



The Wisdom of Ben Sira. Fragments of four columns of a second-first-century B.C.E. Hebrew manuscript found at Masada preserving parts of Sir 39:27—43:30. Photograph is courtesy of the Israel Museum and the Shrine of the Book.

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Palestine in the Wake of Alexander the Great

THE OVERLORDS OF PALESTINE

For about two centuries, the Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great held sway over the lands around the eastern Mediterranean. Only the Greeks, and the Scythians to the north of them, successfully withstood attempts at Persian domination. Nonetheless, the vast empire that stretched from the borders of India in the east to Egypt and Thrace in the west was difficult to hold together. The reign of Artaxerxes I (during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah) saw the beginning of unrest and rebellion.

The mortal threat arose in the little backwoods kingdom of Macedonia. Its king, Philip II (359–336 B.C.E.), maneuvering with equal expertise on the battlefield and in the political arena, succeeded in making himself master of almost all of Greece, which was now spent from the agonies of the numerous internal wars. Philip's conquest of Thrace set the stage for a massive confrontation with Persia. When he was assassinated at the age of forty-six, the task fell to his twenty-year-old son, Alexander III ("the Great").

Once he had consolidated his power, the young general moved with incredible speed and efficiency. In four years the fragile Persian Empire crumbled before the relentless drive of Alexander's military machine. In 334 he crossed the Hellespont and defeated the Persian army at the River Granicus near the site of ancient Troy. There was no other sizable Persian force in the whole of Asia Minor. In a year Alexander swept across the peninsula and stood facing the armies of Darius II at the Cilician Gates near Issus (333). The Persian army was routed, and the king fled for his life, leaving his family and possessions behind. Alexander marched south along the coast, accepting the surrender of one Phoenician seaport after the other. Only the island of Tyre resisted, its inhabitants feeling secure in their position a quarter of a mile off the coast. Alexander's army constructed a causeway from the mainland to the island.* After seven months of hard labor and bitter siege, the city fell and its walls were leveled. Alexander continued south into Palestine. Gaza capitulated after a two-month siege, and for its resistance, it too was razed (332). Egypt welcomed Alexander as successor to the pharaohs and acclaimed him son

of the god Amon. He then started north again toward Syria (330). A revolt in Samaria was swiftly punished, the city was destroyed, and a Macedonian garrison was installed.^{1*}

With Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt now firmly in his control, Alexander turned eastward toward the heartland of the empire. He engaged the army of Darius at Gaugamela just east of the Tigris River. Again the Persian army was badly defeated, and the king fled. Alexander turned to other conquests: Babylon, Susa, Persepolis (the Persian capital), and Ecbatana. From Ecbatana he pursued the fugitive Darius, but the king was murdered by his own subordinates (330).

Alexander was now sole ruler of the Persian Empire. His ambitions carried him on through the eastern reaches of his empire to the Indus River. He would have gone farther, but his troops rebelled at the prospect and he was forced to return west (326). He spent his last year in Babylon consolidating his gains and administering his empire. The end came swiftly. He died in 323 at the age of thirty-three.

The young Alexander left no eligible heir to his empire. Immediately after his death his generals appointed Perdiccas, one of their number, to be regent over the whole empire. He in turn appointed his colleagues to be satraps over the various provinces. The orderly arrangement was short-lived, however. In 321 Perdiccas was assassinated by his own commanders, and chaos broke out as the generals and satraps maneuvered for control. These wars of the Diadochi ("successors") lasted forty years.

The province of Coele-Syria (southern Syria and Palestine) was a frequent bone of contention because it was located along the principal trade routes by land and sea and served as a major military highway between Egypt and the countries to the north and east. In a period of twenty-one years (323–302) it changed hands seven times and was frequently the site of military campaigns. Ptolemy, the satrap of Egypt, invaded Coele-Syria in 320. He drove out its rightful governor, Laomedon, and annexed it to Egypt. Meanwhile Antigonus, who was satrap of parts of Asia Minor, began to annex other parts of the empire as he sought to make himself sole successor to Alexander. Ptolemy, Seleucus (whom Antigonus had expelled from Babylon), and other satraps formed an alliance against Antigonus, demanding that he accept Ptolemy's sovereignty over Coele-Syria. Antigonus responded in 315 by invading the country and bringing it under his control. Ptolemy countered in 312, defeating Antigonus's son Demetrius while his father was engaged elsewhere. Antigonus returned, Ptolemy fled, and control over Coele-Syria reverted to Antigonus. In 302 the Macedonian generals once more made common cause against Antigonus. Ptolemy swept through Palestine. At Sidon he heard a rumor that Antigonus had defeated his allies, and he retreated swiftly to Egypt. The rumor was false. The decisive battle took place at Ipsus in central Asia Minor. Antigonus was slain in battle, his army was defeated, and his territory was divided.

The precise details of this settlement are disputed by historians. They were also disputed by the principals, Ptolemy and Seleucus, both of whom claimed the right to rule Coele-Syria. For the present time, however, Ptolemy's armies were in the province, and he and his successors continued to rule there until the beginning of the second century. Thus the result of Ipsus was the following division of the empire: Lysimachus in Thrace

and western Asia Minor; Ptolemy in Egypt and Coele-Syria; Seleucus in northern Syria and Babylon. In 281 Seleucus defeated Lysimachus and annexed Asia Minor to his kingdom. Seleucus and Ptolemy were now the sole successors of Alexander, and their heirs would rule two rival kingdoms.

Ptolemaic Palestine remained peaceful for almost a hundred years. In 219 the old feud between the two dynasties flared up again as the Seleucid king Antiochus III (“the Great”) sought control over Palestine. A series of battles ensued, and Ptolemy IV defeated him at Raphia in 217. When Ptolemy died in 204 and was succeeded by his five-year-old son, Antiochus once more set out to take Coele-Syria. The final battle was fought in 198 at the Panion (the shrine of the god Pan) near the sources of the Jordan River. Antiochus was victorious, and Palestine passed into the hands of the Seleucid house, where it would remain until the successful conclusion of the Jewish wars of independence later in the century.

EARLY HELLENIZATION IN PALESTINE

Alexander was a Macedonian steeped in Greek culture and schooled under Aristotle. His military conquest and political domination helped to expand Hellenic culture in the East. Alexandria was the first of some thirty cities that he established. The settlement of soldiers, some of whom married foreign wives, served to spread Greek institutions, religion, and language.

Alexander’s successors also furthered the Greek way of life. Some thirty cities were founded in Palestine by order of the Macedonian kings. They were located in three areas, which excepted the territory of Judah: the Mediterranean coast; Samaria and Galilee; and Transjordan, where they formed the nucleus of what would later be the Decapolis (or league of “ten cities”). These cities adopted the political structure of the Greek *polis* (“city”) and had an official enrollment of Greek “citizens.” Some of their inhabitants assumed Greek names. Greek educational institutions were established, and temples, theaters, and other fine buildings were constructed.

It is a matter of debate to what extent and in what ways Palestinian Judaism was hellenized before the momentous events of 175 B.C.E., of which we shall speak in the next chapter. In any event, Judah did not remain isolated from its environment, and we shall note evidences of Hellenistic influence in the writings we discuss in the present chapter.

LITERATURE ATTRIBUTED TO ENOCH

Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him (Gen 5:24).

