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RENEGOTIATING WISDOM: TRADITION, IDEOLOGY, AND AFTERLIFE IN SIRACH AND THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

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CONTENTS

Introduction: Diversity and Orthodoxy

Across early Jewish and Christian traditions, the question of what happens after death became an important concern not just for personal belief, but for communal identity and doctrinal boundaries. Resurrection of the dead eventually became the "orthodox" view of both the rabbis and the church fathers. For the Tannaim, the rabbis whose traditions are recorded in the Mishnah, few transgressions excluded Jews from the World-to-Come. Among these transgressions, however, was denial of the resurrection of the dead: "And these [are the people] who have no share in the World-to-Come: One who says, 'There is no resurrection of the dead [derived] from the Torah'" (m. Sanhedrin 10:1). Similarly, the Apostles' Creed affirms the necessity for Christians to confess their belief not just in resurrection, but in the "resurrection of the *body*" (Latin: carnis; Greek: σάρξ)—despite Paul's earlier insistence that the resurrection body will not be composed of "flesh": "flesh (σάρξ) and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 12:50). The rabbis and the church fathers therefore reached a similar conclusion regarding the importance of resurrection as a symbolic identity marker in their communities that determined who to include and exclude.[1]

As these "confessional" statements imply, however, not all ancient Jews and Christians subscribed to the notion of resurrection. Despite the common assumption that resurrection, normally understood by scholars as bodily resurrection, emerged as the dominant view of the afterlife among Second Temple Jews by the first century CE, scholars have recently emphasized the diversity of Jewish afterlife beliefs well into the late Second Temple period. C. D. Elledge, for example, pushes back against this "myth of dominance" by demonstrating the diverse ways

[1] See Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of The Body in Early Judaism And Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2004).

Jewish texts depict resurrection.[2] While some texts envision resurrection as the re-composition of the fleshly body and the restoration of physical life on earth, others imagine resurrection as the ontological transformation of the person such that they inherit an embodied state similar to the angels and inhabit a heavenly realm—and many texts fall somewhere between these two poles.[3] The nature of the resurrection body and the location of resurrection life, then, were contested issues in the late Second Temple period.

Other Jewish texts refrain from using resurrection language altogether and instead speak in terms of the immortality of the soul. Many Alexandrian Jewish authors, influenced by Platonism, seemed to have gravitated toward the idea that righteous souls immediately ascend into God's presence after death. Elledge notes, however, that these Alexandrian texts do not fit completely within the paradigm of the immortality of the soul because they believed that souls had to be immortalized by God and were not, as Plato believed, intrinsically immortal.[4] Mark Finney even argues the radical thesis that Second Temple Jewish texts unanimously "focus their attention on the afterlife of the soul alone" and express contempt for the fleshly body.[5] Even the bare fact of resurrection, therefore, was not universally assumed among late Second Temple Jews.

Some Jews, in line with the biblical tradition, even denied the afterlife altogether. Elledge argues that afterlife denial remained a viable option for Jews into the late Second Temple period. These Jews, such as the Sadducees and Ben Sira, represented a more conservative approach to Jewish traditions that probably viewed ideas like resurrection as a later innovation that lacked

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[2] C. D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: 200 BCE–CE 200* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 9.
[3] Ibid., 19-43.
[4] Ibid., 114, 122.
[5] Mark Finney, *Resurrection, Hell and the Afterlife: Body and Soul in Antiquity, Judaism and Early Christianity* (Routledge, 2016), 2. I personally think Finney overstates his case. Some texts, such as 2 Maccabees, seem to envision the resurrection as a bodily phenomenon. See his treatment of 2 Maccabees on pp. 61-3.

grounding in the Torah and conflicted with their traditional beliefs. Moreover, texts like the Wisdom of Solomon and the Epistle of Enoch polemicize against afterlife denial, serving as forerunners of the later rabbinic and orthodox Christian attitudes mentioned above. Archeological evidence also supports the continuing prevalence of afterlife denial among both Judean and Egyptian Jews even after the Maccabean revolt.[6] Even belief in a positive afterlife was not guaranteed among late Second Temple Jews.

