness relaxes on behalf of those who trust in you.

²⁵ Therefore at that time also, changed into all forms,
 it served your all-nourishing bounty,
 according to the desire of those who had need,*

²⁶ so that your children, whom you loved, O Lord, might learn
 that it is not the production of crops that feeds humankind
 but that your word sustains those who trust in you.

²⁷ For what was not destroyed by fire
 was melted when simply warmed by a fleeting ray of the sun,

²⁸ to make it known that one must rise before the sun to give you
 thanks,
 and must pray to you at the dawning of the light;

²⁹ for the hope of an ungrateful person will melt like wintry frost,
and flow away like waste water.

17 Great are your judgements and hard to describe;
therefore uninstructed souls have gone astray.

² For when lawless people supposed that they held the holy nation
in their power,
they themselves lay as captives of darkness and prisoners of long
night,
shut in under their roofs, exiles from eternal providence.

³ For thinking that in their secret sins they were unobserved
behind a dark curtain of forgetfulness,
they were scattered, terribly* alarmed,
and appalled by spectres.

⁴ For not even the inner chamber that held them protected them
from fear,
but terrifying sounds rang out around them,
and dismal phantoms with gloomy faces appeared.

⁵ And no power of fire was able to give light,
nor did the brilliant flames of the stars
avail to illumine that hateful night.

⁶ Nothing was shining through to them
except a dreadful, self-kindled fire,
and in terror they deemed the things that they saw
to be worse than that unseen appearance.

⁷ The delusions of their magic art lay humbled,
and their boasted wisdom was scornfully rebuked.

⁸ For those who promised to drive off the fears and disorders of a
sick soul
were sick themselves with ridiculous fear.

⁹ For even if nothing disturbing frightened them,
yet, scared by the passing of wild animals and the hissing of
snakes

¹⁰ they perished in trembling fear,
refusing to look even at the air, though it nowhere could be
avoided.

¹¹ For wickedness is a cowardly thing, condemned by its own

testimony;^{*}

distressed by conscience, it has always exaggerated^{*} the difficulties.

¹² For fear is nothing but a giving up of the helps that come from reason;

¹³ and hope, defeated by this inward weakness, prefers ignorance of what causes the torment.

¹⁴ But throughout the night, which was really powerless and which came upon them from the recesses of powerless Hades,

they all slept the same sleep,

¹⁵ and now were driven by monstrous spectres, and now were paralysed by their souls' surrender; for sudden and unexpected fear overwhelmed them.

¹⁶ And whoever was there fell down, and thus was kept shut up in a prison not made of iron;

¹⁷ for whether they were farmers or shepherds or workers who toiled in the wilderness, they were seized, and endured the inescapable fate; for with one chain of darkness they all were bound.

¹⁸ Whether there came a whistling wind, or a melodious sound of birds in wide-spreading branches, or the rhythm of violently rushing water,

¹⁹ or the harsh crash of rocks hurled down, or the unseen running of leaping animals, or the sound of the most savage roaring beasts, or an echo thrown back from a hollow of the mountains, it paralysed them with terror.

²⁰ For the whole world was illumined with brilliant light, and went about its work unhindered,

²¹ while over those people alone heavy night was spread, an image of the darkness that was destined to receive them; but still heavier than darkness were they to themselves.

18 But for your holy ones there was very great light.

Their enemies^{*} heard their voices but did not see their forms,

and counted them happy for not having suffered,
² and were thankful that your holy ones,* though previously wronged, were doing them no injury;
and they begged their pardon for having been at variance with them.*

³ Therefore you provided a flaming pillar of fire as a guide for your people's* unknown journey, and a harmless sun for their glorious wandering.

⁴ For their enemies* deserved to be deprived of light and imprisoned in darkness, those who had kept your children imprisoned, through whom the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world.

⁵ When they had resolved to kill the infants of your holy ones, and one child had been abandoned and rescued, you in punishment took away a multitude of their children; and you destroyed them all together by a mighty flood.

⁶ That night was made known beforehand to our ancestors, so that they might rejoice in sure knowledge of the oaths in which they trusted.

⁷ The deliverance of the righteous and the destruction of their enemies were expected by your people.

⁸ For by the same means by which you punished our enemies you called us to yourself and glorified us.

⁹ For in secret the holy children of good people offered sacrifices, and with one accord agreed to the divine law, so that the saints would share alike the same things, both blessings and dangers; and already they were singing the praises of the ancestors.*

¹⁰ But the discordant cry of their enemies echoed back, and their piteous lament for their children was spread abroad.