The two halves of this cryptic passage suggest *in nuce* the two principal elements of a sizable amount of Jewish revelatory literature that is attached to the name of this ancient patriarch: (1) Enoch was righteous in an unrighteous age. (2) Therefore God saw fit to

remove Enoch from this earth in order to transmit to him esoteric revelation about the nature of the universe and about the end time; Enoch wrote down this revelation so that it could be transmitted to the righteous who would live in the last days. The portrayal of Enoch in this literature reflects an interesting blend of motifs that are at home in Jewish theology and elements that appear to have been drawn from Babylonian flood traditions.²

A considerable number and variety of these pseudo-Enochic traditions, dating from various times in the three centuries B.C.E., have been collected in a writing that has come to be known as 1 Enoch. Most, if not all, of these traditions were composed in Aramaic. The collection was translated into Greek and from Greek into Ge'ez, the language of ancient Ethiopia, in which version alone the entire collection is preserved as part of the Ethiopic Bible. Fragments of eleven Aramaic manuscripts of various sections of 1 Enoch have been identified among the Dead Sea Scrolls.³ We shall discuss the individual sections in their likely historical settings.⁴

The Book of the Luminaries (1 Enoch 72–82)

These chapters constitute a major treatise on cosmic and astronomical phenomena. Originally a more extensive form of this text existed as an independent Enochic work. Four fragmentary manuscripts of the Aramaic version of this longer work have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls—in all cases separate from those manuscripts containing other parts of 1 Enoch.⁵ Since 1 Enoch 1–36 (e.g., chaps. 2–4 and 33–36) employs material from these chapters, it is evident that the Book of the Luminaries is one of the oldest sections of the collection, dating back at least well into the third century B.C.E.

The Book of the Luminaries is presented as revelation. The archangel Uriel (meaning “God is my light”) guided Enoch through the cosmos and explained the laws by which these phenomena operate. Enoch now writes an account of this journey and transmits the information to his son, Methuselah. With monotonous repetition and with calculations and predictions ad infinitum, the treatise demonstrates the uniformity and order of God’s creation as it is evidenced in the movements of the luminaries and the blowing of the winds. The universe is very much alive, with thousands of angels in charge of its many facets and functions.

Enoch’s heaven is a great hemispherical vault stretched over the flat disk of the earth and set upon its outer edge (like an oversized cup inverted on a saucer). At the juncture of the firmament and the earth are twelve gates through which the sun and the moon rise and set during their respective annual and monthly cycles. Alongside these gates are numerous windows through which the stars emerge and exit.

Crucial to this treatise is a solar calendar of 364 days, twelve months of thirty days, with four days intercalated in the third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth months. The first, very long part of the book, which has been preserved only in the fragments of Qumran Aramaic manuscripts a and b (4Q208 and 209), consisted of a tabulation that synchronized the movements of the sun and the moon over the course of a 364-day solar year. This was presumably prefaced by a brief narrative that set the scene and introduced the speaker.⁶

The Ethiopic version begins with this superscription:

The Book about the Motion of the Heavenly Luminaries, all as they are in their kinds, their jurisdiction, their time, their name, their origins, and their months, which Uriel, the holy angel who was with me (and) who is their leader, showed me. The entire book about them, as it is, he showed me and how every year of the world will be forever, until a new creation lasting forever is made. (72:1)⁷

Thus, like much of the rest of 1 Enoch, as we shall see, this section is presented as angelic revelation, and the cosmological shape of its subject matter notwithstanding, it has an eschatological perspective. The present shape of the cosmos will continue until the everlasting new creation (cf. 91:16-17, below, p. 111).

Chapter 72:2-37 presents “the first law of the luminaries”—the movement of the sun. It rises from an eastern gate and sets through the corresponding western gate (presumably returning behind the north or south side of the firmament), and it moves north and south along the six eastern and six western gates, as its zenith approaches and recedes from perpendicular—a function of what we now understand to be the earth’s ecliptic. The calculation of this movement north and south does not coincide with empirical reality, but seems to have been based on an a priori scheme that demonstrates mathematical uniformity in the heavens. The next two laws of the luminaries relate to the phases of the moon (chap. 73) and the moon’s movement along the aforementioned twelve gates (74:1-9). In these cases Enoch’s calculations are close enough to empirical reality to have been based on actual observation.⁸

Chapter 74:10-17, with its comparison of the solar and lunar years, may be a remnant of the synchronistic calendar,⁹ and 75:1-3 continues with reference to the four intercalary days and the angels that are in charge of them. The twelve gates in the four quarters of the heaven, and the winds that blow in and out of them for blessing and curse, are the subject of 75:4—76:14, and a description of the four quarters of the earth and their mountains and rivers follows (chap. 77). The text then returns to the subject of the sun and the moon (chap. 78). The summary in chapter 79 may indicate that some discussion of the stars has dropped from the text (79:1; but cf. 82:9-20). After what appears to be a final summarizing statement (80:1) comes a short poem that differs from the preceding material in two respects (80:2-8). It posits a violation in the order of nature not previously envisioned, and it associates this with “the days of the sinners” (80:2). Only in 75:2 have we seen such a polemic.

Chapters 81:1—82:3 are a misplaced block of narrative about Enoch’s return to earth, which has more in common with chapters 12–36 than the Book of the Luminaries (see below, p. 114). Then another polemic contrasts right and wrong calendrical practice (82:4-8). The book concludes with a description of the stars, their leaders, and the four seasons (82:9-20). The description of the third and fourth seasons has been lost in the Ethiopic version, but one Aramaic manuscript preserves some fragments of it (4Q211 1 1-3).¹⁰

The precise provenance of the Book of the Luminaries is uncertain, but its contents suggest an association with “traditional, intellectual groups,” namely scribes and priests.¹¹

The 364-day solar that is the centerpiece for the Book of the Luminaries is also advocated in the Book of Jubilees (see below, chapter 3), which invests it with special religious status and strongly polemicizes against the “Gentile” lunar calendar. Such a polemical element is largely lacking in the Book of the Luminaries, although 75:2; 80:2-8; and 82:4-6 indicate that this material was employed for such a purpose at some point in the document’s literary history, and the book’s revelatory form may indicate that some such dispute lies in the background. Nonetheless, it is striking that Book of the Luminaries—both in the Ethiopic 1 Enoch and in the Qumran Aramaic fragments—contains detailed descriptions of the daily movements of the moon and of the relationships between the movements and locations of the sun and the moon. Other Qumranic calendrical texts also refer to lunar phases and movements.¹² There is, to date, no explanation for the presence at Qumran of multiple copies of both the antilunar Book of Jubilees and the Enochic and non-Enochic solar/lunar texts. The Enochic treatise provided the theoretical undergirding for Jubilees’ dispute with the Jewish religious establishment (see below, pp. 69, 74), but it is unclear exactly how the Enochic authors themselves and the Qumran community may, at any given time, have fit into such a dispute.¹³

The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36)

These chapters are a collection of revelatory traditions that have accreted over a period of time. We shall treat the component sections in the order of their appearance in 1 Enoch. Our earliest Aramaic manuscript evidence indicates that at least chapters 1–11 were already a literary unit in the first half of the second century B.C.E.¹⁴ As we shall see, chapters 1–5 are the introduction to a larger number of chapters, probably 6–36. Evidence in 1 Enoch 85–90 indicates that 1 Enoch 1–36 was known before the death of Judas Maccabeus in 160 B.C.E.¹⁵ Hence we are justified in treating these chapters as a product of the period before 175 B.C.E.

