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THE BOOK OF WISDOM



CHAPTER 18

The Book of Wisdom never existed among the Hebrews. Its style has rather the fragrance of Greek eloquence. The Jews claim that it is a work of Philo; it is then said to be a work of Wisdom because in it the coming of Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, and his passion are clearly expressed. This is the Prologue Jerome put before the Book of Wisdom; he shows firstly the origin of this book saying: 'The Book of Wisdom never existed among the Hebrews. Its style, that is, its language is so elegant that it 'has rather the fragrance of Greek eloquence', that is, its taste is more Greek than Hebrew. The Greeks are more eloquent and deeper in their statements than the Hebrews. So, since this book has a most elegant style with the deepest teachings, it is clear that it was written in Greek rather than in Hebrew. Secondly, Jerome names its author when he says: 'The Jews claim that it', namely, the Book of Wisdom 'is a work of Philo' as its compiler but that Solomon was the person who discovered it. While Philo was a Jew he was highly skilled in the Greek language. Jerome says of him in the book *De viris illustribus* that 'he was a Jew of Alexandria of the class of priests'. Thirdly, he gives the reason for the title when he says: 'it is then said to be a work of Wisdom because in it the coming of Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, and his passion are clearly expressed'. The translation is based on the Douay Rheims version of the Bible.

**THE COMMENTARY ON THE CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK OF WISDOM
ARE THE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SERAPHIC DOCTOR SAINT BONAVENTURE, OFM**

Chapter 18

Secondly, on punishments inflicting death

However your saints. After dealing with the punishments preceding death, here he treats of the punishments bringing on death; and, firstly, on the killing of their firstborn in Egypt, namely, in this chapter; secondly, on their drowning in the Red Sea, namely, in the last chapter.

On the killing of the firstborn in Egypt

In the first part he treats, firstly, of a commendation of the Hebrews who were oppressed; secondly, how their deliverance was a just punishment on the Egyptians who oppressed them: *The others indeed were worthy to be deprived of light, and imprisoned in darkness, who kept your children shut up, by whom the pure light of the law was to be given to the world; thirdly, the grave temptation of the Hebrews in the desert after their deliverance: But the just also were afterwards touched by an assault of death, and there was a disturbance of the multitude in the wilderness, but your wrath did not long continue.*

***'One who is in darkness can see one who is in light,
but not the contrary.'***

And in the four rows of the stones the glory of the fathers, that is, the names of great authority, was graven; for on the breastplate were the four rows of precious stones; on each of which were written the individual names of the twelve Patriarchs, as is clear in Exodus 28:21, just as the names of the twelve Apostles are said to be inscribed in the foundation stones of Jerusalem, Revelation 21:14. And your majesty was written upon the diadem of his head, that is, the magnificent Tetragrammaton name of God, that is, from the four letters which are: Yodh, He, Waw, He, which represent the beginning of the time of the passion of Christ.

(Verse 25). *To these, however, to the sacred ornaments, the destroyer gave place, namely, the Angel or the fire, ceasing not because of those ornaments but because of what they represented, namely, because of a future ornament, that is, the sacrifice of the highest Priest, namely, Christ. And was afraid of them, that is, acted as if afraid, namely, by going away; and I have said well: And to these the destroyer gave place, and was afraid of them, for the proof only of wrath, that is, a beginning not a carrying out, was enough; namely, for the correction of the people, namely, with the intercession of the High Priest.*

END OF WISDOM 18

Firstly, a commendation of the Hebrews

In the commendation four things are considered: firstly, the display of the divine gift; secondly, thanksgiving for the display of the divine gift: *And because they also did not suffer the same things, they glorified you*; thirdly, a prayer for the continuation of the gift: *and asked this gift, that there might be a difference*; fourthly, that their prayer is heard: *Therefore they received a burning pillar of fire for a guide of the way which they knew not, and you gave them a harmless sun of a good entertainment.*

(Verse 1). *However your saints had a very great light, and they heard their voice indeed, but did not see their shape. And because they also did not suffer the same things, they glorified you.* The Egyptians were in darkness in this way: *however*, for but; *your saints*; namely, the Israelites, according to Leviticus 11:44: 'Be holy'; *a very great light*, because the light was exterior and physical; so Exodus 10:23: 'Wheresoever the children of Israel dwelt there was light'; also an interior, spiritual light; '*Your saints*, that is, the Israelites who were illumined by faith and purity of conscience'; 1 Thessalonians 5:5: 'All you are the children of light'; also a higher heavenly light; John 1:9: 'That was the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into this world'; also Malachi 4:2: 'Unto you that fear my name, the sun of justice shall arise'. *And they*, namely, the saints, the enemy *heard their voice*, namely, of human conversation or divine praise, *indeed, but did not see their shape*, namely, because of the impeding darkness.