Overall, in his analysis of the afterlife beliefs represented among the Jewish pseudepigraphal and apocryphal literature, Jan Sigvartsen identifies eighteen distinct types of afterlife beliefs.[7] Jews debated topics such as 1) the possibility of resurrection, 2) the nature of the resurrection body, 3) the existence of an intermediate state in between death and resurrection, 4) whether the resurrection would be limited or universal, 5) the ultimate fate of the wicked, and 6) the possibility of postmortem salvation or repentance—just to name a few. For good reason, then, scholars have recently nuanced the reductionistic assumption that bodily resurrection was *the* Jewish view of the afterlife.

Behind this conceptual diversity looms an unanswered question: *why* were Second Temple Jewish afterlife beliefs so diverse? Phrased this broadly, this question could be answered in numerous ways depending on the perspective from which it is viewed. In this thesis, I will approach this "why" question in a manner that takes seriously the social and ideological positionality of the Jewish scribes behind their texts. That is, I will assume that these scribes' beliefs about the afterlife formed in part due to their experiences of social and ideological conflict within and between social groups, and that their notions of the afterlife functioned to solve or alleviate this conflict. From this perspective, this "why" question can be reframed as a

[6] Many scholars view the Maccabean revolt as the event that propagated afterlife beliefs among Jews.
[7] Jan A. Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Pseudepigrapha* (T&T Clark, 2019), 209.

"how" question, which makes it more answerable: how did these authors utilize notions of the afterlife to manage social and ideological conflict?

To answer this question, I will employ an ideological-critical approach. Ideological criticism refers to a hermeneutical approach that investigates how texts reflect the social, political, and economic realities in which they are embedded, and how their composition or reception serve the interests of a given social group or class.[8] Ideological criticism gives special attention to concepts like ideology, class, and social status. I will use these terms in a more Bourdieusian rather than Marxist sense. Unlike a strictly Marxist approach that primarily views ideology and class exclusively through the lens of economics, Bourdieu highlights how ideologies operate through cultural and social practices that reproduce power relations beyond mere economic constraints.[9] Rather than treating ideology as a monolithic system imposed from above, I view ideology as an ongoing and often unconscious negotiation of meaning and power that occurs at every level of the numerous social hierarchies in a given society. In application, when talking about the social location of a particular scribe, such as Ben Sira, I take into consideration a combination of economic, religious, and cultural factors to determine his social status and class. His views of the afterlife emerge from his ideological negotiation of the wisdom tradition in conversation with the exigencies of his social class—a process that he may be totally unaware of but that is nonetheless happening.

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[8] "All texts are ideological in some sense and have a relationship to vested interest in relation to social formations. The text is an individual representative of the struggles between social classes and the contradictions of human existence." Christopher Rowland, "Ideological Criticism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

[9] For a discussion of Bourdieusian theory, see Inger Furseth, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2024), 81-4. Dale Martin uses a similar understanding of ideology in *The Corinthian Body* (Yale University Press, 1995), and I see myself as modeling this thesis on his work in many ways.

I will focus my attention on two texts: the Wisdom of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. I have chosen these texts for several reasons. First, both texts have identifiable sociohistorical contexts. Sirach was composed around 180 BCE in Judea, and its author, Ben Sira, was a temple-scribe. Wisdom dates to the early Roman period (30 BCE–70 CE) and has an Alexandrian provenance. We have adequate knowledge of the social contexts behind these texts to conduct a proper ideological analysis. Second, both texts present unique conceptions of the afterlife that diverge from bodily resurrection, and their authors' social contexts are also diverse. Third, both texts are of the wisdom genre, and both authors aim to adapt the wisdom tradition to make it relevant to their contexts, making the two works apt for comparison. Lastly, scholars have paid far less attention to the afterlife motifs of these sapiential texts than they have apocalyptic texts. This is especially true of Ben Sira, which has often been dismissed as a text that simply denies the afterlife.

Overall, each text will be analyzed across two chapters, resulting in a total of four chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 will examine Sirach, while chapters 3 and 4 will focus on Wisdom. The first chapters for each text (chs. 1 and 3) will identify how these authors' statements about the afterlife reflect their renegotiation of the wisdom tradition, especially as it relates to the wisdom tradition's theory of divine retribution. Since divine retribution is closely intertwined with concepts of the afterlife, it must be explored alongside them. In chapters 2 and 4, I will examine how these authors' afterlife beliefs functioned ideologically in their social contexts. This comparative analysis will ultimately demonstrate that how Jews perceived ideas like afterlife denial and resurrection largely depended on their social location. For an empowered elite like Ben Sira, the denial of an afterlife functioned ideologically as an affirmation of the existing social order and a means of preserving established status and authority, whereas a

disenfranchised scribe like Pseudo-Solomon gravitated towards resurrection and immortality because it promised eschatological vindication and status reversal.

