

COVENANT AND COSMOS IN WISDOM OF SOLOMON 10–19

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A wisdom text is an unlikely resource for ancient Jewish conceptions of the covenant. Election, covenant, law, temple, cult, Israel's national history, and the other distinctives of Yahwism as known from the Torah and the Prophets receive scant attention in the Hebrew Bible's wisdom writings, where the emphasis is rather on universal human experiences that transcend national and religious boundaries. A half century ago G.E. Wright expressed the difficulty of reconciling covenantal and wisdom perspectives:

In any attempt to outline a discussion of Biblical faith it is the wisdom literature which offers the chief difficulty because it does not fit into the type of faith exhibited in the historical and prophetic literatures. In it there is no explicit reference to or development of the doctrine of history, election or covenant.¹

Even G. von Rad, whose monumental *Wisdom in Israel*² did much to redress the marginalization of the wisdom corpus that had characterized theological studies of the Hebrew Bible,³ was able only to treat wisdom as an independent tradition alongside the other biblical materials, and not to synthesize it with the covenant faith recited in the historical and prophetic traditions. Despite numerous and diverse efforts within the last generation to integrate wisdom theology into the theology of the Hebrew Bible as a whole,⁴ W.L. Holladay's recent

¹ G.E. Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (SBT 8; London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 103.

² G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (trans. J.D. Martin; London: SCM Press; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972 [1970]).

³ Such neglect characterized his own earlier *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; trans. D.M.G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1962 [1957]), as well as most of the other Old Testament theologies published in the second half of the twentieth century.

⁴ Two helpful overviews are H.G. Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 168-

classification of wisdom literature under the rubric 'Beyond the Covenant' is by no means unusual.⁵

What is true of Israel's wisdom tradition in general is true of Wisdom of Solomon in particular. Here older wisdom ideas are blended with ideas from Stoicism and Middle Platonism, neither of which, as J.J. Collins observes, 'had any place for a concept of divine election, or for a special and exclusive divine revelation'.⁶ Explicit covenantal language does not figure prominently in the book,⁷ and even when Israel or individual biblical characters are described they are never actually named. Many interpreters have concluded that pseudo-Solomon was uninterested in Israel's history except insofar as it provided representative types of the righteous and wicked that could be appropriated universally.⁸ J.M. Reese, following G. Ziener, speaks of 'a spiritualizing and universalizing of the covenant promises', an 'enlargement of perspective from the covenant with Israel to the saving love of God toward all men'.⁹

At the same time, other interpreters discern a pronounced ethnic and national dimension to the author's concept of the people of God. A generation ago J. Reider found in Wisdom of Solomon an 'undisguised particularism' in which 'God...is partial to the Jews and inimical to their enemies'.¹⁰ More recently, S. Cheon has described the work as 'an expression of ethnic segregation',¹¹ and J.M.G.

86; and L.G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), pp. 19-48.

⁵ W.L. Holladay, *Long Ago God Spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p. 231.

⁶ J.J. Collins, 'Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition: The Case of Hellenistic Judaism', *CBQ* 60 (1998), pp. 1-15.

⁷ διαθήκη is used only in 18.22, and συνθήκη only in 12.21 with reference to a divine-human relationship. Both nouns appear in the plural. 1.16 uses συνθήκη with reference to the pact that the ungodly have made with death.

⁸ J.J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), pp. 214-15.

⁹ J.M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and its Consequences* (AnBib 41; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), pp. 144-45; G. Ziener, *Die theologische Begriffssprache im Buche der Weisheit* (BBB 11; Bonn: Hanstein, 1956), pp. 73, 85, 93-97, 109.

¹⁰ J. Reider, *The Book of Wisdom* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), p. 41.

¹¹ S. Cheon, *The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation* (JSPSup 23; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 145.

Barclay has called it 'a vigorous defence of Jewish particularity'.¹² While the features that prompt these characterizations are concentrated in the long paraphrase of Israel's history in chs. 10–19, the tension between universalism and particularism in Wisdom of Solomon cannot be resolved source-critically. Over against earlier theories of composite authorship, some of which set chs. 10–19 or 11–19 apart from the rest, largely on the basis of the particularism of these later chapters,¹³ current scholars strongly favor the literary unity of the book.¹⁴ Moreover, a universalist vision is no less evident in the historical material in chs. 10–19 than in the earlier chapters.

The juxtaposition of covenantal identity and universalist ideals in Wisdom of Solomon may be illustrated at the outset by reference to one passage. In the sole occurrence of διαθήκη in the book, Aaron is said to have delivered the wilderness generation from calamity by 'appealing to the oaths and covenants given to our ancestors' (ὅρκους πατέρων καὶ διαθήκας ὑπομνήσας, 18.22).¹⁵ No sooner has the author made this remarkable appeal to Israel's covenantal heritage than he depicts the same Aaron in priestly array suggestive of cosmic rather than covenantal ambit: 'For on his long robe the whole world (ὅλος ὁ κόσμος) was depicted' (18.24). This description of the priestly vestments reflects the widespread Stoic and Cynic idea that the true temple of God is the whole cosmos.¹⁶ As in the fuller but closely

¹² J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Hadrian (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), p. 191.

¹³ D. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43; New York: Doubleday, 1979), pp. 12–14, provides a concise survey of views.

¹⁴ Among many others, see the important studies by Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, esp. pp. 122–45; Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, pp. 12–18; C. Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse ou la Sagesse de Salomon* (3 vols.; EBib 1, 3, 5; Paris: Gabalda, 1983–85), I, pp. 95–119. Studies of literary structure, while varying in specifics, strongly confirm the literary unity of the work. See A.G. Wright, 'The Structure of the Book of Wisdom', *Bib* 48 (1967), pp. 165–84; *idem*, 'The Structure of Wisdom 11–19', *CBQ* 27 (1965), pp. 28–34; J.M. Reese, 'Plan and Structure in the Book of Wisdom', *CBQ* 27 (1965), pp. 391–99; and M. Kolarcik, *The Ambiguity of Death in the Book of Wisdom 1–6: A Study of Literary Structure and Interpretation* (AnBib 127; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991), pp. 1–28.

¹⁵ In keeping with the pattern of anonymity, Aaron is not named, but the allusion to Aaron and the events of Num. 16.46–50 is transparent. This and all subsequent quotations of Wisdom of Solomon are from the NRSV.

¹⁶ See Heraclitus, *Epistles* 4: 'the world is his temple'; Seneca, *Ben.* 7.7.3: 'the whole world is the temple of the gods'; *idem*, *Ep.* 90.29: 'the vast temple of

parallel description in Philo, *Spec.* 1.12-17,¹⁷ the Jewish High Priest is construed as the intercessor for the entire universe.

What, then, is the relationship between the universalist and particularist impulses in Wisdom of Solomon? More specifically, in view of the author's explicit universalist aspirations, is there room for a meaningful concept of being the covenant people of God? Our approach will be to examine first the indications of close continuity with Israel's history and traditions that are concentrated in chs. 10-19, then to consider the cosmic ideals expressed throughout the book. Finally, we shall ask whether a synthesis is possible and inquire what place, if any, a concept of being the chosen or covenant people of God has in the self-identity of pseudo-Solomon.