But contra: Because one who is in darkness can see one who is in light, but not the contrary.

It has to be said that this is true provided there be no impediment in their eye, or in the medium itself. But there was an impediment in the eye of those looking, because they were afflicted with blindness, and they were in the middle of darkness that was thick and could be touched.

And, that is, also, *because they*, namely the saints, *also did not suffer from the same things*, that is, the same plagues, *they glorified you*, namely, by giving praise; Luke 1:46: 'My soul does glorify the Lord'; Sirach 43:35: 'Who shall magnify the Lord as the Lord is from the beginning?'

(Verse 2). *And they that before had been wronged*, namely, by Pharaoh oppressing and whipping them, as is clear in Exodus 1:10ff. *Gave thanks to you, because they were not hurt now*, namely, by the plagues inflicted by God; Isaiah 51:3: 'Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of praise'. *And that there might be a difference*, namely, between them and the Egyptians, *they entreated you, O God*, or: *prayed to you, O God*, according to Psalm 42:1: 'Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from the nation that is not holy', just as Abraham entreated lest the just be treated like the unjust, Genesis 18:23. Or: *a difference*, namely, diversity; this was given to the Israelites when 'the angel stood behind, between the Egyptian's camp and the camp of Israel', as is clear in Exodus 14:19-20.

(Verse 3). *Therefore*, because they were grateful for the gift received, they prayed together; *they received a burning pillar of fire*, namely, at night, as is clear in Exodus 13:21-22; *for a guide of the way which they knew not*, namely, through the desert, *and a harmless sun*, along the way; *a sun*, I say, *of a good entertainment*, add: a guide at the end of the way; *you gave; a harmless sun*, I say, by day, and this with the column of cloud tempering the heat of the sun, as is clear in Exodus 10:21-22 and above in Wisdom 10:17: *She was to them for a covering by day, and for the light of stars by night*, so that they came to the place in which they could be suitably welcomed and pitch their tents; Isaiah 4:5: 'The Lord will create upon every place of mount Zion, and where the Lord is called upon, a cloud by day'; and further on in verse 6: 'there shall be a tabernacle for a shade in the daytime from the heat'.

Secondly, the just punishment of the Egyptians

The others indeed were worthy to be deprived of light. Here the just punishment of the Egyptians oppressing the Israelites is shown; and, firstly, the punishment common to all is treated as if by summing up; secondly, especially of those killed: *And whereas they thought to kill the babes of the just*; thirdly, especially of those living and watching: *But on the other side there sounded an ill according cry of the enemies*; fourthly, of the living who were asleep: *For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course*.

(Verse 4). *The others indeed were worthy*, namely, the Egyptians were, add: *to be deprived of light*, as a privation of the senses, *and imprisoned in darkness*, as a privation of movement; *who kept your holy children shut up, by whom the pure light of the law was to be given to the world*, by not allowing them to leave the land of Egypt; Exodus 5:2: 'I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go'. *Your holy children*, namely, the Israelites who believed in you; John 1:12: 'He gave them power to be made the children of God, to them that believe in his name'; by whom, namely, by the preparation of that people to receive the Law because it was not yet given; *the pure light of the law was to be given to the world*. Note that the Law is sometimes called light because it enlightens the mind; Proverbs 6:23: 'The commandment is a law, and the law a light'; *pure* because it purifies or guards the affections from corruption, according to Psalm 11:7: 'The word of the Lord is as silver tried by the fire, purged by the earth, refined seven times'.

For in the priestly robe which he wore, was the whole world: and in the four rows of the stones the glory of the fathers was graven, and your majesty was written upon the diadem of his head. Here he treats of the causes of the deliverance and, firstly, from the point of view of the priest; secondly, from the point of view of the exterminating Angel: *And to these the destroyer gave place, and was afraid of them, for the proof only of wrath was enough*.