CHAPTER ONE

"A Good Name Lasts Forever": Onomastic Immortality and Divine Retribution in Sirach

During the Second Temple period, Jews became increasingly interested in the prospect of life after death, with beliefs in resurrection and immortality attested across literary genres and geographic provenances. Their experiences of exile and imperial domination caused Second Temple Jewish authors to formulate new theories of cosmic justice in which the afterlife played a central role.[10] For many of these authors, God's righteousness could only be vindicated in light of some notion of resurrection and eschatological postmortem judgment.[11] Despite this, Jewish beliefs about the afterlife were far from monolithic; not only did Jews envision the details of resurrection and eschatological judgment in diverse ways, but some even denied them altogether.[12] This chapter will examine one such example, namely, the Wisdom of Sirach.[13]

Ben Sira's statements about death and the afterlife reflect his larger rhetorical goal of theological preservation. Ben Sira sought to preserve the basic framework of the Deuteronomic theory of divine retribution, which posits that God distributes rewards and punishments on earth

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[10] For a broad, popular-level treatment of how factors like the exile and foreign imperialism affected the development of Jewish afterlife beliefs, see Bart Ehrman, *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* (Simon & Schuster, 2020).

[11] Claudia Setzer argues that resurrection functioned as a symbol of God's righteousness and power for ancient Jews and Christians. To believe in resurrection, then, was to affirm God's righteousness and power; denying resurrection could be perceived as an affront on God's nature (e.g., Jesus's critique of the Sadducees in Mark 12:24 and Matt 22:29). See Claudia Setzer, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Brill, 2004).

[12] For a general treatment of the diversity of afterlife beliefs attested in the period, see C. D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: 200 BCE—CE 200* (Oxford University Press, 2017). For a systematic analysis of every reference to the afterlife in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, see Jan Sigvartsen's companion monographs, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature* (T&T Clark, 2019) and *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Pseudepigrapha* (T&T Clark, 2019).

[13] Sirach was composed around 180 BCE, shortly after Judea was transferred from Ptolemaic to Seleucid control, but prior to the Maccabean Revolt. It was originally composed in Jerusalem and in Hebrew, but Ben Sira's grandson, who had travelled to Alexandria, translated it into Greek around 117 BCE. His translation introduced some distinctive theological changes into the text, such as the inclusion of references to resurrection, that were foreign to Ben Sira's Hebrew original. Scholars have widely recognized these mentions of resurrection as later additions, so they will not be discussed here. For these introductory matters, see David deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Baker Academic, 2018), 161-70.

rather than in heaven or hell.[14] At a time when beliefs in resurrection and eschatological judgment were becoming increasingly widespread, Ben Sira renegotiated the Deuteronomic view by emphasizing the notion of *onomastic immortality*: God rewards the righteous by preserving and honoring their *name* after death, either through notoriety in corporate memory or through the prosperity of their descendants.[15] I will advance two arguments regarding Ben Sira's notion of onomastic immortality: 1) onomastic immortality allows him to affirm that justice is not always executed during an individual's lifetime but that God still distributes rewards and punishments on earth; and 2) corporate memory and progeny represent two distinct paths to achieving onomastic immortality, which roughly correspond with social class. After providing a brief survey of important post-exilic developments in theories of divine retribution, I will discuss Ben Sira's understanding of death and divine retribution. I will then examine his theory of onomastic immortality in light of this historical context.