COVENANTAL CONVICTIONS

Unlike the first nine chapters of Wisdom of Solomon, the 'book of history' in chs. 10-19¹⁸ contains much that suggests an identity deeply rooted in God's covenantal relationship with Israel. Whether these elements represent the essence of the author's thought or only vestigial remnants of his ancient religious and ethnic heritage, and whether they are compatible with his larger theological vision are issues to be addressed below, but that he considers the Israelites and their descendants to be in some sense the chosen people of God and heirs of the ancestral covenants is unmistakable.

The very subject matter of chs. 10-19 suggests such a perspective. Chapter 10 reviews biblical history from Adam to Moses, surveying

the gods—the universe itself'; Plutarch, *Tranq. an.* 20: 'the universe is a most holy temple and worthy of a God'; Chrysippus, according to Cicero, *Nat. d.* 3.10.26; *idem*, *Rep.* 3.9; 6.15; and other sources cited in Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, p. 321; and H.W. Attridge, *First-Century Cynicism in the Epistles of Heraclitus* (HTS 29; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 22-23, including an inscribed potsherd from Egypt: 'the one and only temple of god is the world'. See further the discussion in Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse*, III, pp. 1035-40.

¹⁷ See also Philo, *Mos.* 2.24; *Cher.* 19; *Q.E.* 2.73, 76, 91; *Somn.* 1.213-18; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.7.5-7 §§162-187; *War* 5.5.4-5 §§207-221; Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 77.

¹⁸ Some would link ch. 10 with the preceding chapters and define the 'book of history', the third major division of the book, as chs. 11-19. The issue is not critical here; in either case ch. 10 is transitional and begins the biblical paraphrase that continues in chs. 11-19. Similar controversy surrounds whether the transitional ch. 6 ends the first major section, the 'book of eschatology', or begins the second, the 'book of wisdom'. In fact, it does both.

wisdom's activity in the lives of seven righteous persons from Adam to Moses and their wicked counterparts.¹⁹ The contrasting fate of the righteous and wicked continues a major theme from chs. 1–5, but unlike the abstract treatment of the polarity there, here concrete historical persons known from the biblical text are the ones described as 'righteous'.²⁰ Interpreters have been quick to point out that the main protagonist here is wisdom rather than individual *dramatis personae* from Israel's history, and that the latter serve only to illustrate how wisdom works through the forces of the cosmos to save the just and hinder the wicked.²¹ Nevertheless, the mere fact that historical Israel provides the only concrete paradigms for righteous behavior that are cited in the book is significant. Clearly the author identifies with these biblical forebears and understands the righteous person of his own time to be closely affiliated with them.

In a similar vein, chs. 11–19 provide a lengthy meditation on the exodus and desert wanderings in the form of a σύγκρισις, or comparison.²² Here the author presents seven antitheses in which God's

¹⁹ The seven are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, and the Israelites under Moses, along with their respective enemies or oppressors. Like the lists of illustrious biblical characters in Sirach 44–50, 1 Macc. 2.49–64, and Heb. 11.4–40, this review cites individuals as examples and does not present a continuous narrative sequence. On Hellenistic models for such *Beispielreihen*, see E. Janssen, *Das Gottesvolk und seine Geschichte: Geschichtsbild und Selbstverständnis im palästinensischen Schrifttum von Jesus Sirach bis Jehuda ha-Nasi* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1971); and R.G. Hall, *Revealed Histories: Techniques for Ancient Jewish and Christian Historiography* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991). With particular reference to the *Beispielreihe* in Wisdom of Solomon 10, see A. Schmitt, 'Struktur, Herkunft und Bedeutung der Beispielreihe in Weish 10', *BZ* 21 (1977), pp. 1–22.

²⁰ Proper names are not used, but the identifications are evident to anyone familiar with the biblical narrative. The function of anonymity here and elsewhere in the book is discussed below under 'Universalist Ideals' and 'Conflict and Coherence'.

²¹ E.g., Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, pp. 144–45; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 214–15; and *idem*, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd edn, 2000), pp. 201–202. See the discussion below under 'Conflict and Coherence' on the relationship between representative type and historical particularity in pseudo-Solomon's deployment of biblical figures.

²² On this Greek literary convention, see Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, pp. 98–102, and the references cited there. See also *idem*, 'Plan and Structure in the Book of Wisdom', pp. 397–99.

deliverance of his chosen people is contrasted with his punishment of their enemies.²³ As in the earlier historical material, proper names are avoided, and God—not Israel—is the protagonist in the events reviewed.²⁴ The retelling of the exodus story is in fact a reshaping of the story to teach a lesson in God's justice: God has so ordered the cosmos, and indeed history itself, that the faithful are delivered and those who wrong them are punished. Still, it is no accident that the events chosen to illustrate this fundamental cosmological principle are Israel's most formative historical events. Moreover, in recounting this history, the author regularly calls the Israelites 'righteous' and the Egyptians 'enemies', and, as we shall see, considers the one '*our* ancestors' and the other '*our* enemies'. The biblical past is thus appropriated as paradigmatic for ethnic and religious identity in the author's own time.²⁵ M. Kolarcik aptly calls this 'the most "Israelite" section

²³ The seven are: (1) Israel's provision of water in the desert and the pollution of water in Egypt, 11.1-14; (2) Israel's gift of quail in the desert and the plagues of various animals upon Egypt, 16.1-4; (3) Israel's deliverance from venomous snakebites and Egypt's affliction through the bites of locusts and flies, 16.5-14; (4) manna from heaven for Israel and hail and lightning from heaven upon Egypt, 16.15-29; (5) Israel's illumination by the pillar of fire and Egypt's plague of darkness, 17.1-18.4; (6) the rescue of the Israelite children from death and the death of the Egyptian firstborn, 18.5-25; and (7) Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians there, 19.1-22. M. Kolarcik, 'The Book of Wisdom', in L.E. Keck *et al.* (eds.), *The New Interpreter's Bible* (12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), VIII, pp. 528-94, follows Wright, 'The Structure of Wisdom 11-19', pp. 28-34, in organizing the same material in five diptychs (combining #2 with #3 and #6 with #7 in the above scheme).

²⁴ It is of no consequence that wisdom is the protagonist in ch. 10, whereas in chs. 11-19 wisdom recedes and the author speaks more directly of God. Winston (*Wisdom of Solomon*, p. 226) notes the same tendency on the part of Philo to range freely between speech about wisdom and speech about God; for both Philo and pseudo-Solomon, 'Wisdom is in reality the Divine Mind, and therefore virtually synonymous with the Deity'. See Philo, *Sacr.* 30; and *Migr.* 22.