(Verse 24). *For in the priestly robe* etc, as if to say: and so he was able to do what has been said; *for in the priestly robe*, that is, in a hyacinth-coloured tunic reaching to the ankles, 'at the extremity of which were little bells and pomegranates', Exodus 28:33-34. Or according to Josephus, both the inside and outside of all the clothing of the high priest - *priestly*, is a linen vesture reaching down to the feet, and so it is named from the Greek word *podas* which means in Latin *of the foot*, and so a priestly robe clings as it were to the feet – *in the priestly robe* is understood what is seen more accurately in what follows. *In the priestly robe*, I say, *which he wore*, namely Aaron, *was the whole world*, namely, depicted as in a sign, 'The Hebrews think of cotton as belonging to the earth because it comes from the earth; purple as belonging to the sea because its colour is tinted by its shells; hyacinth as belonging to the atmosphere because of their similarity in colour; the scarlet colour belonging to fire and the upper world, namely, that the priest might pray for the whole world; if indeed the word is made up of earth, water, fire and air'.

But according to the explanation of the hyacinth-coloured tunic it is asked: how was the whole world depicted on it? For if it was completely of hyacinth-colour, it does not seem that anything was depicted on it other than air. It has to be said that although the body of the tunic was of a hyacinth-colour, in its extremities some parts were cotton, hyacinth and scarlet just like pomegranates and similar things. –The belt represented the ocean because it encircles the whole earth. The vestment and the two stones which hung down and touched each shoulder represented the two hemispheres, or the sun and the moon. The pomegranates and little bells depicted below represented lightning and thunder; the twelve stones on the breastplate, represent the twelve months or the twelve parts of the zodiac. The breastplate represents divine providence and direction. The mitre with the hyacinth-coloured fillet represents the sky. The plate on the forehead of the high priest and the name of God written there represent all the things that in the judgment of God are to be carried out.

Note that in a spiritual sense the shield can be called faith; so Ephesians 6:16: 'In all things taking the shield of faith'; it can also be called the word of God; so Proverbs 30:5: 'Every word' of the Lord, or 'of God, is a shield to them that hope in God'. Also, *prayer*; so here: *bringing forth prayer the shield of his ministry*. Also, equity; so above in Wisdom 5:20: *He will take equity for an invincible shield*. Also, alms; so Sirach 29:16-18: 'Better than the shield of the mighty, and better than the spear, it shall fight for you against your enemy'. Also, patience; 2 Samuel 1:21: 'There was cast away the shield of the valiant and the sword of Saul did not return empty'. Also, obedience, of which 1 Maccabees 14:24 says: 'This is the golden shield of Simon of a thousand pounds'.

And by incense, that, by offering incense, *making supplication*, that is, hastening by being commissioned; Numbers 16:47-48: 'He offered the incense and standing between the dead and the living, he prayed for the people'. Note that prayer is used for remission of sin, intercession for the removal of punishment, incense for reconciliation with an offended judge. I say, *a blameless man hastening withstood the wrath*, that is, the divine strike. *And put an end to the calamity*, that is, to the inevitable human affliction. *Showing*, namely, by action, not only by word, *that he was your servant*, according to John 10:11: 'The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep'; Sirach 45:20: 'He chose him out of all men living to offer sacrifice to God, incense, and a good savour, for a memorial to make reconciliation for his people'. On the contrary, the Lord complained of bad prelates in Ezekiel 13:5: 'You have not gone up to face the enemy, nor have you set up a wall for the house of Israel'.

(Verse 22). *However, he overcame the disturbance*, that is, the people disturbed by dividing and penetrating, *not by armour of strength*, as Samson over the Philistines, Judges 15:15ff.; *nor with force of arms*, namely, the armour of a powerful and strong person, like David with Goliath, 1 Samuel 17:49ff.; 1 Maccabees 3:19: 'The success of war is not in strength of arms'. But *with a word*, namely, of devout prayer, *he subdued him that punished them*, namely, the Angel killing the people which he regarded as his vexation, according to the text: 'Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is scandalized and I am not on fire?', according to 2 Corinthians 11:29. *The oaths of the Fathers and the covenant*, Genesis 12:7: 'To your seed I will give this land'; *alleging*, namely, in his prayer.

