



December Bible Tidbits—Books of The Bible #4

A selection of facts and information to help you discover more of the riches about Sacred Scripture. **We continue our journey through the books of the Bible.**

Each month we'll offer you several new tidbits in print and on-line: In print on the reverse side of the OLV Activities Calendar; On-line on OLV's Home Page (ourladyofvictorytallmadge.parishesonline.com),—below the Question of the Week!

Wisdom Books: *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom. Sirach next month.*

- **Ezra:** The first six chapters of this Book give us some valuable information about the first two groups of those returning from the Exile in Babylon. In Chapters 7 – 10 we hear about how Ezra, a priest of the highest rank, began his reform so that all would be restored to the practice of Israelite faith. Men gave up their foreign wives because marriages to pagans were invalid. Unity of faith and practice were essential to Ezra's reform. All those things that characterized Israel's special way of life were to be restored.
- **Job:** The Book of Job is constructed like a dramatic play. The hard question is asked: If God does look after the just and does always punish the wicked, why does the opposite seem to be our real experience, in which evil people prosper from their deeds and the honest person never gets ahead. Job teaches us that ultimately from the midst of doubt and questioning comes trust.
- **Psalms:** This book contains 150 prayer-poems which were probably intended to be sung or accompanied by music. But they are not all a like. Some are brimming with joy and praise of God's goodness; others are filled with sorrow and lament and a spirit of contrition. In having them all, we are able to see a depth and width of Israel's attitude toward Yahweh not present in any other book of the Bible.
- **Proverbs:** The proverb was an important element in Israel, as it was in other ancient nations, for it took the wisdom of human experience and put it in a form that could easily be memorized by a society where few could read books. The Book of Proverbs contains a great number of sayings whose message is as old as the civilization of the Sumerians in 3000 BC.
- **Ecclesiastes:** This book, sometimes called the most skeptical book in the Bible, has a different approach to the value of wisdom—pessimism. The author puts forth the idea that only futility and emptiness result from the constant human search for the meaning of life. The mystery of divine purpose behind the order of the world as it is, the tragic finality of death, the reasons for success and failure, and the justice of rewards and punishment for good and evil behavior are all beyond our capabilities to discover. Ecclesiastes' message is one similar to that of Job: trust and surrender yourself to God's loving care even if you cannot know where it will lead.
- **Song of Songs:** This book shows signs of being worked and reworked through many centuries. At the oldest level are love poems, perhaps wedding songs, many of which could go back to the time of Solomon. The lusty nature of the songs gave scandal to many of the Jewish rabbi who struggled with the decision as to whether this book should be in the sacred canon. One of the deciding factors was the belief that this book described allegorically the love of Yahweh for Israel as a beloved bride.
- **Wisdom:** The Book of Wisdom is known only in Greek and may be the last book of the Old Testament to be written. The main interest of the author is to reassure the Jewish community living in Egypt that keeping their faith is worthwhile despite the hardships of a pagan land. The Book of Wisdom stands out from previous wisdom writings in Israel by its intense concern with two themes: (1) salvation history as a lesson for learning wisdom, and (2) immortality as an explanation of how God rewards the suffering of the just. Although not the most profound of wisdom books, it does throw light on the struggles of Judaism in the Greek and Roman eras to preserve its heritage of faith in the midst of alien values and to fight pagan ideas by means of their own arguments.