²⁵ This point is not greatly affected by the contrasting conclusions of P. Enns and S. Cheon regarding pseudo-Solomon's interpretive technique. Cheon (*The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon*) considers the author a creative biblical expositor who was 'not fully attentive to the biblical text' (p. 151)—indeed, 'very free and bold with the biblical text' (p. 110). P. Enns (*Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15-21 and 19:1-9* [HSM 57; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997]) contends that the author was not engaging the biblical text directly at all, but serving as 'a conduit for pre-existing exegetical

of the book, focusing as it does on the foundational event of Israel's consciousness'.²⁶

The 'book of history' highlights not only the foundational historical event, but also the foundational demand of the covenant—that Israel worship Yahweh alone and not bow down to false gods. A lengthy excursus (chs. 13–15) provides 'a scorching polemic against idolatry in general and Egyptian paganism in particular'.²⁷ Like the reflection on the exodus, this critique of idolatry has strong affinities with both biblical and post-biblical Jewish sources.²⁸ As to other demands of the covenant, pseudo-Solomon refers to 'law' and 'the laws' several times (2.12; 6.4, 18; 9.5; 16.6; 18.4, 9), although the reference may not be always—or, at least, not *only*—to the law of Moses.²⁹ In 18.4, 9 the reference to the Mosaic law is clear, as are the covenantal associations of this 'divine law' (ὁ τῆς θειότητος νόμος).³⁰ The allusion to keeping wisdom's laws in the σωρίτης on wisdom in 6.17–20 may also have reference to Torah obedience, given the identification of wisdom with Torah already established by Ben Sira (see especially Sirach 24).

Even more suggestive of a theology of election and covenant than the polemic against idolatry and the choice of biblical paradigms for the righteous and the wicked is the specific language used to refer to biblical characters. In addressing God the author regularly designates the people of Israel 'your people' (ὁ λαός σου: 12.19; 16.2, 20; 18.7; etc.), 'your children' (οἱ υἱοί σου: 16.10, 26; 18.4; τέκνα: 16.21;

traditions' (p. 138). Either way, the exodus story is reshaped to bring it to bear on the readers' difficult situation.

²⁶ Kolarcik, 'Book of Wisdom', p. 528.

²⁷ G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), p. 183.

²⁸ See, e.g., Jer. 10.1–16; Isa. 40.18–20; 41.1–7; 44.9–20; Hab. 2.18–19; Pss. 115.4–8; 135.15–18; Epistle of Jeremiah; Bel and the Dragon; *Ep. Arist.* 134–38; *Sib. Or.* 3.29–35; *T. Job* 2–5; *Jos. Asen.* 10–13; Philo, *Decal.* 12–16; *Contempl.* 1; *Spec.* 1.3–5; and see further W.M.W. Roth, 'For Life, He Appeals to Death (Wis 13:18): A Study of Old Testament Idol Parodies', *CBQ* 37 (1975), pp. 21–47; M. Gilbert, *La critique des dieux dans le Livre de la Sagesse (Sg 13–15)* (AnBib 53; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1973); and F. Ricken, 'Gab es eine hellenistische Vorlage für Weish 13–15?', *Bib* 49 (1968), pp. 54–86.

²⁹ The more general and universal dimension of law in Wisdom of Solomon will be discussed further below.

³⁰ See the fuller discussion of 18.5–13 below.

παῖδες σου: 12.20³¹), and 'your holy ones' (οἱ ὅσιοί σου: 18.1; 10.17; cf. 18.9). Israel is 'a holy people and blameless race' (λαὸς ὅσιος καὶ σπέρμα ἄμεμπτον: 10.15), 'a holy nation' (ἔθνος ἅγιον: 17.2), and even 'God's child' (θεοῦ υἱός: 18.13). Moreover, these designations for the Israelites often appear in direct contrast to disparaging designations for non-Israelites. Thus, in the retelling of the exodus in 10.15-21, those in bondage in Egypt are 'a holy and blameless race', while their captors are 'a nation of oppressors' (10.15); Moses is 'a servant of the Lord' whereas Pharaoh represents 'dread kings' (10.16); those liberated from Egypt are 'a holy people', and those who drowned in pursuit of them are 'their enemies' (10.19); in sum, the Israelites are the 'righteous', while their antagonists are the 'ungodly' (10.20).³²

That such a distinction informs the author's understanding of the people of God beyond the historical particularities of the exodus narrative is suggested by his occasional widening of the critique from the Egyptians to 'the nations' (τὰ ἔθνη) in general (12.12; 14.11; 15.15),³³ and especially by the use of first person pronouns to identify himself and his contemporaries with the biblical forebears: those who took possession of God's 'holy land' are '*our* ancestors' (12.6); the Israelites who escaped the death of the firstborn in Egypt are likewise designated '*our* ancestors' (18.6); God's greater indulgence toward his children than toward the Canaanites in the conquest of the land is greater indulgence toward *us* than toward *our* enemies (12.20-22).

The author's most striking use of first person plural pronouns to identify himself with the people of God appears in his direct address to God in 15.1-6:

- 1 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 colors,

³¹ παῖδες could also be translated 'servants'.

³² A similar cluster of contrasts in 12.18-22 is discussed below.

³³ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, p. 189 n. 13.

- 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.

In its context in the excursus on idolatry, this remarkable passage sets the personal bond between the righteous and their living God in stark contrast with the relationship between idolaters and their lifeless objects of worship. God is addressed as ‘*our* God’ and his goodness is celebrated with the confident claim that ‘even if we sin we are yours,...we know that you acknowledge us as yours’. As Kolarcik has observed, the depiction of this personal bond is reminiscent of the covenantal language used to describe the bond between God and Israel in Ezek. 34.30-31:

They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord God.³⁴

The description of God’s merciful rule over creation in v. 1 is also inspired by a key covenantal text from the Torah: it closely parallels the language of Yahweh’s self-disclosure to Moses on the occasion of the renewal of the covenant and rewriting of the tablets (Exod. 34.6-7).³⁵ Pseudo-Solomon’s sense of communal pride in belonging to a people especially favored by a powerful but merciful God likewise has close biblical precedents: in Deut. 4.7-8 (see also 4.32-40) Moses praises Yahweh for giving Israel the Torah and showing greater mercy and power toward Israel than toward other nations. Like the exiled community of Israel addressed in Deuteronomy, readers of Wisdom of Solomon are invited to find a source of strength and pride in belonging to a people whose history shows their faith superior to that of idol-worshippers. The ungodly, pseudo-Solomon has already pointed out, have their own covenant: it is a covenant (συνθήκη) with death, for whose company they are well suited (1.16).

Contemplation of God’s extraordinary power and forbearance is again the focus in 12.18-22, another passage in which pseudo-Solomon expressly identifies historic Israel as God’s chosen people:

³⁴ Kolarcik, ‘Book of Wisdom’, p. 561. See also Ezek. 11.20; 14.11; 37.27; and 39.7.

³⁵ Three of the four descriptive expressions in v. 1 appear in the Septuagint of Exod. 34.6. See Kolarcik, ‘Book of Wisdom’, p. 561; and Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse*, III, pp. 847-50.

- 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 (ὄρκους καὶ συνθήκας)
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.

The argument here is that the righteous should learn benevolence from God's forbearance toward Egypt and Canaan. Both God's delay in punishing these enemies of Israel until they had a chance to repent and his regular disciplining of his chosen people demonstrate his compassion and mercy. The passage reflects the universal love of God for all creation that is enunciated both in the immediate context (11.24–12.2) and elsewhere in the book (1.14), but it also distinguishes sharply between Israel and her enemies and unequivocally affirms Israel's privileged position before God. Addressing God, the author calls Israel 'your people...your children...your servants...your children, to whose ancestors you gave oaths and covenants full of good promises!' The Egyptians and Canaanites, on the other hand, are 'the enemies of your servants and those deserving of death'. They 'were an accursed race from the beginning' whose wickedness was inborn (12.11). Moreover, the author leaves no doubt where he and his righteous community stand in relation to these ancient dichotomies: in disciplining Israel God disciplines '*us*';³⁶ Israel's enemies are '*our* enemies', although we must be kind to them even as God gave them every opportunity to repent. The Canaanites were unworthy residents of God's 'holy land' (12.3), but the Israelites proved to be 'a worthy colony of the servants³⁷ of God' in this 'land most precious of all' (12.7). The perception of Israel at the time of the exodus, wilderness wanderings, and

³⁶ In 12.22 ἡμῶς, '*us*', is placed first in the clause for emphasis.