(Verse 23). *For when* etc., as if to say: I have said well that *he overcame the disturbance; for when they were now fallen down dead by heaps one upon another*, that is, when the dead lay one upon another in heaps; *he stood between*, that is, he stood between the living and the dead; so Numbers 16:48: 'He stood between the living and the dead'. *And stayed the assault*, namely, of the fire consuming them; Hebrews 11:34: 'Quenched the violence of fire'; *and cut off the way to the living*, namely, by placing himself in the fire in the middle of the way lest the fire cross from the dead to the living.

And whereas they thought to kill the babes of the just, one child being cast forth, and saved, to reprove them, you took away a multitude of their children, and destroyed them all together in a mighty water. Here is treated, firstly, the striking of the firstborn of Egypt; secondly, the foreknowledge of the striking: *For that night was known before by our fathers*; thirdly, the escape of the Hebrews: *So your people received the salvation of the just, and destruction of the unjust*; fourthly, the reason for the escape: *For the just children of good men were offering sacrifice secretly, and they unanimously ordered a law of justice, that the just should receive both good and evil alike, singing now the praises of the fathers*.

(Verse 5). *Whereas they thought*, namely, the Egyptians, *to kill the babes*, not only as a simple plan, but also as a work to be put in progress, *of the just*, that is, of the Hebrews, as is clear in Exodus 1:15ff. *One child*, namely, Moses, *being cast forth*, namely, by the mother, *and saved*, namely, by the daughter of Pharaoh, as is clear in Exodus 2:2ff. *To reprove them*, that is, the punishment of the Egyptians, or: *to reprove them*, that is, the Hebrews so as to lead them freed by Moses from Egypt. *You took away a multitude of their children*, that is, all the firstborn, Exodus 12:29. *And destroyed them*, namely, their Egyptian parents, *all together*, that is, at the one time, *in a mighty water*, namely, by drowning them in the Red Sea, Exodus 14:28: 'Neither did there so much as one of them remain', and Exodus 15:10: 'They sank as lead in the mighty waters'.

(Verse 6). *For; for* used for but; *that night*, namely, when the first born were slain, *was known before by our fathers*, namely, to Abraham and others; so Genesis 15:13: 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years'; or: to the Israelites themselves in Egypt, with Moses prophesying to them, as is clear in Exodus 2:21ff. *That assuredly*, that is, with certitude, *knowing what oaths they had trusted to*, that is, what firm promises of God; Genesis 22:16: 'By my own self have I sworn, says the Lord'; also Hebrews 6:18: 'That by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have the strongest comfort'; *they might be of better courage*, namely, while waiting for the carrying out of the oath.

(Verse 7). *So your people received*, namely, on that night, or, 'The Law of the Passover', on that night, as if for a great gift, *your people*, namely, the Israelite people, as is clear in Exodus 12:28 where it is said: 'All the children of Israel did as the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron'; *the salvation of the just*, for by it the Israelites were saved from the destroying Angel; as is clear in Exodus 12:23; *and destruction*, that is, death by the destroying Angel, *of the unjust*, namely, of the Egyptians, Exodus 12:29.

(Verse 8). *For as you punished our adversaries*, namely, for their sin of killing, *so you also encouraged*, add: to better things, namely, of faith and acceptance of the Law; Deuteronomy 32:11: 'As an eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, the Lord spread his wings, and has taken him and carried him on his shoulders'; *and glorified us*, namely, by wonderfully delivering us from that destruction.

(Verse 9). *For secretly*, namely, out of fear of the Egyptians, *were offering sacrifice*, namely, by sacrificing the Pasch, as is clear in Exodus 12:3ff. *The just children of good people*, namely, of the Israelites, with their parents, for which reason they merited to be delivered and the firstborn of the Egyptians slain. *And they unanimously ordered a law of justice*, namely, given with the sacrifice of the Pasch, and it was just because it represented the justification to be effected by the death of Christ; also it was called a law because its observance was binding for that time. *They unanimously ordered*, that is, undertook together and intended to fulfill and implement; so in Psalm 49:5: 'Gather to me my faithful ones who made a covenant with me by sacrifice'. *That the just*, namely, themselves, *should receive both*, that is, equally, *good and evil alike*, that is, things fair and adverse; say again: ordered, whatever God might want to happen; Job 2:10: 'If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?' Also Luke 16:25: 'You received good things in your lifetime, and Lazarus likewise evil things'. *Singing*, that is, devoutly singing, *now the paternal praises*, that is, instituted and celebrated by the fathers, praising God by giving praise for evil things, such as punishments, and for good things such as grace, or fortune, or nature; Psalm 33:2: 'The Lord's praise shall always be in my mouth'; always, that is, not only in prosperity but also in adversity.