¹¹ The slave was punished with the same penalty as the master, and the commoner suffered the same loss as the king;

¹² and they all together, by one form* of death, had corpses too many to count.

For the living were not sufficient even to bury them,
since in one instant their most valued children had been
destroyed.

¹³ For though they had disbelieved everything because of their
magic arts,
yet, when their firstborn were destroyed, they acknowledged your
people to be God's child.

¹⁴ For while gentle silence enveloped all things,
and night in its swift course was now half gone,

¹⁵ your all-powerful word leapt from heaven, from the royal
throne,
into the midst of the land that was doomed,
a stern warrior

¹⁶ carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command,
and stood and filled all things with death,
and touched heaven while standing on the earth.

¹⁷ Then at once apparitions in dreadful dreams greatly troubled
them,
and unexpected fears assailed them;

¹⁸ and one here and another there, hurled down half dead,
made known why they were dying;

¹⁹ for the dreams that disturbed them forewarned them of this,
so that they might not perish without knowing why they suffered.

²⁰ The experience of death touched also the righteous,
and a plague came upon the multitude in the desert,
but the wrath did not long continue.

²¹ For a blameless man was quick to act as their champion;
he brought forward the shield of his ministry,
prayer and propitiation by incense;
he withstood the anger and put an end to the disaster,
showing that he was your servant.

²² He conquered the wrath* not by strength of body,
not by force of arms,
but by his word he subdued the avenger,
appealing to the oaths and covenants given to our ancestors.

²³ For when the dead had already fallen on one another in heaps,

he intervened and held back the wrath,
and cut off its way to the living.

²⁴ For on his long robe the whole world was depicted,
and the glories of the ancestors were engraved on the four rows
of stones,
and your majesty was on the diadem upon his head.

²⁵ To these the destroyer yielded, these he* feared;
for merely to test the wrath was enough.

19 But the ungodly were assailed to the end by pitiless anger,
for God* knew in advance even their future actions:

² how, though they themselves had permitted* your people to
depart

and hastily sent them out,
they would change their minds and pursue them.

³ For while they were still engaged in mourning,
and were lamenting at the graves of their dead,
they reached another foolish decision,
and pursued as fugitives those whom they had begged and
compelled to leave.

⁴ For the fate they deserved drew them on to this end,
and made them forget what had happened,
in order that they might fill up the punishment that their torments
still lacked,

⁵ and that your people might experience* an incredible journey,
but they themselves might meet a strange death.

⁶ For the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew,
complying with your commands,
so that your children* might be kept unharmed.

⁷ The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp,
and dry land emerging where water had stood before,
an unhindered way out of the Red Sea,
and a grassy plain out of the raging waves,

⁸ where those protected by your hand passed through as one
nation,

after gazing on marvellous wonders.

⁹ For they ranged like horses,
and leapt like lambs,
praising you, O Lord, who delivered them.

¹⁰ For they still recalled the events of their sojourn,
how instead of producing animals the earth brought forth gnats,
and instead of fish the river spewed out vast numbers of frogs.

¹¹ Afterwards they saw also a new kind* of birds,
when desire led them to ask for luxurious food;

¹² for, to give them relief, quails came up from the sea.

¹³ The punishments did not come upon the sinners
without prior signs in the violence of thunder,
for they justly suffered because of their wicked acts;
for they practised a more bitter hatred of strangers.

¹⁴ Others had refused to receive strangers when they came to
them,
but these made slaves of guests who were their benefactors.

¹⁵ And not only so—but, while punishment of some sort will come
upon the former

for having received strangers with hostility,

¹⁶ the latter, having first received them with festal celebrations,
afterwards afflicted with terrible sufferings
those who had already shared the same rights.

¹⁷ They were stricken also with loss of sight—
just as were those at the door of the righteous man—
when, surrounded by yawning darkness,
all of them tried to find the way through their own doors.

¹⁸ For the elements changed* places with one another,
as on a harp the notes vary the nature of the rhythm,
while each note remains the same.*

This may be clearly inferred from the sight of what took place.

¹⁹ For land animals were transformed into water creatures,
and creatures that swim moved over to the land.

²⁰ Fire even in water retained its normal power,

and water forgot its fire-quenching nature.

²¹ Flames, on the contrary, failed to consume the flesh of perishable creatures that walked among them, nor did they melt* the crystalline, quick-melting kind of heavenly food.

²² For in everything, O Lord, you have exalted and glorified your people, and you have not neglected to help them at all times and in all places.