³⁷ Or '*children*'.

conquest of Canaan as heirs of the ‘oaths and covenants’³⁸ God gave to the ancestors (12.21), together with the author’s acute sense of continuity with these biblical forebears, suggest that he understood Jewish identity, at least to some degree, in covenantal terms.

From the rare references to the ancestral covenants in 12.21 and 18.22, it is impossible to reconstruct a full picture of the author’s covenantal ideas. The difficulty is compounded by the use of the plural noun in both places (συνθήκαι in 12.21; διαθήκαι in 18.22).³⁹ The exodus context of both passages obviously brings into view the covenant made in connection with the giving of the law, but the reference to covenants with the ancestors of that exodus generation evokes prior covenants as well, presumably those with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The very vacillation between συνθήκαι and διαθήκαι suggests indeterminacy and fluidity rather than a fixed covenantal doctrine.

Interestingly, pseudo-Solomon’s retelling of the exodus makes no allusion to Sinai; instead, in 18.5–13 the giving of the law is associated with the passover and the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt:

- 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 (καὶ τὸν τῆς θεϊότητος
νόμον ἐν ὁμονοίᾳ διέθεντο)
so that the saints would share alike the same things,
both blessings and dangers;

³⁸ Here the term is συνθήκαι. Cf. the term διαθήκαι in the otherwise similar expression in 18.22: ‘the oaths and covenants made with the ancestors’.

³⁹ In contrast, the Hebrew Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls never use ברית in the plural. The plural διαθήκαι does appear in 2 Macc. 8.15; Sir. 44.18; and many manuscripts of Rom. 9.4, where some prefer it over the singular as the more theologically difficult reading. See E.J. Christiansen, *The Covenant in Judaism and Paul: A Study of Ritual Boundaries as Identity Markers* (AGJU 27; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 8 and 221 n. 33.

- 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 the 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.

Neither Mosaic nor Sinaitic connections are mentioned here.⁴⁰ Even so, in 18.9 the receiving of the law is couched in clearly covenantal terms: the verb διατίθεσθαι, which the Septuagint consistently uses in the cognate accusative διατίθεσθαι διαθήκην to translate כרת ברית,⁴¹ depicts the exodus generation of God's children as entering with one accord into a covenantal obligation to keep the divine law. The immediate context links this covenantal identity not only with the communal obligation to keep the law, but also with the concepts of Israel's election, the promises to the fathers, ethnic identity, divine sonship, and salvation history.

Outside chs. 10–19, Wisdom of Solomon offers only vague hints of a Jewish identity rooted in law, covenant, or other distinctives of Israel's history. In 6.4 the kings and judges of the earth are rebuked for not keeping the law, but it is not clear that the law in question is the Mosaic law.⁴² In 2.12–18 the ungodly complain that the righteous person: (1) 'reproaches us for sins against the law (ἁμαρτήματα νόμου) and accuses us of sins against our training (ἁμαρτήματα παιδείας)'; (2) calls himself a child of the Lord (παῖς κυρίου); (3) lives a life that is unlike that of others; (4) avoids the ways of the ungodly as unclean (ὡς ἀπὸ ἁκαθαρσιῶν); and (5) boasts of having God as

⁴⁰ P.R. Choi's reference to 'an intentional effort to extricate the law from the Mosaic and Sinaitic contexts' is an overstatement. See P.R. Choi, 'Abraham our Father: Paul's Voice in the Covenantal Debate of the Second Temple Period' (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Seminary, 1996), p. 62. Yet it is true that none of the references to the law (2.12; 6.4, 18; 9.5; 16.6; 18.4, 9) draw a direct connection with Moses or Sinai.

⁴¹ J. Behm, 'διατίθημι, διαθήκη', *TDNT*, II, p. 105.

⁴² See the fuller discussion of law in Wisdom of Solomon under 'Universalist Ideals' below.

father (πατέρα θεόν) and of being God's child (υἱὸς θεοῦ). Although it is possible to discern specifically Jewish issues in these expressions, the contrast between the righteous and ungodly found here and throughout the opening chapters is couched in such general terms as to preclude a precise profile of either side of the dichotomy. The oppressed are called simply 'the righteous' (2.10, 12, 16, etc.), 'the holy ones' (4.15; 5.5), 'the elect' (3.9; 4.15), and 'the children of God' (2.13, 18; 5.5). However, when the same labels are used repeatedly in the book of history to refer specifically to the people of Israel, and when these biblical characters appear as 'our ancestors' and their enemies as 'our enemies' (12.22)⁴³ there is no longer any doubt that the author holds a concept of the people of God that is deeply rooted in God's election of, covenants with, and historic care for ancient Israel. Moreover, while the references to the law in 2.12, 6.4, and elsewhere are vague, in 18.9 the law that Israel makes a covenantal agreement to keep is clearly the Mosaic law, even if none of its ritual particularities are ever spelled out; and while that law is universal, its 'imperishable light' is to be mediated to the world through historical Israel (18.4).⁴⁴

Pseudo-Solomon's designation of Israel as 'God's child' provides both a vivid illustration of how the book of history brings historical specificity to the tensions envisioned in the early chapters and an apt conclusion to this part of our study. In 2.12–20 the wicked deride the righteous person for boasting that God is his father (2.16) and that he is God's child (υἱὸς θεοῦ, 2.18; παῖς κυρίου, 2.13). The wicked further propose to subject the righteous to a shameful death in order to test whether the claim of divine sonship is true (2.17–20). In 5.5 the unrighteous are forced to confess their miscalculation and to acknowledge that the righteous are in fact 'children of God' (υἱοὶ θεοῦ).⁴⁵

⁴³ On the possibility that the unrighteous are (or at least include) apostate Jews, see Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 193–95.

⁴⁴ The notion of universal instruction transmitted to all the world by Israel is akin to that in Isa. 2.2–3 and Mic. 4.1–4.

⁴⁵ On the indebtedness to Jewish apocalyptic tradition here and throughout chs. 1–5, see Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', pp. 134–42; *idem*, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 183–85; P. Grelot, 'L'eschatologie de la Sagesse et les apocalypses juives', in *À la Rencontre de Dieu: Mémorial Albert Gelin* (Bibliothèque de la Faculté Catholique de Théologie de Lyon 8; Le Puy: Mappus, 1961), pp. 165–78; G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (HTS 26; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 58–62; L. Ruppert, 'Gerechte und Frevler (Gottlose) in Sap 1,1–6,21: Zum Neuverständnis und zur Aktualisierung alttestamentlicher Traditionen in der Sapientia

Thus far these children are described only in general terms that have to do with righteous living and wise behavior. However, the book of history brings out the ethnic contours of the author's concept of the people of God. In 18.13 the Egyptians, in the aftermath of the death of their firstborn, are the ones compelled to acknowledge their folly, and the language closely parallels that used by and about the wicked in the first part of the book.⁴⁶ In particular, the Egyptians acknowledge that the people of Israel are God's child (θεοῦ υἱός). This designation of the whole people of Israel as God's child is built upon Exod. 4.22-23, where, in the context of the tenth plague, Yahweh calls the Hebrews in Egypt 'my firstborn son' and calls upon Pharaoh to 'let my child go'.