But on the other side there sounded an ill according cry of the enemies, and a lamentable mourning was heard for the children that were bewailed. Here the punishment of the Egyptians who were living and watching is treated, namely, distress over the death of their firstborn; and, firstly, the topic of distress is treated; secondly, the value of mourning: *And the servant suffered the same punishment as the master, and a common person suffered in like manner as the king*; thirdly, the cause of its universality: *So all alike had innumerable dead, with one kind of death*; fourthly, the ensuing effect: *For whereas they would not believe anything before by reason of the enchantments, then first upon the destruction of the firstborn, they acknowledged the people to be of God*.

(Verse 20). *However, the just also* etc. In this way the Egyptians were punished but not only them; *however* for but; *were then touched*; *then*, is used in a broad sense so that the meaning is: *Then*, namely, at that time, when they left Egypt and set out through the desert, *the just also were touched*, namely, the children of Israel. He says *touched*, because the *assault of death*, that is, leading to death, did not remain a long time nor was it in all. *And there was a disturbance of the multitude in the wilderness*, namely, against Moses and Aaron, so that they fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, as is clear in Numbers 16:41-43. *But your wrath did not long continue*: Habakkuk 3:2: 'When you are angry, you will remember mercy'.

For a blameless man made haste to pray for the people, bringing forth the shield of his ministry, prayer, and by incense making supplication, withstood the wrath, and put an end to the calamity, showing that he was your servant. Here he treats of the triple way in which they were delivered, namely, by praying devoutly; secondly, by remembering the promises to the fathers: *And he overcame the disturbance, not by strength of body nor with force of arms, but with a word he subdued him that punished them, alleging the oaths and covenant made with the fathers*; thirdly, by personally putting himself between them: *For when they were now fallen down dead by heaps one upon another, he stood between and stayed the assault, and cut off the way to the living*.

(Verse 21). He says, therefore: *For a blameless man* etc. I have said well that *your wrath did not long continue*; *for a blameless man made haste*, namely, Aaron; so Numbers 16:47: 'When Aaron had heard this, and had run to the midst of the multitude which the burning fire was now destroying, he offered the incense, and standing between the dead and the living, he prayed for the people and the plague ceased'; *made haste*, indicating by this the fervour of his heart, *blameless*, his holy way of life, *to pray for the people* etc. God listens to such a person, not to sinners; so John 9:31: 'God does not hear sinners'; Saint Gregory says: 'When one who is displeasing is sent to intercede, the spirit of an angry person is provoked to worse things'; *to pray for the people*; intercession properly aims to remove evil, but prayer aims to gain good things, or commonly one is used for the other. *Bringing forth the shield of his ministry, prayer, and by incense making supplication, withstood the wrath, and put an end to the calamity, showing that he was your servant*. Prayer is called a shield because it protects; Ezekiel 22:30: 'I sought among them for a man that might set up a hedge and stand in the gap before me'. It is said *of his ministry* because he was bound to this service by his priestly office; so Hebrews 5:1: 'Every high priest taken from among men, is ordained for people'; and later in 1:3 he adds: 'Therefore, he ought, as for the people, so also for himself to offer for sins'.

(Verse 17). *Then suddenly*, namely, at the very hour of the killing, *visions of evil dreams*, that is, terrible dreams, *troubled them*, namely, those sleeping; 'Rest was given neither to those watching nor to those sleeping'. *And fears unlooked for*, that is, unexpected, *came upon*, namely, upon them; Job 7:14: 'You will frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions'; Job 4:13-14: 'In the horror of a vision by night, when deep sleep is wont to hold people, fear seized upon me'.