Divine Retribution in the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible widely conceives of divine retribution as occurring on earth and taking the form of material and social prosperity or ruin.[16] While this understanding of God's justice is implicitly assumed in most places, two texts in particular explicitly discuss the logic behind it: Deuteronomy and Proverbs. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses explains to the Israelites the consequences of obedience and disobedience to God's law. Obedience to God brings "blessings" (בְּרָכוֹת) while disobedience brings "curses" (קְלָלוֹת). Blessings range from militaristic victory over foreign enemies and national safety to abundant agricultural produce, thriving livestock, and

[14] For other ways in which Ben Sira's thought can be characterized as "conservative," see Alexander Di Lella, "Conservative and Progressive Theology: Sirach and Wisdom," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1966): 139-54.
[15] The term "onomastic immortality" is my own.
[16] There are some exceptions to this rule. The only text in the Hebrew Bible that scholars widely agree contains a reference to literal, bodily resurrection and postmortem judgment is Daniel, which dates to around the 160s BCE.

personal well-being, whereas curses include defeat in battle, famine, disease, and social upheaval, reflecting the comprehensive scope of divine favor or punishment.[17] Verse 11 summarizes the Deuteronomist's notion of blessing well: "The Lord will make you abound in prosperity (וְהוֹתִרְךָ יְהוָה לְטוֹבָה),[18] in the fruit of your womb, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your ground in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give you."[19] The Deuteronomist uses the hiphil stem of the root יתר to indicate God's active role in causing their prosperity as a result of their obedience. Indeed, the notion of earthly reward and punishment is so engrained in Deuteronomy that many scholars refer to this idea as the *Deuteronomic* view of divine retribution.

Proverbs, too, reveals a similar understanding. Proverbs 3:1-2 states, "My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you (וְשָׁלוֹם יוֹסִיפוּ לָךְ)."[20] Similar to Deuteronomy 28:11, this author uses the hiphil stem of יסף to demonstrate the causative relationship between adherence to commandments and divine blessing. While the focus of Proverbs is more individualistic than Deuteronomy, the terms of blessing remain the same. Those who follow the way of wisdom will live long lives full of peace (שָׁלוֹם), a term that refers to wholistic prosperity and completeness in the Hebrew Bible.[21] Overall, these texts are clear on what rewards and punishments look like for the righteous and the wicked: success or destruction on earth.

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[17] The text elaborates much more on curses (vv. 15-68) than blessings (vv. 1-14). On this point, Richard Nelson notes, "Curses and threats outnumber blessings because deterring infractions was the primary goal. Blessings are also brief or nonexistent in comparative ancient texts." Richard Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 327.

[18] References to the Hebrew text of the Hebrew Bible come from Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartsensia: A Reader's Edition*, edited by Adrian Schenker (5th ed.; Hendrickson Publishers, 2014).

[19] All translations, unless stated otherwise, come from the NRSVue.

[20] Cf. Prov 10:27-30.

[21] Used approximately 237 times throughout the Hebrew Bible, this word denotes a broad range of ideas related to safety, success, and prosperity.

Because these texts assume that God's justice will be administered prior to death, there is no need for postmortem judgment or hell. Scholars have long noticed the absence of these concepts throughout the Hebrew Bible.[22] Instead, the Hebrew Bible posits the existence of Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) where both the righteous and wicked reside after death.[23] Importantly, Sheol is not a place of reward or punishment; it is simply the realm of the dead. Descriptions of Sheol in the Hebrew Bible seem to indicate that the deceased are conscious but experience a shadowy existence.[24] While some texts may express a hope that God can redeem people from Sheol,[25] most assume that no one returns from Sheol after their death.[26]

Divine Retribution in Ben Sira's Sapiential Predecessors

The harsh experiences of exile and foreign domination caused many Jews to rethink their understanding of divine retribution, death, and the afterlife. Post-exilic wisdom literature expresses an increased dissatisfaction with the Deuteronomic view of divine retribution; these authors renegotiated and nuanced the Deuteronomic theory to better fit their rhetorical and existential exigencies.