That Pseudo-Solomon considers the exodus experience not merely illustrative of, but also foundational for, the identity of the people of God in his own time is confirmed by his designation of this exodus generation of Israelites as 'our ancestors' (18.6, 22), and, as we have seen, by his application to them of many of the specific labels used for the righteous in the first part of the book. As Barclay observes, Israel is clearly 'marked out as God's own people, entitled to consider God in a special sense as *theirs*'.⁴⁷ The very doxology with which the book closes (19.22) brings out this special sense being God's people in continuity with historical Israel:

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.⁴⁸

UNIVERSALIST IDEALS

The universalist ideals of Wisdom of Solomon and their foundations in Hellenistic philosophy have been extensively analyzed in recent

Salomonis', in H. Hübner (ed.), *Die Weisheit Salomos in Horizont biblischer Theologie* (Biblisch-Theologische Studien 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), pp. 1-54; M. Delcor, 'L'immortalité de l'âme dans le livre de la Sagesse et dans les documents de Qumrân', *NRTh* 77 (1955), pp. 614-30.

⁴⁶ Kolarcik, 'Book of Wisdom', pp. 591, 593.

⁴⁷ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, p. 188. The emphasis is his.

⁴⁸ Kolarcik, 'Book of Wisdom', p. 598, points out that this final doxology forms an *inclusio* with the great doxology that begins the retelling of the exodus (10.20-21).

studies⁴⁹ and need only brief summary here for consideration alongside the particularist strand described above. According to 1.14–15, God

...created all things so that they might exist;
the generative forces of the world are wholesome,⁵⁰
and there is no destructive poison in them,
and the dominion of Hades is not on earth.
For righteousness is immortal.

Here pseudo-Solomon draws on the Stoic doctrine that the impulse toward self-preservation and immortality is built into all things.⁵¹ God's universal mercy and compassion are reiterated again in 11.23–12.1, where the author addresses God in language 'stamped through and through with the value of universalism':⁵²

- 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.
1 For your immortal spirit is in all things.

'By this logic', Collins correctly notes, 'God should love the Egyptians as well as the Israelites'.⁵³ Indeed, as we have noted above, pseudo-Solomon considers the Jewish high priest the mediator for the

⁴⁹ See, among others, Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*; and the various works by J.J. Collins cited throughout this study.

⁵⁰ The precise sense of this line (καὶ σωτήριοι αἱ γενέσεις τοῦ κόσμου) is debated. γενέσεις could mean 'created things' rather than 'generative forces', and σωτήριοι could have the active sense of 'saving' or 'delivering' rather than 'wholesome' or 'healthy'. See the discussions by A.T.S. Goodrick, *The Book of Wisdom* (London: Rivingtons, 1913), pp. 96–97; Ziener, *Begriffssprache*, p. 137; Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, pp. 108–109; and Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse*, I, pp. 199–205.

⁵¹ Cf. Philo, *Mos.* 36; *Aet.* 7; *Opif.* 13.44; *Q.G.* 2.12; and the discussion in Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, pp. 108–109.

⁵² Kolarcik, 'Book of Wisdom', p. 541.

⁵³ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 218; and *idem*, 'Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition', p. 11.

entire universe, 'for on his long robe the whole world was depicted' (18.24).

Even the law to which Wisdom of Solomon alludes several times (2.12; 6.4, 18; 9.5; 16.6; 18.4, 9) is not for Israel alone. Rather, through Israel 'the imperishable light of the law was to be given to the world' (18.4). We have argued above that in some instances the law is unquestionably the law of Moses. However, such an identification cannot be assumed in all of the occurrences. When the wicked complain in 2.12 that the righteous person 'reproaches us for sins against the law', the parallel line says that he 'accuses of sins against our training' (παιδεία). There are no references here or anywhere else in the book to laws that are distinctively Jewish, such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, or dietary restrictions. As Collins observes, the author avoids such references even when he is drawing on a biblical text in which these distinctives are mentioned.⁵⁴ According to 6.4, kings and rulers are subject to the law, but nowhere are they faulted for not following peculiarly Jewish mores.⁵⁵ The ethical evils that can be inferred from the speech of the wicked in ch. 2 are those that all decent people decry. The perversions listed in 14.22-29 are similar to those listed in other Hellenistic Jewish texts, but they are not presented as divine prohibitions from the Torah.⁵⁶ Pseudo-Solomon may well have shared Philo's view that the law of Moses is an embodiment of natural law that is known to all.⁵⁷ In any case, nothing in the vice list

⁵⁴ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 192-93. E.g., in 3.14, a passage obviously dependent on Isa. 56.4-5, the eunuch's keeping the Sabbath and holding fast to the covenant is replaced with the more general reference to his doing no lawless deed and devising no wicked things against the Lord.

⁵⁵ Similarly, in the *Letter of Aristeas*, the Jewish sages praise Ptolemy Philadelphus for his divine wisdom and nowhere intimate that his wisdom is deficient because he does not follow peculiarly Jewish laws.

⁵⁶ Cf. Philo, *Hypoth.* 7.1-9 and Josephus, *Apion* 2.22-30 §§188-219, where the ethical material is presented expressly as summarizing biblical laws. Closer analogies to Wisdom of Solomon at this point are the *Letter of Aristeas* and the *Sentences* of Pseudo-Phocylides, where peculiarly Jewish mores are lacking and the ethics promoted are those shared by many enlightened Gentiles.

⁵⁷ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 192; and *idem*, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, p. 200. According to Philo, *Opif.* 3, '...the world is in harmony with the Law, and the Law with the world, and that the man who observes the Law is constituted thereby a loyal citizen of the world, regulating his doings by the purpose and will of Nature, in accordance with which the entire world itself also is administered'. See also Sirach 24 and Josephus, *Ant.* 1.4 §§109-119. On the concept of natural

in 14.22-29 is peculiarly Jewish. Certainly the extended indictment of idolatry in which this list appears is no proof of Jewish exclusivism, inasmuch as many pagan philosophers likewise expressed contempt for popular superstition and especially the crass forms of idolatry practiced in Egypt.⁵⁸

As we have seen, the book of history in chs. 10-19 presents key figures from Genesis and Exodus as paradigms of the righteous, but interpreters have been quick to point out that they are not necessarily unique or exclusive paradigms. When characters from the Bible are described, proper names are systematically avoided, and demonstrative pronouns and generic descriptions are employed instead, although the identifications are transparent to anyone who knows the biblical narrative. In the view of most interpreters, this anonymity functions to universalize the ancestral history by providing types of the righteous and the wicked that could be appropriated by anyone. We have already cited Reese's contention, following Ziener, that this material represents 'a spiritualizing and universalizing of the covenant promises', an 'enlargement of perspective from the covenant with Israel to the saving love of God toward all men'. Pseudo-Solomon's use of Israel's history 'shifts the center of God's saving activity to the arena of the entire world'.⁵⁹ In Ziener's words, 'Doch an die Stelle des Volkes Israel ist jetzt der einzelne Gerechte getreten'.⁶⁰ W. Vogels writes similarly:

...creation and salvation are not linked to nationalities, but to humankind and to any human person... Salvation is no longer the salvation of Israel

law in antiquity and its relationship to the Torah, see H. Koester, 'Nomos Physeos: The Concept of Natural Law in Greek Thought', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of E.R. Goodenough* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), pp. 521-41; R.A. Horsley, 'The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero', *HTR* 71 (1978), pp. 35-39; P. Mitsis, 'Natural Law and Natural Right in Post-Aristotelian Philosophy: The Stoics and their Critics', *ANRW*, II.36.7, pp. 4812-50; and Collins, 'Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition', pp. 1-15.