(Verse 18). *And one thrown here*, namely, than another, *half dead*, that is, at the end of life; *and so showed the cause of death*, namely, by pointing out to others, as he or she was able, that is, that it came from the hardness of a heart rebelling against the God of the Hebrews and against Moses, God's servant; Romans 2:5: 'According to your hardness and impenitent heart'.

(Verse 19). *For the visions*, namely, in the dreams, *that troubled them foreshowed these things*, namely, the cause of their death. *Lest they should perish and not know why they suffered these evils*, and so because of ignorance they could be excused for their impenitence; Isaiah 28:19: 'Vexation will make you understand what you hear'; Saint Gregory says: 'Punishment opens the eyes that sin closes'.

Thirdly, the grave temptation of the Hebrews

However, the just also were then touched by an assault of death, and there was a disturbance of the multitude in the wilderness, but your wrath did not long continue. Here the grave temptation of the Hebrews in the desert after their deliverance is added; and he shows, firstly, the danger on the part of those being tempted; secondly, how they were delivered from Pharaoh: *For a blameless man made haste to pray for the people* etc.; thirdly, the cause or power delivering from the point of view of the priestly robe: *For in the priestly robe which he wore, was the whole world*; fourthly, the effect achieved by the destroying Angel: *And to these the destroyer gave place, and was afraid of them, for the proof only of wrath was enough.*

(Verse 10). I have said that *paternal praises* were sung; *But on the other side there sounded*, namely, strongly through the whole land of Egypt, *an ill according cry of the enemies*, that is, the voice of the Egyptians horrible to hear; Exodus 12:30: 'There arose a great cry in Egypt'; *and a lamentable mourning was heard*, that is, weeping with beating; there was a cry of the voice and weeping of the eyes and a banging of hands; I say, *a lamentable mourning for the children*, that is, by the infants or for the infants, for whom they lamented, according to Jeremiah 6:26: 'Make mourning for an only son, a bitter lamentation'.

(Verse 11). *However, the servant suffered the same punishment*, in the one house, *as the master*, that is the loss of the firstborn; *and a common person suffered in like manner as the king*, namely, throughout the whole land of Egypt, Exodus 12:29: 'Struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, unto the firstborn of the captive woman that was in the prison'; Isaiah 24:30: 'It shall be as with the people, so with the priest, and as with the servant, so with his master'.

(Verse 12). *So all alike*, that is the greater, the lower and the ordinary people, namely, king Pharaoh and all his lords and their servants; *had innumerable dead*, all the firstborn, *dead*, I say, *with one kind of death*, namely one type because by a divine plague. And I have said well: *all*, because 'there was not a house wherein there lay not one dead', as in Exodus 12:30. *Neither were the living sufficient to bury them; for in one moment the noblest offspring of them was destroyed.* And I have said well: *innumerable; neither were the living sufficient to bury them*, namely, the dead; Jeremiah 16:6: 'The great and the little shall die and shall not be buried' etc. *For in one moment*, namely, in one hour of the night, *the noblest offspring of them*, that is, all the firstborn who are superior to the other children, *were destroyed*, that is, killed by the destroying Angel, as is clear in Exodus 12:29.

(Verse 13). *For whereas they*, as if to say: and so the firstborn were rightly put to death; *for whereas they*, that is, for all the plagues previously inflicted, *would not believe*, namely, the Egyptians, *anything before by reason of the gifts*, namely, given to them by stopping all the plagues, as is clear in Exodus, chapters seven, eight, nine, ten and twelve. *Then first upon the destruction of the firstborn*, namely, in the last plague, *they acknowledged the people to be of God*, that is, they promised that they would observe God's command which was to release the children of Israel; for then they released them as is clear in Exodus 12:31. Or: *they acknowledged* etc., that is, they promised that if they were freed they would believe in the God of the Hebrews; Isaiah 26:16: 'Lord, they have sought after you in distress'; Psalm 77:34: 'When God slew them then they sought God'.

