

**THE BOOK OF PROVERBS
&
THE BOOK OF JOB**

Introductory Commentaries

by Michael Fallon MSC

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A NOTE ON THE FORMATTING OF THE TEXT

The Scripture text is presented in narrow columns on the outer side of the page.

The commentary is presented in wider columns towards the inside of the page.

Cover: Angel, in St John's Catholic Church, Bath, U.K. The church was designed and built between 1861-3 by Charles Hansom, brother of J.A.Hansom, who designed the Hansom cab.

Photo: Paul Stenhouse. MSC.

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PREFACE

Alongside the scrolls of the Torah and the Prophets, the Hebrew Bible has preserved the rich heritage of Ancient Israel's Wisdom Literature. The Book of Proverbs includes the oldest collection of Israel's wisdom sayings, presented under the name of Solomon, the king who 'excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom' (1 Kings 10:23). Two other works of the Hebrew Bible are also presented in his name: the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. As can be seen from the frontispiece I am publishing an introductory commentary on both these books in a companion volume on Israel's Festival Scrolls. A fourth book linked to Solomon's name is the Book of Wisdom, from the first century BC. It is not part of the Hebrew Bible, but is found in the Greek Septuagint Version.

The Book of Job is acknowledged as one of the world's poetic masterpieces. The author has taken an ancient tale about a prosperous and righteous man called Job who comes on hard times, but, because of his patience and acceptance, he is rewarded by God, who restores everything he had lost and more. The author inserts into this tale a long exploration of the issue of human suffering, and in doing so challenges the traditional 'wisdom' found throughout the ancient world, including Israel, that understood suffering as God's punishment for sin.

Ecclesiasticus (also known as 'The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach') is another example of Israel's Wisdom tradition. Like the Book of Wisdom it is preserved only in the Greek Septuagint Version.

Another rich source of wisdom is the Book of Psalms. I published an Introductory Commentary on the Psalms in 2005. However, throughout this commentary I will refer to the psalms whenever appropriate.

For suggestions as to further reading I recommend the bibliography prepared by Father Jean Louis Ska SJ, who is currently professor of Old Testament Studies at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (see his website: http://www.biblico.it/doc-vari/ska_bibl.html). Go to Section X 2.2 and 2.3. On Job I would add D. Bergant *Israel's Wisdom Literature: a liberation-critical reading* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1997) and H.L. Ellison *A Study of Job: from tragedy to triumph* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1971).

This translation is heavily dependent on the NRSV and the work of many scholars. I am especially indebted to L. Alonso Schökel SJ.

I thank Father Warrick Tonkin for the time and care he put into reading the manuscript and granting it the 'Nihil Obstat', and Archbishop Mark Coleridge for permission to publish. My prayer is that this Introductory Commentary will enrich your appreciation of these two ancient and inspiring books.

– Feast of the Sacred Heart, 2011