⁵⁸ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 212-13. See the texts and discussion in Attridge, *First-Century Cynicism*, pp. 13-23; and see further M. Görg, 'Die Religionskritik in Weish 13,1f: Beobachtungen zur Entstehung der Sapientia-Salomonis im späthellenistischen Alexandria', in G. Hentschel and E. Zenger (eds.), *Lehrerin der Gerechtigkeit: Studien zum Buch der Weisheit* (Erfurter Theologische Schriften 19; Leipzig: St Benno-Verlag, 1991), pp. 13-25.

⁵⁹ Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, pp. 144-45; Ziener, *Begriffssprache*, pp. 73, 85, 93-97, 109; so also Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 214-15.

⁶⁰ Ziener, *Begriffssprache*, p. 109.

from Egypt as in the book of Exodus, but something offered to the whole of humanity which God has created.⁶¹

Whether these views overstate pseudo-Solomon's universalizing tendency will be considered further below, but clearly he does generalize from the historical particularities of Israel's past to provide representative types of the righteous and the wicked.

It is also clear that pseudo-Solomon's development of the cosmic character of wisdom beyond what is found in earlier wisdom texts has strong universalist implications. The author's unique synthesis of heterogeneous conceptions drawn not only from Jewish wisdom tradition but also from various Greek philosophical currents, especially Stoicism and Middle Platonism,⁶² is well illustrated in 7.21–8.1, a litany of praise for wisdom:

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,

²³ irresistible, beneficent, humane,

steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,

all-powerful overseeing all,

⁶¹ 'The God Who Creates is the God Who Saves: The Book of Wisdom's Reversal of the Biblical Pattern', *EgT* 22 (1991), pp. 333-34.

⁶² See Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, pp. 33-46 *et passim*; C. Larcher, *Études sur le Livre de la Sagesse* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1969), pp. 181-236; Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, *passim*; E. des Places, 'Épithètes et attributs de la "Sagesse" (Sg 7,22-23 et SVF I 577 Arnim)', *Bib* 57 (1976), pp. 414-19; H. Engel, "'Was Weisheit ist und wie sie entstand, will ich verkünden': Weish 7,22–8,1 innerhalb des ἐγκώμιον τῆς σοφίας (6,22–11,1) als Stärkung der Plausibilität des Judentums angesichts hellenistischer Philosophie und Religiosität', in Hentschel and Zenger (eds.), *Lehrerin der Gerechtigkeit*, pp. 67-102; H. Hübner, 'Die Sapientia Salomonis und die antike Philosophie', in *idem* (ed.), *Die Weisheit Salomos in Horizont biblischer Theologie*, pp. 55-81; Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', pp. 128-34; and *idem*, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 196-204. In addition to the philosophical affinities, influences from the aretalogies of Isis have been proposed. See on this Reese, *Hellenistic Influence*, pp. 40-52; B.L. Mack, *Logos und Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum* (SUNT 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); *idem*, 'Wisdom Myth and Mythology', *Int* 24 (1970), pp. 46-60; and J.S. Kloppenborg, 'Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom', *HTR* 75 (1982), pp. 57-87; but cf. the judicious comments on this in Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, pp. 203-204.

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

With extensive borrowings from Greek philosophy, this remarkable eulogy of wisdom attributes to her twenty-one qualities that balance her immanence and transcendence. Wisdom's creative and pervasive power is what enables the generations of the world to be renewed and to continue. She integrates into a harmonious whole the various components of reality, including human life and destiny. Human beings participate in the salvific forces of the world by the indwelling of wisdom, the all-pervasive cosmic principle of order. In language likewise akin to the Stoic conception of the Logos or Pneuma as the rational principle of coherence in the universe,⁶³ 1.5-7 identifies wisdom with 'the spirit of the Lord' that 'holds all things together'. Wisdom's immanence, mobility, and pervasiveness in the cosmos mean that she is not limited to one nation but is equally accessible to

⁶³ See J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (4 vols.; Stuttgart: Teubner, repr. 1964), II, no. 416: 'the spirit pervades all things'; and no. 1021: 'the spirit permeates the whole'. See further Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, pp. 178-90; and Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse*, II, pp. 479-518, on the Stoic affinities here.

all human beings. Her further characterization as φιλόανθρωπον (1.6; 7.23; cf. 12.19)—‘a Stoic term with broad universalist implications’⁶⁴—further underscores her indomitable relationship to all humanity.⁶⁵

As in Stoicism, the ideal in Wisdom of Solomon is to live in harmony with this cosmic principle of order and purpose that is immanent in the universe. Although wisdom ‘will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin’ (1.4), in each generation she does enter into holy souls and make them ‘friends of God, and prophets’ (7.27). To appropriate wisdom is to gain ‘unerring knowledge of what exists, to know the structure of the world and the activity of the elements, the beginning and end and middle of times...’ (7.17-18).⁶⁶ The appropriation of wisdom leads to righteousness, and hence to immortality (5.15; 15.3; and especially the σωρίτης in 6.17-20).⁶⁷ The ungodly are those who ‘reasoned unsoundly’ (2.1) and ‘did not know the secret purposes of God’ (2.22). They are rejected not only by God but by the very forces of the cosmos which they failed to appreciate: God ‘will arm all his creation to repel his enemies’ (5.17), who will be punished by the very instruments of their sin (11.16); idolaters are punished by means of the very creatures they had considered to be gods (12.27); Israel’s oppressors are punished by the same means by which God called Israel to himself (18.8). The cosmos is so structured that it ‘defends the righteous’ (16.17) and ‘exerts itself to punish the unrighteous’ (16.24).⁶⁸

Human righteousness and human destiny in Wisdom of Solomon are thus inseparably bound to the cosmic wisdom that orders the universe.⁶⁹ Understanding the universe, of course, includes knowledge of

⁶⁴ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, p. 202.

⁶⁵ On the concept of φιλανθρωπία, see A. Jaubert, *La notion d’alliance dans le judaïsme aux abords l’ère chrétienne* (Patristica Sorbonensia 6; Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), pp. 364-65; and R.P. Festugière, *La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste* (4 vols.; EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 1949-54), II, pp. 301-309.

⁶⁶ The language here is close to that of Chrysippus; see von Arnim, *SVF*, II, no. 555.

⁶⁷ See further R.E. Murphy, “‘To Know Your Might is the Root of Immortality’ (Wis 15.3)”, *CBQ* 25 (1968), pp. 88-93.

⁶⁸ See similar ideas in Philo, *Aet.* 7.35; *Opif.* 13.44.