A. Introduction	chaps. 1–5
B. The rebellion of the angels	6–11
C. Enoch’s heavenly commissioning	12–16
D. Enoch’s journey to the west	17–19
E. Additional journey traditions	20–36
1. List of accompanying angels	20
2. Journey back from the west	21–27
3. Journey to the east	28–33
4. Journeys to the four corners of the earth	34–36

1 Enoch 1–5

Presently these chapters are the introduction to the whole of 1 Enoch, announcing the coming of the great judgment as a revelation that Enoch had received and transmitted for the benefit of the righteous chosen who would be living in the last days, that is, the real author's own time. The emphasis on the judgment and other points of similarity with chapters 20–36 suggest that chapters 1–5 were *composed* as an introduction to chapters 6–36.¹⁶

The opening verses (1:1-2) paraphrase Deuteronomy 33:1 (the Blessing of Moses) and Numbers 24:3-4 (one of Balaam's oracles). Thus the author sets himself in the line of the prophets and cites heavenly visions and auditions as the authority for the revelations that follow. The passages that frame the section (1:4-9 + 5:4-9) are a lengthy oracle in late prophetic style announcing the theme of the book: an imminent judgment in which God will vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked.¹⁷ The first half of the oracle (1:4-9) recalls such biblical theophanic texts as Deuteronomy 33, Micah 1, and Zechariah 14:5. The latter half (1 Enoch 5:4-9) draws on the imagery and language of Isaiah 65 with its contrast between the long life and blessing awaiting the righteous and the curses that will befall the wicked. The prose passage in the middle of the oracle (1 Enoch 2:1—5:3), written in a style typical of wisdom literature,¹⁸ contrasts nature's obedience with human rebellion. Sinful humans are culpable because they do not obey the moral order that God has created in the cosmos.

1 Enoch 6–11

This story about the rebellion of the angels (“the watchers”) and their judgment is the nucleus and fountainhead of the traditions in chapters 1–36 and is presumed throughout. With the possible exception of chapters 72–82, it is the earliest tradition in 1 Enoch. Unlike the other sections of 1 Enoch, chapters 6–11 contain no references to Enoch himself or any indications that they were composed in his name.

A. The Proposal (Gen 6:1-2a)		6:1-8	
B. The Deed (Gen 6:2b, 4b)		7:1abc	
	[Teaching		7:1de]
C. The Results (Gen 6:4cd, 4a)		7:2-5	
1. Birth of the giants	7:2		
2. Ensuing desolation	7:3-5		
D. The Plea		7:6—8:4	
1. Of the earth (Gen 4:10)	7:6		
[2. What Asael taught			8:1]
[3. Its results			8:1-2]
[4. What the other angels taught			8:3]
5. Of humanity	8:4		

E. The Holy Ones' Response (Gen 6:5)		9:1-8
1. They hear	9:1-3	
2. They intercede	9:4-11	
[a. Asael		9:6]
[b. Shemihazah and mysteries		9:8c]
F. God's Response (Gen 6:13)		10-11
1. Sariel sent to Noah	10:1-3	
[2. Raphael sent to Asael		10:4-8]
[3. Gabriel sent against giants		10:9-10]
4. Michael sent		
a. Against Shemihazah	10:11-14	
b. Against the giants	10:15	
c. To cleanse the earth	10:16, 20	
5. Description of the end time (Gen 9)	10:17-19, 21—11:2	

Literary analysis suggests that the passages bracketed in the outline are secondary additions to a story about the rebellion and punishment of the angelic chieftain, Shemihazah, his subordinates, and their progeny, the giants.¹⁹ The original story was an elaboration of Genesis 6:1-4. It divides into three parts, each with significant departures from the biblical text:²⁰

I. *The origins of a devastated world* (A–C): The intercourse between the sons of God and the daughters of men (Gen 6:1-2, 4) is here explicitly an act of conscious and deliberate angelic rebellion against God. The giants are described in detail as a race of powerful and bellicose half-breeds who devour the fruits of the earth, slaughter humankind and the animal kingdom, and then turn on one another. Thus the human race and “all flesh” are not the perpetrators of great evil, which God will punish (Gen 6:5-7, 11-13), but the victims of that evil, which has been committed by the giants.

II. *The turning point: a plea for help* (D–E): Here the archangels, and not God (Gen 6:5), view the state of the earth. The author places on their lips a long, eloquent, and impassioned plea in behalf of humanity.

III. *The divine resolution of the situation* (F): The divine Judge issues orders to the archangels. Sariel instructs Noah about the ark. Michael is commissioned to bind the rebel watchers until their final punishment on the day of judgment and to destroy the giants. The passage then flows into a divine commission to obliterate all evil and to cleanse the earth. It concludes with a description of a renewed earth, in which elements from Genesis 9 have been modified, intensified, and augmented with mythic material that is appropriate to a description of the end time: fabulous fertility and life span, the permanent absence of all evil of every sort, the conversion of the Gentiles—in short the final and full actualization of God's sovereignty on earth.

In addition to being biblical interpretation, this story is myth. Conditions in the author's world are the result of events in the unseen, heavenly realm. Moreover, the end time will be characterized by a quality that is beyond human ken and experience.

The author's thought is also typological. The events of the last days (the author's own time) mirror the events of primordial times. At the time of the flood, God judged a wicked earth and its inhabitants and started things anew. Once again the world has gone askew, but judgment is imminent and a new age will begin. Within the framework of this typological scheme, the variations from the biblical text may be read as reflections of the author's purposes and of the events and circumstances of the author's own time, when the enemy is a breed of mighty warriors whose bloody deeds threaten the very existence of creation. Since the archangels are intercessors between humanity and God, their prayer relays the prayer of the author's constituency and reflects a crisis in the faith of the people, who ponder the contradiction between God's complete foreknowledge and God's inactivity in the midst of the present disaster. The author's answer is placed in the mouth of God, who has given orders to the archangels. The judgment is at hand!

Our author is making a statement about the nature of contemporary evil and about its obliteration. This evil is more than the wicked deeds of violent people. Behind the mighty of the earth stand demonic powers. Given the supernatural origins of this evil, only God and God's heavenly agents can annihilate it. And they will do so. Therefore the audience can find comfort and take heart. Thus, in its viewpoint and function, this story foreshadows the apocalyptic literature of the second century to which we shall turn in the next chapter.

Because the story of Shemihazah is set in primordial times, attempts to determine the concrete historical setting of its composition will always fall short of absolute certainty.²¹ Given this qualification, a possible setting appears to be the Diadochian wars. Alexander's conquests had begun a period of war and bloodshed. The large number of the Diadochi, the repeated campaigns in Palestine, and the multiplicity of wars and assassinations provide a suitable context for the descriptions of the battles of the giants—their devastation of the earth and humanity and their destruction of one another. Within this context, the myth of supernatural procreation may be read as a parody of the claims of divine procreation attached to certain of the Diadochi.²² The author would be saying, yes, the parentage of the "giants" is supernatural, but their fathers are demons and rebels against heaven.

At some point the Shemihazah story was expanded either by ad hoc elaboration or through the addition of other traditions about rebel angels.²³ Now the rebellion involves the revelation of two kinds of heavenly secrets. Shemihazah and his subordinates reveal the magical arts and various kinds of astrological and cosmic prognostication (7:1de; 8:3). In addition, Shemihazah's lieutenant Asael is identified with an angelic rebel chieftain who reveals the arts of metallurgy and mining;²⁴ the result is the creation of weapons and seductive cosmetics. The material about Asael reflects the influence of Greek myths about Prometheus or perhaps other Near Eastern myths about similar figures.²⁵ In subsequent developing tradition, the figure of Asael comes to be identified with Azazel in Leviticus 16.²⁶

The mythic character of this polemic against prohibited revelations is consonant with that of the Shemihazah story. Primordial rebellion is the cause of present evils: occult knowledge, bloodshed, and sexual misconduct. The precise object of the polemic against

magic and prognostication is uncertain. While one might cite Gentile practices, magic was practiced also by Jews, and the Qumran Scrolls include both a horoscope and a bron-tological document (prognostication on the basis of thunderclaps).²⁷ The Scrolls docu-ment a Jewish community that collected texts with cosmic prognostications as well as other texts that polemicized against such prognostication.