For while all things were enclosed in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course. After dealing with the affliction of those waiting for the death of the firstborn, here he treats of the affliction of those who were sleeping; and he treats, firstly, of the cause of the affliction; secondly, of the punishment: *Then suddenly visions of evil dreams troubled them, and fears unlooked for came upon them.*

(Verses 14 and 15). I have said well: *Then first upon the destruction of the firstborn; for meaning because; while all things were enclosed in quiet silence; the silence, namely, of night which was given for rest just as the day is for working; so 1 Thessalonians 5:7: 'They that sleep, sleep in the night'. And the night was in the midst of her course, that is, when it was midnight; so Exodus 12:29: 'And it came to pass at midnight'; and this was so as to be unexpected. - Your almighty word, O Lord, that is, or decision and command; so Hebrews 4:12: 'The word of God is living and effectual', namely, because of the impossibility of resistance, leapt down from heaven, he says leapt down from the speed, from heaven, that is, in the destroying Angel, from the royal throne, namely, your royal throne, that is, from the company of the Angels among whom you reign and sit; Psalm 79:2: 'You who are enthroned upon the Cherubim'. Or: leapt down from heaven, namely, sent by you who live in heaven: 'All ministering spirits sent to minister to them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation', Hebrews 1:14; came as a fierce, that is, an implacable, conqueror, namely, of the Egyptians because of their stubbornness; leapt down, suddenly, into the midst of the land of destruction, that is, into the land of Egypt to put the firstborn to death'.*

(Verse 16). *A sharp sword, that is, of a sharp sword to carry out the duty of killing the firstborn; Hebrews 4:12: 'The word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword'; also Ephesians 6:17: 'The sword of the Spirit which is the word of God'. Therefore, a sharp sword, in its ready ability to harm, carrying your unfeigned commandment, that is, not false, but your true command and power, because 'there is no power but from God', Romans 13:1. Therefore, it is called an unfeigned commandment because of the divine authority, and he stood, because the sentence was immovable. Filled all things with death, that is, the whole land of Egypt with the dead firstborn. 'There was not a house wherein there lay not one dead', as is clear in Exodus 12:30. Therefore, he says: Filled all things with death, because of the universality of this plague.*

But there is the objection that Exodus 12:12 says: 'I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and will kill every firstborn in the land of Egypt' etc., and, therefore, he was not standing: so it is wrong to say: *he stood* etc. But it has to be said that this standing, of which he speaks here, is the opposite of going away from the land of Egypt, not of movement through the land. So he means to say that the Angel carrying out the word or command given to kill the firstborn stood in the land of Egypt so that no one was killed outside Egypt; but he does not mean to say without moving through Egypt from house to house.

And standing on the earth reached even to heaven, namely, seemed to reach because of what was inevitable, namely, lest anyone escape; Psalm 138:8: 'If I ascend into heaven, you are there'. Or: even to heaven, he says this because the Angel was contemplating in heaven, serving on earth, according to Saint Bede 'They run within God wherever they are sent'; Matthew 18:10: 'Their angels', namely, their assistants, 'in heaven always see', by contemplation, 'the face of my Father who is in heaven'.

In an allegorical sense, the coming of Christ into flesh is described here for he is called the *almighty word* of God by eternal generation, according to John 1:1: 'In the beginning was the Word'; but he came *from heaven from your royal throne* by a temporal assuming of flesh; Psalm 18:7: 'His going out is from the end of heaven'; in the middle silence of the night, because of the suitability of the time; Galatians 4:4: 'But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent the Son, made of a woman'. The first silence was under the law of nature due to an ignorance of weakness; the second, under the law of Moses due to the hopelessness of health; the third, under the law of grace due to the adoption of salvation. *As a fierce conqueror into the midst of the land of destruction, namely, because of the storming of the demons; Luke 11:21-22: 'When a strong man armed keeps his court, those things are in peace which he possesses. But if a stronger than he come upon him and overcomes him, he will take away all his armour wherein he trusted, and will distribute his spoils'. Into the midst of the land of destruction, that is, in the middle of the world because of the place on the earth in which he was born; Psalm 73:12: 'He has wrought salvation in the midst of the earth'. Carrying the commandment of God with him, because he shares the all powerful Deity with the Father; John 1:1 and 14: 'And the Word was God', namely, he of whom he adds: 'And the Word was made flesh'; also Matthew 28:18: 'All power is given to me in heaven and in earth'. To have filled all things with death, on account of the completion of all things in his death, according to John 19:30: 'It is consummated'. Standing on the earth to have reached heaven, because while in the condition of a pilgrim he had a continuous enjoyment of God; John 3:13: 'No one has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven'.*