⁶⁹ See Collins, ‘Cosmos and Salvation’, pp. 128-42, for an insightful discussion of how this world view in Wisdom of Solomon relates to a ‘cosmological conviction’ rooted in ancient Near Eastern mythology and developed in the Hellenistic age. According to the prevailing ‘Hellenistic mood’, human

the transcendent creator (13.1; 15.3),⁷⁰ but this knowledge is 'indirect, mediated by wisdom, through the cosmos', and is 'not given directly by the prophetic "word of the Lord" or by ecstatic revelation'.⁷¹ Collins notes that even the contrasting fates of the righteous biblical characters and their wicked counterparts in ch. 10 'are not ascribed to the direct intervention of God but to the constant activity of wisdom in the world'.⁷² In the adaptation of the exodus tradition in the σύγκρισις of chs. 11-19, where wisdom fades from the scene and pseudo-Solomon speaks more directly of God, the experience of Israel and her enemies is nevertheless 'expressed as an experience of the cosmos rather than a direct encounter with God'.⁷³ History is understood as a function of the natural processes of the cosmos. The whole exodus story serves to illustrate the cosmological principle articulated in 16.24:

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.⁷⁴

Even the miraculous fashioning anew of creation envisioned in 19.6-12 as God's decisive act of deliverance for his people, Collins insists, 'does not require a direct intervention by God' but 'is brought about by an inner mutation of the universe, prompted only by God's

destiny, history, and eschatology are all bound up with the structure of the universe, and the ideal is to understand this order and conform to it. Collins also discusses the affinities between Jewish wisdom and apocalyptic in terms of this shared 'cosmological conviction'. See further A.J. Festugière, *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954), pp. 37-52.

⁷⁰ Here the author is obviously closer to Platonism than to Stoicism. Philo's concept of the Logos, which he sometimes identifies with Wisdom, provides the closest parallels to this blending of Platonic and Stoic ideas. See the references and discussion in Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, pp. 59-63.

⁷¹ Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, p. 199.

⁷² Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', p. 127; and *idem*, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 198.

⁷³ Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', p. 127; and *idem*, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 198; and see further P. Beauchamp, 'Le salut corporel des justes et la conclusion du livre de la Sagesse', *Bib* 45 (1964), pp. 491-526; and Ziener, *Begriffssprache*, pp. 135-36.

⁷⁴ On the underlying Platonic and Stoic notions of ἐπίστασις and ἄνεσις, see Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, p. 300, and the primary sources cited there.

command'.⁷⁵ According to the last lines of the book, the elements of the natural order have arranged and rearranged themselves in Israel's history like notes in a symphonic melody to sustain a cosmic harmony in which the just are helped and the unjust are thwarted (19.18-22).⁷⁶

On such an understanding of Israel's moments of deliverance as part of a larger divinely-orchestrated cosmic harmony, M.J. Suggs speaks of 'a new interpretation of *Heilsgeschichte*'⁷⁷ and explains:

...the old *Heilsgeschichte* with its idea of miraculous divine eruption in history is reinterpreted. What is now described is the providential ordering of Israel's history through Sophia's generation-by-generation election of holy servants.⁷⁸

The universalism implicit in such a conception is well summarized by Collins:

Revelation does not take place by theophanies, but by the constant mediation of wisdom. The primary locus of revelation is the world, created by word and wisdom (9.1-2). The history of Israel provides a paradigmatic example of the experience of righteous individuals or a righteous people, but it is only an illustration of the workings of the universe. Wisdom and righteousness are not necessarily confined to Israel.⁷⁹

If human destiny is bound to a cosmic principle built into the very structure of the universe, is it possible, without the benefit of Israel's special revelation, to arrive at the requisite knowledge of God? Pseudo-Solomon is ambivalent on the issue. On the one hand, he acknowledges in his opening address to the 'rulers of the earth' that God 'is found by those who do not put him to the test, and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him' (1.2). He further affirms in 13.1-9, as Paul does in Rom. 1.19-20, that at least some knowledge of God is attainable through human reason and that failure to attain such

⁷⁵ Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', p. 127; and *idem*, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, p. 198. See also Goodrick, *The Book of Wisdom*, p. 251: 'Even miracles are regarded by "Wisdom" not as a derangement of the universe, but as a rearrangement of the harmony of it'. See further J.P.M. Sweet, 'The Theory of Miracles in the Wisdom of Solomon', in C.F.D. Moule (ed.), *Miracles* (London: Mowbray, 1965), pp. 113-26.

⁷⁶ On this musical image and its background in Stoic theory, see D. Winston, 'The Book of Wisdom's Theory of Cosmogony', *HR* 11 (1971), pp. 200-202.

⁷⁷ M.J. Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology, and Law in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 21.

⁷⁸ Suggs, *Wisdom, Christology*, pp. 40-41.

⁷⁹ Collins, 'Cosmos and Salvation', p. 127.

knowledge is inexcusable.⁸⁰ On the other hand, his very disparaging assessment of human reasoning in 9.13-17 suggests that the search for the true God by means of reason is doomed to failure.⁸¹ Certainly Wisdom of Solomon itself does not represent a discovery of God through philosophical reasoning, but a use of philosophical ideas to buttress convictions based on the biblical record. Nevertheless, the fact that the author holds open the theoretical possibility of coming to know God apart from special revelation qualifies his outlook as 'universalist'.

COHERENCE AND CONFLICT

To return to the issues raised at the outset: Is the theology of Wisdom of Solomon determined by covenantal convictions grounded in the biblical record of God's saving acts on behalf of Israel, or cosmological convictions influenced by Hellenistic metaphysics, in which the way of salvation is thought to lie in understanding the universe and living in harmony with it? The answer, in a word, is yes. The author fused these conflicting convictions, and to emphasize either to the neglect of the other is to misrepresent the creative and unique—if ultimately incompatible—synthesis that he achieved.

Pseudo-Solomon's appreciation of Hellenistic metaphysical theory with its inherent universalism is widely recognized by current scholars, so that the universalist dimension of his thought is rarely underestimated nowadays.⁸² On the other hand, the emphasis on his universalizing tendencies has sometimes obscured the extent to which

⁸⁰ With Philo (see *Decal.* 14.66), pseudo-Solomon seems to have greater sympathy for the one who falls short in the quest for the true God and deifies beautiful created things than for the one who simply creates idols to worship. Yet, in the end, both are culpable.

⁸¹ Larcher, *Livre de la Sagesse*, II, p. 591, appropriately gives his commentary on 9.13-18 the heading 'L'humanité a besoin d'une révélation pour connaître la volonté de Dieu'.