1 Enoch 12–16²⁸

This section of 1 Enoch reinforces the message of chapters 6–11. It does not retell the story of the watchers' revolt, but it does refer to it. Like chapters 6–11, it anticipates the coming judgment of the watchers. This announcement comes from the mouth of Enoch, "the scribe of righteousness," who is the central figure in these chapters.

Enoch is the recipient and transmitter of revelation about the nature and implications of the angelic revolt. He first receives this revelation from an angel. When he informs the watchers of their coming judgment, they ask Enoch to intercede for them. In response to this prayer, he sees a vision of heaven that reinforces the first revelation. As he relates this to the watchers (chaps. 14–16), he describes in great detail his ascent to heaven and his vision of the divine throne room. This description has a specific function within the nar-rative. Because the watchers have come from heaven, they know what it is like. By telling them of his experience of heaven, Enoch leaves no doubt in their minds that the message he brings comes straight from the divine throne room. This fictional (Enochic) setting in the story quite likely reveals the real setting for this piece of literature. The *author* pre-sents an interpretation of chapters 6–11 and offers it to *his* audience as a piece of divine revelation. The descriptions of his ascent and of the throne room are his documentation.

These chapters mention only briefly the angelic revelation of secrets. They focus instead on the watchers' sinful intercourse with women. The act involved the unnatural mixture of heavenly and earthly, spirit and flesh (12:4; 15:3-7), and violated the divine order of creation. As such it was bound to fail and result in disaster. The union of angels and women could produce only half-breeds and bastards, and the deed could not be eas-ily undone. When the giants died, their spirits were set loose in the world as evil spirits (15:8-12). The author interprets chapters 6–11 as a description of the incarnation of evil into the world, but he does so with his own nuance. The giants were an ancient race whose evil spirits—the progeny and incarnation of the watchers' rebellious spirits—now infest a troubled world.

The narrative of Enoch's call to preach to the rebel angels imitates the form of biblical prophetic commissionings. The author is especially beholden to Ezekiel 1–2 and to the account of that prophet's tour of the eschatological temple in Ezekiel 40–48. Making use of these materials, the author depicts Enoch's ascent to heaven and his progress through the courts of the heavenly temple right up to its holy of holies, where the Deity is enthroned. This use of the prophetic commissioning form suggests that the author saw himself in the line of the prophets. At the same time these chapters mark an important transitional point at which the tradition about Ezekiel's throne vision is moving in the

direction of later Jewish mysticism. The description of the heavenly temple is shot through with paradox. The temple is constructed of hailstones, ice, and snow but is surrounded by fire. When Enoch enters it, he is as hot as fire and as cold as ice. The throne room at the heart of the ice temple is a raging inferno. The transcendence of the Deity, which is presumed and depicted throughout, foreshadows the viewpoint of later mysticism.

The oracles against the watchers depict them as priests of the heavenly temple who have forsaken their stations and defiled their purity (15:3-4; cf. 12:4). The language is reminiscent of polemics against the Jerusalem priesthood.²⁹ Taken in conjunction with elements in chapters 12–13 that parallel the story of Ezra,³⁰ they may indicate that the author looked upon the Jerusalem priesthood as in some sense defiled. The events in these chapters are set in upper Galilee near Mount Hermon. The multiple references to this area, and their accuracy, suggest that this tradition emanated from this geographical region, which had a long history as sacred territory for Israelites, Christians, and pagans.³¹ *

1 Enoch 17–19

Angelic guides lead Enoch on a cosmic tour. With the exception of 18:1-5 (a *topically* arranged section about the seer's visit to the winds and about their functions), the direction of his journey is toward the west and culminates beyond the mountain throne of God in the northwest with a vision of the watchers' places of punishment. In its pattern the present section presumes chapters 12–16; like them it relates a journey to the throne of God, climaxing in a vision in which Enoch hears a word of judgment against the rebellious watchers. Here, however, the narrative has been shaped after the model of the Greek *nekylia*, a literary form that recounted a journey to the place of the dead and a vision of their punishments.³² The author has employed and nuanced that form as a means of reinforcing the message of the book as a whole, namely, the judgment and punishment of the watchers. Temporally oriented predictions about that judgment are here given a locative referent: Enoch sees *the places* where the announced judgment will occur. As in chapters 14–16, the rapid listing of the places in the cosmos through which Enoch passes provides the reader with a kind of documentation that Enoch has made the trip all the way out there. The places listed indicate that the author was familiar with popular Near Eastern and Greek mythic geography.³³

The author's subscript in 19:3 concludes a work whose central theme is the coming judgment (chaps. 6–19 or 1–19). The primary focus throughout is on the angelic, supernatural level—on the rebel angels, the giants, and the demons, who are the cause of the present evil, and on the divine figures and functionaries who will execute judgment on them.

1 Enoch 20–36

These chapters gather a second set of traditions about Enoch's cosmic journeys. Chapter 20 introduces the cast of angels who serve as Enoch's guides. Thereafter a stereotyped

vision form is employed: arrival, vision, question, angelic interpretation, blessing (“I came to . . . I saw . . . I asked the angel . . . he said . . . Then I blessed the Lord”).

In chapters 21–27 Enoch retraces his journey from the far northwest eastward to Jerusalem, the center of the earth. The point of departure and direction of the journey indicates that this journey narrative presumes the existence of chapters 17–19. Doublets of the traditions in those chapters are here interpolated with eschatological elements and are interwoven with descriptions of places of special eschatological significance. Chapter 21 describes the places of punishment that have already been described in 18:10—19:2.³⁴ In chapter 22 Enoch arrives at the place of the dead, whose spirits are compartmentalized according to type until the day of judgment. Here the righteous receive a foretaste of their coming bliss while the wicked are already suffering.

In chapters 24–25 the seer is once again at the mountain throne of God. The description of 18:6–9 has been augmented by reference to God’s final visitation of the earth, mention of the tree of life, and a description of the blessings that the righteous will experience in the new Jerusalem. Enoch’s vision of the Holy City in chapters 26–27 has a similar emphasis. Chapters 25–27 take up eschatological predictions in Isaiah 65–66 and set them in the revelatory form that is typical of these chapters of 1 Enoch. Chapters 28:1—32:2 modify this vision form. Paralleling 17:1–5 they rapidly recount landmarks that document the seer’s journey along the eastern spice routes, which culminates in his arrival at paradise (again the vision form in 32:3–6) and beyond it at the ends of the earth (33:1). In 33:2–4 Enoch refers to the astronomical treatise (chaps. 72–82). Chapters 34–36 summarize his vision of the winds (chap. 76). The book closes with an expanded form of the blessing that concludes most of the visions in chapters 21–33.

The Apocalyptic Worldview of 1 Enoch

Chapters 1–36 of 1 Enoch are our earliest extant example of a Jewish text that is governed by a full-blown apocalyptic worldview, in which a set of complementary dualisms or polarities is relieved by means of a revealed message received by an ancient sage.³⁵ A *spatial* dualism contrasts the inhabited world, the site of violence and injustice, with the heavenly realm, where God’s will is done and judgment is being prepared, and with the outer reaches of earth’s disk, the location of the places of reward and punishment. A *temporal* dualism juxtaposes the present time of evil with the primordial time of angelic rebellion and the future time of adjudication. An *ontological* dualism sets humanity over against the rebel watchers and demons on the one hand, and God and God’s good angels on the other hand. The seer has traveled to heaven and the outer reaches of the cosmos and has seen into both the past and the future. His revelation, or apocalypse, to a world bereft of justice is that God’s will, which is being done in heaven, will be fulfilled on earth when the imminent future judgment eradicates the present evil that was spawned in the past. This good news, contained in the writings of the ancient sage and seer, constitutes the eschatological community of the chosen, who abide by Enoch’s law and trust in his promise of imminent deliverance. This same message will reappear in other parts of

1 Enoch and in a modified form in writings like the book of Daniel (for both, see below, pp. 77–86) and the New Testament book of Revelation.

Enochic apocalypticism blends a variety of traditions, themes, and literary forms from the Bible and noncanonical Jewish literature, as well as from non-Jewish sources. Drawing on Israelite precursors, it provides an eschatological interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4, rewrites history from Genesis to the Maccabees (1 Enoch 85–90), employs the themes and forms of prophecy, and takes up themes and forms found in biblical and nonbiblical wisdom texts.³⁶ The blend is dominated especially by the dualistic worldview described above, the book's claim to a new revelation (presented as very old), and the emphasis on eschatology. The Enochic use of pagan mythological motifs and its preachments against Gentile oppression are clear marks of this text's setting in the Hellenistic world and of its complex interaction with the events and culture of that world. The next book of concern to us offers a contemporary blend of some of the same elements from Israelite tradition, albeit with a very different emphasis and set of concerns.³⁷ It also presents another important witness to the interaction of Palestinian Judaism and Hellenistic culture.

The Wisdom of Ben Sira (Sirach or Ecclesiasticus)

Joshua Ben (“the son of”) Eleazar Ben Sira³⁸ was a professional sage and scribe who studied and taught in Jerusalem during the first quarter of the second century B.C.E. He collected the fruits of his labors in a volume that he published in his own name (50:27), a fact that makes it almost unique in our literature. “The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach,” the title of the book found in most English editions, employs the Greek form of his names and is derived from manuscripts of a Greek translation of the work that Ben Sira's grandson made from its Hebrew original.³⁹

The book's genre and contents appear, at first, to be quite similar to the biblical book of Proverbs, although it is roughly twice as long as its canonical counterpart.⁴⁰ For much of his fifty-one chapters, Ben Sira employs the traditional form of the proverb to expound his views on right and wrong conduct and their consequences. Closer comparison of the two books, however, indicates some significant differences in genre, authorial concerns, and theological perspective. In addition to the proverbial form, Ben Sira includes some autobiographical narrative, two petitionary prayers, some prophetic forms, a long hymn in praise of the fathers, and some poems about “Lady Wisdom.” He focuses on persons and events in Israelite history, emphasizes the critical importance of temple and cult (religious ritual), and indicates interest in the prophets and eschatology. For him wisdom is, to no small degree, embodied in the Mosaic Torah, although he also appreciates and sometimes speaks in the idiom of Hellenistic intellectual tradition.

Author

Ben Sira offers us a few glimpses of himself in his professional activities.⁴¹ In 38:24—39:11 he contrasts the labor of the farmer and the tradesman with that of the scribe.

Each had “set his heart” on his particular task (38:26–28, 30; 39:5). For his part, the scribe (38:24) devoted himself full-time to a study of “the *law* of the Most High . . . the *wisdom* of all the ancients . . . and *prophecies*.” Thus he was a scholar of what would later emerge as Israel’s Scriptures and what in part was already recognized as such (Torah and Prophets). Moreover, his study included not only Israelite wisdom traditions but also the wisdom lore of other parts of the ancient Near East (cf. 39:4 and 39:1, “*all* the ancients”).⁴² Especially noteworthy is his sense of being a recipient of, participant in, and transmitter of traditional wisdom (24:25–33).⁴³ As a sage he served as counselor to rulers (39:4; cf. 38:33). His experience was not limited to his homeland; he traveled abroad, where he “tested the good and evil among humans” (39:4; cf. 34:9–12 [Gk. 31:9–13]). In addition to being a scholar, the scribe was also a teacher (39:8; cf. 24:33; 51:23).⁴⁴ To judge from Ben Sira’s warning about association with the unscrupulous rich and powerful, his instructions on etiquette at banquets, and his frequent advice on riches, lending, and almsgiving, his students must have included in good part the youth of the Jerusalem aristocracy.⁴⁵ Whether, in addition to or in connection with his roles as scribe, scholar, and sage, Ben Sira was a member of the Jerusalem priesthood is disputed. He makes many positive references to the priesthood and the temple cult, and he identifies Jerusalem as the place where divine Wisdom dwells and “serves” (24:10–11). His strong support of the temple, cult, and priesthood may point in that direction (see below, pp. 59–60), although these statements may reflect rather his status as a “retainer” of the priestly and governing class.⁴⁶

Literary Aspects

Prefixed to the Wisdom of Joshua Ben Sira is the translator’s prologue. The structure of the body of the book is a matter of scholarly debate, and there is some evidence that the book was subject to a process of ongoing composition and editing rather than being a onetime composition.⁴⁷ There is general agreement, however, that, in its present form, the Greek text divides into two major sections. The first begins with a poem about Wisdom (chaps. 1–2), and an analogous poem in chapter 24 divides the book in two. The work climaxes with a doxology to the Creator (42:15—43:33) and a recitation of Israel’s history in the form of an extensive song of praise to the heroes of the past (chaps. 44–50).⁴⁸ It concludes in the first-person singular with an author’s subscript and a blessing on the reader (50:27–29),⁴⁹ a psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance from death (51:1–12), and a poem about the seeking of Wisdom (51:13–22)⁵⁰ that topically relates back to chapter 1 and links with 51:23–30, the author’s final exhortation that the reader join with him in the pursuit of Wisdom.⁵¹

The selective analysis of chapters 1–23 that follows provides entree to the literary forms and techniques employed by Ben Sira and offers a basis on which the reader may analyze the literary aspects of chapters 24–51. Chapters 1–2 are the first of a number of sections on the personified figure of Wisdom (4:11–19; 6:18–37; 14:20—15:10; 24:1–29; 51:13–22). Chapters 2:1—4:10 are addressed to the sage’s pupil(s) under the familiar title

“child” or “children” (2:1; 3:1, 17; 4:1).⁵² Continuing the theme of “the fear of God” in 1:11-30,⁵³ chapter 2 exhorts the reader to the patient pursuit of Wisdom and the testing that it brings with it. In 3:1-16 Ben Sira discusses, from a variety of perspectives, the honoring of one’s parents. The verses below are typical of this reflection and of the distich (a proverb of two parallel lines), which constitutes the basic building block of this work (as it does of the book of Proverbs).

He who honors his father atones for sins,
and like one who lays up treasure is he who glorifies his mother.

(3:3-4)

He who honors his father will be gladdened by his own children,
and in the day of his prayer he will be heard. (3:5)

Honor your father in deed and word,
that a blessing from him may come upon you. (3:8)

For the blessing of a father strengthens the houses of his children,
but the curse of a mother uproots their foundations. (3:9)

Here, as often, the idea of action and consequence is expressed, whether in the two halves of a line (vv 3-4, 9), in the succession of lines (v 8), or in both (v 5). Typical of Ben Sira is the combination of related proverbs with an identical formula (“He who honors/glorifies his father,” vv 3, 5, 6) and the linking of proverbs by word association or catchword (“blessing,” vv 8-9). The result is a more polished literary product than is found in many analogous collections in Proverbs (cf., e.g., Prov 12:13-23 on speech). In Sirach 3:17-31 Ben Sira develops the theme of humility and pride, which may have been placed here because the reference to almsgiving in 3:30 links with 4:1-10 and its exhortations to help the poor and needy. To be a father to the orphans is to be like a son of the Most High (4:10), a thought that links with another section on Wisdom (4:11-19), who “exalts her sons” (4:11).