⁸² An exception is Barclay, who finds 'little openness of spirit towards his religious environment' on the part of the author and understands the 'primary tone' of the book as one of 'cultural antagonism' (*Judaism in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, p. 190). Such acculturation as does appear in the book, Barclay contends, is all 'enlisted in the service of a vigorous defense of Jewish particularity' (p. 191). The Hellenized work 'drowns its integrating potential in a sea of polemic' (p. 184). This view greatly underestimates the rapprochement with Greek philosophy that Wisdom of Solomon represents.

he retained a Jewish identity bound up in God's election of and covenants with Israel. Collins, for example, goes too far in suggesting that the biblical characters featured in the book of history 'are only significant as examples of a type' and that 'the story of Israel is viewed as a cosmic allegory, that could in principle be appropriated by any right-eous people, if any other should ever exist'.⁸³ In *Wisdom of Solomon*, as in the works of Philo, Collins writes, 'historical particularity is disregarded and primary importance is attached to representative type'.⁸⁴

Our study has revealed a stronger sense of ethnic and historical continuity with the chosen people of Israel on the part of pseudo-Solomon than this characterization allows. As we have seen, the author considers the people of Israel to be God's children, God's holy ones, a holy people and blameless race, a holy nation, God's child. Moreover, he considers them 'our ancestors'. Certainly they provide types of the righteous, but using them as types is not the same as disregarding their historical particularity.⁸⁵ S. Cheon makes a strong case that the unnamed biblical characters remain historical figures and are not mere universal types; the avoidance of proper names allows Jewish readers to relate the ancestral history to their own particular situation of socio-political conflict in Alexandria and to facilitate their self-understanding by identifying both themselves and their antagonists with biblical figures.⁸⁶ Likewise, interpreting the biblical story to show its compatibility with Hellenistic conceptions of the eternal order of the cosmos was not an abandonment of the author's

⁸³ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 214.

⁸⁴ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, p. 215.

⁸⁵ Collins's statement in 'Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition', p. 11, is to be preferred over the quotations above from his monograph. In the former, he writes: 'It appears, then, that the story of the exodus has *not* been reduced to an allegory of the righteous and the wicked but retains its traditional force as ethnic history'. The emphasis is supplied.

⁸⁶ S. Cheon, 'Anonymity in the *Wisdom of Solomon*', *JSP* 18 (1998), pp. 111-19. See also Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, p. 139. Winston correctly insists that 'for the author of *Wisdom*,...the biblical personalities are historical figures and not mere types as they are for Philo'. Winston and Cheon both discuss the aesthetic function which this device also serves: readers familiar with the Bible find pleasure in their immediate recognition of biblical characters who are described but unnamed.

traditional Jewish heritage, but an exercise in revitalizing it and making it respectable.⁸⁷

In trying to assimilate the disparate traditions that he inherited into a coherent synthesis, pseudo-Solomon was content to live with—or perhaps remained oblivious to—more than one logical inconsistency. Best known is his ambivalence on the origin of death and evil.⁸⁸ As A.P. Hayman recognizes, the author remained in his own mind staunchly monotheistic and monistic, even as he attempted to deal with the problem of theodicy by insisting that ‘God did not make death’ and assuming that death is a primordial mythical power (1.12-14):

At an intellectual level our author is a monist, but at the emotional level a dualist. The two levels are not harmonized in his mind nor does he seem overly concerned to reconcile them. The text is more *ad hominem* polemic than philosophical treatise.⁸⁹

Hayman comments further:

The struggle of the exegetes to uncover the logical consistency which must underlie the text is misconceived. Despite its apparent pretension to compete in the world of the philosophers the Wisdom of Solomon is too much

⁸⁷ As an analogy, D. Seeley (‘Narrative, the Righteous Man and the Philosopher: An Analysis of the Story of the *Dikaios* in Wisdom 1-5’, *JSP* 7 [1990], p. 77) cites Kloppenborg’s study of how pseudo-Solomon worked features of Isis into his portrayal of wisdom. This synthesis, according to Kloppenborg, ‘helped revitalize Jewish tradition so that it could continue to provide religious identity and structure to people under attack. But it also laid the basis for communication with the dominant group, to whose privileges and position Alexandrian Jews aspired’ (‘Isis and Sophia’, p. 84). Seeley concludes similarly that pseudo-Solomon’s combination of Hebraic and Hellenistic vectors from his syncretistic culture was an effort ‘to express enough differences between Greek and Hebrew thought to retain the latter’s integrity, while pointing out enough similarities to make it respectable’ (pp. 76-77).

⁸⁸ Note the fitting title of Kolarcik’s important monograph on the subject: *The Ambiguity of Death in the Book of Wisdom 1-6*. See also Y. Amir, ‘The Figure of Death in the “Book of Wisdom”’, *JJS* 30 (1979), pp. 154-78; and K.M. Hogan, ‘The Exegetical Background of the “Ambiguity of Death” in the Wisdom of Solomon’, *JSJ* 30 (1999), pp. 1-24.

⁸⁹ A.P. Hayman, ‘The Survival of Mythology in the Wisdom of Solomon’, *JSJ* 30 (1999), p. 128 n. 8. Hayman aptly draws an analogy with Philo: ‘He too, when faced with explaining the origin and persistence of evil in the world takes the dualist option, despite the philosophical difficulties this causes for him’ (p. 135).

rooted in the mythical world view of the Old Testament to be overly concerned with such logical consistency. The work is primarily *ad hominem* polemic or apologia and functions much more on an imaginative, metaphorical and mythological level than on any appeal to rationality and logic.⁹⁰

Hayman's conclusion regarding the ambiguous treatment of creation and death in Wisdom of Solomon is applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to our topic of the tension between universalism and particularism in the book. Like the other competing traditions held in tension by our author, the appeal to election and to special revelation, on the one hand, and to a universally recognizable 'natural theology', on the other, are incompatible if pressed to their logical consequences.⁹¹ But pseudo-Solomon—and he was not alone among Hellenistic Jewish authors in this regard—was driven less by a commitment to logical consistency and philosophical precision than by a pressing need to bring all his resources to bear on a complex social situation.⁹² As part of an ethnic and religious minority often under attack, he found the exodus story helpful for sustaining a distinctive Jewish identity.⁹³ Nevertheless, like Philo, he remained convinced of the fundamental compatibility of his revealed religion and the best of Greek philosophy. For him the figure of wisdom afforded a way of blending the Hebrew tradition and the dominant philosophical perspectives of his day into a coherent whole. In his view the creative forces of the cosmos that work continually to save the just and punish

⁹⁰ Hayman, 'Survival of Mythology', p. 138.

⁹¹ Collins, 'Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition', p. 15: '...ultimately either revelation or reason must hold the deciding vote. The two do not mesh as easily as Philo would have us believe. In the end, either the biblical revelation becomes merely a source of illustrations of universal claims, or natural theology is reduced to a supporting role, overruled at crucial points by particularist preference'.

⁹² To cite only the most obvious example, Philo likewise tried to balance his universalist aspirations with his conviction of Israel's election by God. See A. Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity* (BJS 161; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 115-38; and E. Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews and Proselytes* (BJS 290; *SPhilo* 2; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

⁹³ Collins, 'Natural Theology and Biblical Tradition', p. 14: 'When the Jewish community found itself under attack, the age-old story of the exodus spoke more eloquently to their situation than did Platonic philosophy, and the promise of deliverance by an unabashedly partial deity offered greater hope and sustenance than the notion of a universal spirit did'.

the unjust operated precisely and paradigmatically in the foundational events of Israel's history. The centrifugal effect of his applying the universalist spirit of Hellenistic metaphysics to his Jewish faith led him to entertain the possibility that someone could achieve righteousness and immortality through some path other than Israel's revealed religion. However, what he allowed in theory he seems to have considered unlikely or impossible in actual practice. In any case, together with his universalist vision he retained a Jewish identity deeply rooted in God's election of Israel and in 'the oaths and covenants given to our ancestors', and he probably would be surprised to know that modern interpreters find this combination problematic.