The proper and improper use of speech is the topic of 4:23—6:1. An apparently unrelated section on wealth (5:1-8) has been attached, possibly because of the introductory formula “Do not *say*” in 5:3-6. A discussion of friendship (6:5-17) follows the section on speech, perhaps due to word association—the reference to “voice” and “tongue” in 6:5. Common introductory formulas are again evident (6:8-10, 14-16), indicating a conscious literary style. Another poem on Wisdom follows (6:19-31), with some related injunctions attached to it (6:32-37).

The negative imperative is a formal device that holds together 7:1-16, although topical subsections on public office (vv 4-7), escaping God’s judgment (vv 8-9), and speech (vv 11-14) are in evidence. The use of the negative imperative in 7:18-20 may have been the linking device at the beginning of a major section that discusses: human relations and associations (7:18—9:18); friends and family (7:18-28); the priesthood (7:29-31, linked to the previous subsection by the common idea of gift in v 28 and vv 29-31); the poor and troubled (7:32-36); the rich and powerful (8:1-2); boors (8:3-4); the aged (8:6-9); sinners and the insolent (8:10-11); those stronger than oneself (8:12-14, perhaps origi-

nally connected with 8:1-2); other undesirables (8:15-19); women (9:1-9); and others desirable and undesirable (9:10-16). A section on magistrates and rulers (10:1—11:9), interpolated with a subsection on honor and riches (10:19—11:1), leads to a long discussion of poverty and wealth, rich and poor (11:10—14:19), which again indicates subcollections and subtopics. Another poem on Wisdom follows (14:20—15:10).

In 15:11—18:14 Ben Sira switches from his practical, deed-oriented discussion to theological speculation. His topic, however, is related. He discusses responsibility for one's deeds, the certainty of divine knowledge and retribution, creation, covenant and Torah, and the possibility of repenting of one's sinful deeds.

Returning to the realm of the practical and specific, Ben Sira discusses caution in speech and other matters (18:19—19:17, introduced by several other sayings on speech [18:15-18]). Four sayings beginning with "Question!" constitute a subunit (19:13-17). A brief section on wisdom and folly is connected by word association (19:30) with another lengthy discussion of proper and improper speech (chap. 20). Sin and the sinner are the topic of 21:1-10. Given the essential identity of sin and folly in the wisdom tradition, we have a natural transition to 21:11—22:18, where "fool" is the primary catchword in a wide variety of observations. Ben Sira uses a similar device in 41:17—42:8, a catalog of things of which one should be ashamed or not ashamed. Likewise, in 40:18-26 he combines diverse ideas by a common formula (x and y are good, but z is better).

The catchword "heart" connects 22:18 with 22:19, which begins a section on speech (22:19—23:15) that includes a prayer (22:27—23:6) with a brief mention of that subject (22:27). At the conclusion of the first major section of the book, a discussion of sexual sins (23:16-27) with its reference to an adulterous woman offers a transition to the praise of her foil or counterpart, Lady Wisdom (chap. 24), who is celebrated also at the end of part two (51:13-22).⁵⁴

Our analysis of chapters 1–23 has laid out the major literary forms and devices employed by Ben Sira: short two-line proverbs, some of them with similar formulas, assembled in topical collections; the use of word association and common topics and formulas to link these collections to others; and the interweaving of sections on concrete topics and examples with poems about Wisdom, prayers and hymns, and extended theological discussion.

Wisdom in Ben Sira

Ben Sira includes under the category of wisdom instruction a spectrum of interests and concerns ranging from practical to speculative, from secular to religious and theological.⁵⁵

Practical Advice

The sage writes about such down-to-earth matters as table etiquette (31:12—32:13 [Gk. 34:12—35:17]), caution in one's dealings with others (18:15—19:17), and wise and unwise associations (12:8—13:20). In treating these topics Ben Sira speaks as a man of experience, accumulating examples as he looks at the topic from a variety of viewpoints,

and many of his observations and admonitions still ring true today. Wisdom about life is not simple, and proper action requires the discernment that comes from experience. As a man of experience, Ben Sira knows that a mistake or faux pas in these matters can have the gravest consequences. These consequences are generally seen to be natural and inevitable and are seldom defined as divine retribution, as they are when he is speaking of breaches of God's law.

Wisdom and Torah

It is in Ben Sira's identification of Wisdom and Torah that we find the heart and dynamic of his thought.⁵⁶ The practical sides of his advice notwithstanding, he is concerned for the most part with one's conduct vis-à-vis the Torah and with the consequences of that conduct. Although the book of Proverbs identifies the fear of God as the beginning of wisdom, and the author of Psalm 119 extols at great length the joy of the Torah, the Wisdom of Joshua Ben Sira is the earliest datable work in our literature that discusses the relationship of Wisdom and Torah in detail and in theory.⁵⁷

In chapter 24 Ben Sira lays out his speculation about Wisdom and Torah.⁵⁸ This long passage is a counterpart to Proverbs 8 and also bears striking resemblance to Hellenistic texts about the goddess Isis.⁵⁹ The main part of the chapter is a hymn of four strophes, in which Wisdom praises herself (vv 3-7, 8-12, 13-15, 16-22).⁶⁰ Here Wisdom is personified and depicted as a female, the first of God's creatures (24:3; cf. 1:4; Prov 8:22), who is at home in the heavenly council (Sir 24:2). Proceeding from God's mouth (24:3), she participated in the creative process (cf. Prov 8:30)—whether as God's creative word (Gen 1:3), as God's breath construed as the life-giving mist that covered the barren primordial earth (Sir 24:3; cf. Gen 2:4-6), or as God's endowment on created beings (Sir 24:6; cf. 1:9). After Wisdom had pierced the heights of the ether and plumbed the depths of the abyss (24:4-6), God commanded this denizen of the angelic council (24:2) to pitch her tent and find her resting place in Israel, where she would minister to God in the Jerusalem temple (24:8-11). Thus the universal endowment of humankind became the Creator's unique gift to the chosen people. Employing the language of simile, Wisdom now describes how she took root and grew in Israel like a pleasant tree (24:12-18), and she concludes by inviting her hearers to partake of her life-giving fruit, which satisfies any hunger and quenches all thirst (24:19-22).⁶¹

Ben Sira then interprets Wisdom's hymn:

All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God,
the law that Moses commanded us
as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. (24:23)

Employing a new simile, the sage likens Torah to the Jordan River and to the life-giving streams that surrounded paradise (Gen 2:10-14). As such it gushes forth Wisdom into a boundless ocean and a fathomless and inexhaustible abyss (Sir 24:25-29).

There is a further stage in the mediation of Wisdom. The sage, in this case Ben Sira, is a channel that conveys the life-giving waters of Torah's Wisdom into another sea—his collective teaching, to be found in his book (24:30-34). In another simile, like Wisdom he is an enlightener of Israel (24:32; cf. v 27). Through prayerful, inspired study of Torah, wisdom, and prophecy (39:1-8), the sage or scribe becomes a secondary but evidently necessary channel of God's Wisdom. The place of prophecy has been taken by the scribe's study⁶² and interpretation of the ancient writings, especially the Torah. This produces a deposit of teaching that Ben Sira considers to be authoritative, to judge from his claim that he speaks like a prophet (24:33) and perhaps from his use of prophetic forms.⁶³

Ben Sira presents a kind of drama of salvation—salvation not in the sense of deliverance from something but as the bestowal of well-being, blessing, and life. His theological starting point is the biblical (esp. the Deuteronomic) view of covenant and Torah.⁶⁴ Through the covenant, God bestowed on Israel its status as the chosen people. In the same covenant, God set the divine commandments before them. The alternative possibilities to obey and disobey these commandments would lead like two roads to blessing and life or to curse and death.⁶⁵ One could not short-circuit the process that led from the grace of covenantal election to the fullness of covenantal blessing and life. Responsible obedience to the commandments of Torah was an integral and necessary part of the covenant. In this sense Torah was a gift that brought the possibility of life.

The focus of Ben Sira's covenantal theology is governed first by the fact that he is a teacher of ethics. For this reason, though he takes for granted Israel's covenantal status as God's chosen people (24:12; 46:1), he rarely speaks of the covenant except in the context of Torah.⁶⁶ From this same perspective his recitation of Israel's history—a rarity in Israelite wisdom literature—focuses on the right deeds, piety, and obedience of individual Israelites of renown. The catalog provides, in part, a multiplicity of examples of the life and attitudes Ben Sira seeks to inculcate throughout the book.⁶⁷

Ben Sira's covenantal theology is also marked by a kind of mythicizing that superimposes an ahistorical and heavenly dimension onto the historical phenomenon of Torah. The chronological starting point for his drama of salvation is not Mount Sinai or even the exodus. In the beginning was Wisdom. This personified entity is functionally an agent or power. She first brought life to the world. At a particular point in history, she was sent to earth and embodied in Torah, where she offers the dynamic for obedience and hence the possibility for life. Thus Ben Sira's myth of Wisdom is the story of how God's freely given, innervating, vivifying goodness has been made present in Torah. It is the story of grace told from the perspective of eternity.

In chapter 24 and in his other poems about Wisdom (chaps. 1-2; 4:11-19; 6:18-31; 14:20—15:10; 51:13-30), Ben Sira describes several aspects of the Wisdom that resides in Torah.⁶⁸ Through Torah, Wisdom enlightens and instructs, revealing the will of God that leads to life if it is obeyed. Wisdom is also a means toward obedience. She is preacher and proclaimer (24:19-22; 51:23-30 through the mouth of the teacher) and helper (4:11). However, Ben Sira is under no illusion that the way of obedience is easy. It

requires steadfastness, perseverance, and endurance (2:1-18).⁶⁹ Wisdom has her own tortuous discipline, her fetter, yoke, and collar (4:17; 6:18-31; 51:26). Nonetheless, those who pursue her she will feed and exalt and bless with gladness and goodness and the life and blessing that God offers through the covenant (4:18; 6:28-31; 15:1-6).⁷⁰ The theme of blessing through discipline we have already met in the story of Tobit.⁷¹

The myth of Wisdom reappears in the book of Baruch with explicit reference to the Deuteronomic covenant.⁷² Early Christianity also employs the Wisdom myth, substituting Jesus of Nazareth for Torah as the unique historical embodiment of Wisdom.⁷³

Ethical and Religious Teaching

As a teacher of Torah, Ben Sira is concerned more with ethical matters than ritual matters. A great deal of his advice relates to household relationships.⁷⁴ In 3:1-16 and 7:27-28 he expounds the commandment to honor one's parents.⁷⁵ Elsewhere he writes about relationships to one's wife, children, and slaves.⁷⁶ Ben Sira's attitude toward sexual matters is based on the biblical viewpoint. Incest and adultery are wrong (23:16-18). Other sexual relationships without benefit of marriage are not condemned *per se*, but they are to be avoided from a pragmatic point of view (9:1-9, where his advice applies also to adultery). Ben Sira's attitude toward women is thoroughly male-oriented, outright disparaging in places, and offensive to modern sensitivities.⁷⁷ To no small degree it reflected the values and, perhaps, the anxieties of a patriarchal society that saw "females' function as part of a cultural symbol system embodied in the concepts of honor and shame."⁷⁸

Other interpersonal relationships are of special concern to Ben Sira.⁷⁹ Friendship stands high on his agenda,⁸⁰ and he celebrates the goodness of friendship, the need for caution in choosing one's friends, and the importance of faithfulness to those who are chosen.⁸¹ For Ben Sira forgiveness is an important quality, and one passage that provides a context for the Lord's Prayer speaks of the reciprocity of forgiveness (28:1-7; cf. Matt 6:12).⁸² Repeatedly Ben Sira turns to the topic of wealth, discussing its ethical implications.⁸³ He contrasts generosity and stinginess (Sir 14:3-8); enjoins almsgiving and other acts of kindness to the poor and needy (4:1-6; 7:32-36; 29:9-13); recommends lending, with all its problems (29:1-7, 14-20); and warns against fraud and ill-gotten riches (5:8; 21:8). Wealth in itself is not wrong, but Ben Sira is not optimistic about the possibility of the rich remaining honest and God-pleasing in their dealings with others (26:29-27:2; 31:1-11). Although Ben Sira is a protagonist of the poor and humble, his treatment of the topic is nuanced by "his ambiguous status vis-à-vis his rich superiors."⁸⁴

Although Ben Sira concentrates on ethical issues, he is also concerned about the Jerusalem temple cult; he holds the priesthood in high regard. Among the strands of the Pentateuch, it is the Priestly redaction to which he is most closely related.⁸⁵ In his catalog of heroes he devotes twice as much space to Aaron as he does to Moses (45:6-22; cf. vv 1-5), and he concludes his hymn to these men of renown with a lengthy section in praise of the high priest Simon.⁸⁶ In a passage that expands on the biblical command-

ment to love God (Deut 6:5), he commands his readers to honor the priests and to give them their due (Sir 7:29-31). The cult is God's means of repairing violations of the covenant (45:16), and Ben Sira encourages participation in the cult (35:4-11 [Gk. 32:6-13]). Nonetheless, in true prophetic style he warns against contradictions between cult and life, specifically the offering of sacrifices from ill-gotten riches and possessions. Alternatively, obedience and deeds of charity function like cultic acts and provide "atonement" (34:18—35:3, 12-20 [Gk. 31:21—32:5, 14-26]; 3:3, 30). Ben Sira includes three prayers in his wisdom collection (23:1-6; 36:1-17 [Gk. 33:1-13 + 36:16-22]; 51:1-12).

Ben Sira: Between Wisdom and Torah

As we have seen, Ben Sira deals with ethical and ritual matters that are treated in the Torah. Indeed, words for "law," "commandments," and "covenant" occur more than fifty times in his book.⁸⁷ Yet, with the exception of 3:1-16, where he ruminates on the commandment to obey one's parents, one is hard-pressed to find any extended reference to a biblical law or commandment. Ben Sira is not a halakic interpreter of the Torah, one who spells out how one should observe the Torah in this or that situation. In 3:1-16 there is scarcely a reference to *what* specifically constitutes honoring one's parents; the substance of the passage is the commandment and the consequences of obedience and disobedience, spelled out in typical proverbial form.⁸⁸ Thus he has taken one paradigm for instruction in the right life—Mosaic covenantal Torah—and he has folded it into another paradigm—the wisdom tradition of moral admonition.⁸⁹ A similar melding occurs in the Qumran 4QInstruction and perhaps in the later strata of 1 Enoch.⁹⁰

Retribution and Theodicy

Divine retribution in the form of blessing and curse was essential to the covenant, as we have seen. The idea is built into the very structure of many of Ben Sira's proverbs that describe the consequences of one's conduct. Where such conduct involves obedience or disobedience of Torah, the consequences are understood as divine retribution.

Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High,
and it will profit you more than gold.
Store up almsgiving in your treasury,
and it will rescue you from all affliction. (29:11-12)

Ben Sira did not, of course, expect perfection, and he speaks of the means of atonement and of forgiveness (2:11; 28:2). Nonetheless, one is not to presume on God's mercy, as if God would continue to forgive a multitude of sins heaped one on the other (5:4-7).⁹¹ On a number of occasions Ben Sira speaks about retribution in polemical fashion.⁹² He

argues against the idea that God does not see sin or is not concerned with punishing it (15:19-20; 16:17-23; 17:20; 23:18-20). His programmatic treatment of the subject is in 15:11—18:14. The passage appears to be arguing on a theoretical and intellectual level against certain fixed points of view: the kind of determinism that excludes free will (15:11-20) and the theory that there can be no retribution in the universe (16:17).⁹³ While this possibility cannot be excluded,⁹⁴ it should be noted that Ben Sira's argument moves in a practical direction. He discusses creation (16:26—17:6), God's covenant with Israel (17:7-17), and God's charge that they obey the divine commandments and heed God's warning of retribution (17:14-23). He then moves into an exhortation to repent (17:24-29) and concludes with a passage in praise of God's uniqueness, especially God's patience and compassion (17:30—18:14). Ben Sira appears to be less interested in arguing for free will and retribution than in preaching and in exhorting his audience to act responsibly within the covenant. The same practical direction in his argument is evident in 5:7 and 23:21.

A doctrine of creation is central to Ben Sira's understanding of covenantal responsibility and retribution. God created humans with the free will that places in their hands the choice to obey or disobey (15:14-17).⁹⁵ Thus Deuteronomy 30:15-19 is put in the context of creation. Humanity's created endowments are the presupposition for covenant obedience also in Sirach 17:1-13. Ben Sira spells out his understanding of creation in his so-called doctrine of opposites: "every element in creation obeys God and carries out the purpose for which it was designed, either for good or for bad; sometimes the same element has the capacity to function either way" (17:7; 33:14, 15b; 39:33-34; 42:24).⁹⁶ In this way Ben Sira can maintain the goodness of creation (Gen 1:31) while allowing the presence of both good and bad. The Creator uses the creation to bless and curse the obedient and the disobedient. God's knowledge of human actions, which is the presupposition for divine judgment, is an aspect of God's creative power (Sir 42:18-21). God knows that which God has created. But in the final analysis, theology gives way to doxology. God's creative deeds are described in order that God might be praised (39:16-35; 42:15—43:33). As to the problem of evil in the world, Ben Sira, sounding somewhat like a Stoic, and positing a doctrine of opposite pairs, asserts that everything has its place in God's creation (33:7-15).⁹⁷

Eschatology: God's Acts in the Future

It is generally thought that a wisdom book like Ben Sira's has no place for eschatology, such as one finds, for example, in 1 Enoch (see above, pp. 46-53). For this author divine retribution takes place here and now in this life. Different from 1 Enoch, death is followed by a gloomy existence in Sheol, from which there is no resurrection to a new life (40:1—41:13).⁹⁸ Thus the expectation of divine judgment in the future is not a major motif for Ben Sira. Nonetheless, a couple of passages may indicate some interest in the topic. In 48:24-25 Ben Sira says of Isaiah:

By the spirit of might, he saw what would come after,
 and he comforted the mourners in Zion;
 he revealed what would occur at the end of the age,
 the hidden things before they come to pass.

As we have seen, the latter chapters of Isaiah were an important resource for the eschatology of 1 Enoch. Another passage speaks of Elijah as the one who is ready to return to calm God's wrath and to restore the tribes of Israel (Sir 48:10).⁹⁹ Whether Ben Sira espoused a hope in a future Davidic king is a disputed question. The relevant passages are 45:25; 47:11, 22, which refer to God's covenant with David. Two of these texts are particularly striking. In 45:25 the Davidic covenant is mentioned out of historical order and in tandem with the priestly covenant with Phinehas. This calls to mind Qumranic expectations about the coming of two "anointed ones"—a priest and a king (see below, pp. 150–51). Also striking is 47:22, where Ben Sira employs the negative four times to assert that God will never abolish the covenant with David.¹⁰⁰ A final passage with an eschatological tone is the prayer in 36:1–17, which appeals to God to vindicate Israel and destroys its enemies, although scholars debate whether this text is part of Ben Sira's original composition or a later interpolation.¹⁰¹ Even if the prayer is considered a later interpolation, the other passages discussed above indicate that Ben Sira does not exclude future decisive acts of salvation from his purview. Such an outlook is present in other wisdom texts such as Tobit (see above, pp. 33, 35), Baruch (see below, p. 46), and 4QInstruction (see below, pp. 170–72). In this respect these texts differ from earlier wisdom texts like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Date, Setting, and Purpose

The Wisdom of Ben Sira was written between 196 and 175 B.C.E. The high date is set by the death of the high priest Simon II, the last of Ben Sira's men of renown (50:1–21), who is described as a figure of the past.¹⁰² The low date is the beginning of the Hellenistic reform under Antiochus IV (see chapter 3 below). Had Ben Sira written after that time, his deep concern for Torah would scarcely have permitted him to bypass sure and certain references to those events.

Given the date and place of the book's composition, it is to be expected that Ben Sira would be writing at least partly in response to the increasing inroads of Hellenism among the Jews. That this response was, to no small degree, negative and defensive has been argued in detail by a number of prominent historians.¹⁰³ However, the evidence is not all that clear. While it is possible that some of Ben Sira's statements are polemics against hellenizing tendencies, they are general enough to have had other intended applications.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, this book is striking for its lack of specific, pointed, and explicit polemics against Hellenism.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, Ben Sira's thought is sometimes couched in language that was at home in Hellenistic philosophy¹⁰⁶ and shows a thorough

knowledge and creative use of Hellenistic rhetoric and literary genres.¹⁰⁷ Clearly Ben Sira opposed “the dismantling of Judaism” in favor of Greek thought;¹⁰⁸ however, the extent to which he was able to express his Judaism in the language and forms of non-Judaic traditions is a complex and interesting example of religious cross-culturalism with many parallels in the Hebrew Bible’s adaptation of elements in its Near Eastern environment.¹⁰⁹

Although it is an exaggeration to portray Ben Sira simply as a polemicist against the alien elements in his environment, his book does indicate points of religious, cultural, and social tension and attempts to deal with them. His praise of Simon and the cult over which he presides offers a powerful brief for the temple establishment during a time of increasing struggle over the priesthood, and especially the high priesthood.¹¹⁰ In addition, Ben Sira appears to polemicize against the kind of apocalyptic wisdom found in the Enochic corpus.¹¹¹ At the same time, his mythicizing of Wisdom—depicting it as a heavenly figure (chap. 24)—can be seen as an attempt to bring order to a unstable world¹¹² by means of an intellectual construct that has a precise parallel in 1 Enoch (cf. esp. 81:1—82:3). Other of his concerns, for example, his attitudes toward women, may be functions of an intensified “coinage of honor and shame” that was the result of “stress generated by the profound cultural, political, and ultimately religious flux of Ben Sira’s day.”¹¹³ In any case, it is clear that Sirach and 1 Enoch need to be read side by side, each to enlighten the other and both to help us understand a critical time in Israel’s history—one that will move rapidly to its tumultuous climax in the events to be described in our next chapter.

Language of Composition and History of Usage

Ben Sira wrote in Hebrew. His grandson translated the book into Greek in Egypt near the end of the second century B.C.E.¹¹⁴ Fragments of three manuscripts of the Hebrew original have been found at Qumran and in the ruins of the Herodian fortress at Masada.¹¹⁵ Large parts of the remainder of the Hebrew text have been recovered from six fragmentary medieval manuscripts.¹¹⁶ The work was widely circulated and held in high regard by the Jews, and it was still referred to after the decision not to include it in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹⁷ In the early Latin church the book was known as *Ecclesiasticus*, “belonging to the church,” that is, the deuterocanonical book par excellence.¹¹⁸

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