One example of such an attempt is found in the book of Job.[27] This book's retribution theology is innovative in several ways. First, it raises the possibility that spiritual, angelic beings may be able to cause suffering. As the book's prologue makes clear, Job's unjust suffering is not caused directly by God himself, but by a secondary angelic figure, the Satan (הַשָּׂטָן, literally "the

[22] See Richard Bauckham, "Hades, Hell," ABD 3:14-5.
[23] For a brief analysis of Sheol, see Mark T. Finney, "Afterlives of the Afterlife: The Development of Hell in its Jewish and Christian Contexts," *Biblical Reception* 2 (2013): 150-4. For a more in-depth treatment, see Philip Johnston, *Shades of Sheol* (InterVarsity Press, 2002), 69-126.
[24] 1 Sam 28; Ps 88:10; Prov 2:18; 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; Isa 14:9; 26:14, 19.
[25] Ps 16; 49.
[26] Isa 38:10; Job 38:17; Ps 9:14; 107:18; Qoh 9:10.
[27] While the exact date of Job is contested, most scholars place it in the early post-exilic period.

adversary").[28] Additionally, the Satan inflicted Job as a test of his righteousness, not as a punishment for sin. These two moves not only distance God from evil, but also semantically transform suffering by indicating that it does not necessarily equal punishment.

The book of Job also questions humanity's ability to evaluate God's justice. The characterization of Job's friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—is especially significant. While each friend represents a unique perspective, their advice to Job assumes standard Deuteronomic reasoning.[29] Although their theological logic appeared to meet Deuteronomic expectations, at the end of the narrative God condemns them for speaking falsely. By having these characters represent Deuteronomic retribution theology, the book of Job subtly critiques the naïve application of retributive justice to human experiences, exposing its failure to account for the nuanced and often inscrutable nature of divine will.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, at the end of the narrative Job is rewarded materially and socially for his righteousness.[30] God not only restores Job with everything he lost—wealth, property, health, and family—but he doubles it. In other words, the book of Job portrays God as repaying Job on earth. This final move clarifies the book's orientation toward Deuteronomic retribution theology; while it nuances the timing of divine retribution by asserting

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[28] "The designation 'the Satan' is not the personal name Satan but a role specification meaning 'the accuser/adversary/doubter' … In later biblical and postbiblical texts Satan appears as a name rather than a title (cf. I Chron. 21:1). The verbal root does not refer to an action which is necessarily evil but to the behavior of one who opposes or challenges another party." Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 89.

[29] "In the first cycle the friends clearly state their positions. Eliphaz posits that no human being is righteous before God; Bildad argues that God never perverts justice; Zophar holds that God assuredly punishes every evildoer. All of them exhort Job to seek God that he might again enjoy a prosperous life. Although they wish to console Job, they are so chagrined at the severity of his misfortune that they feel they must reprimand him for some wrong he certainly must have committed." John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Eerdmans, 1988), 103.

[30] Habel notes that Job's restoration is specifically connected with his act of intercession on behalf of his friends, not necessarily his perseverance through suffering, saying, "By acting as a mediator for his friends Job demonstrates publicly that he has abandoned his stance of a litigant lamenting among the ashes (v. 6) and resumed his position as priest and righteous mediator for the community." Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, 584.

the possibility of delay, it still affirms that rewards and punishments will happen in the present life.

An extreme example of a text's interaction with Deuteronomic retribution theology is Qoheleth. Qoheleth entirely denies the observability of divine justice, positing instead that God's righteous providence, if operative at all, goes unrecognized by humankind: "He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end" (3:11). For Qoheleth, this fact means that human experience is subject to futility (הֶבֶל), where the righteous often receive no reward and the wicked go unscathed (8:14). Even the memory of the righteous is forgotten by future generations (1:11). The solution, then, is for humanity to enjoy the pleasurable things in life while they still can (2:24-25; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10). Qoheleth thus rejects the Deuteronomic scheme of observable rewards and punishments in the present life, opting instead for an outlook of skepticism in which he questions the value of wisdom and righteousness for obtaining favorable outcomes in life.

Divine Retribution in Early Apocalyptic Literature: 1 Enoch

During the Second Temple period, Jewish apocalypticism was emerging and becoming popularized. One of the most characteristic features of apocalyptic thought is the notion of the day of judgment and the resurrection of the dead.[31] Apocalyptic Jewish authors envisioned the exact details of these events in diverse ways, but they generally agreed that on this day God would execute perfect justice, rewarding the righteous in paradise and punishing the wicked. Until then, however, the righteous would have to wait patiently for their vindication.

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[31] John Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (3rd ed.; Eerdmans, 2016), 20. Collins notes that not all apocalyptic texts envision the day of judgment as occurring at the end of history.

One example of an apocalyptic text predating Ben Sira is the section of 1 Enoch (chs. 1-36) known as the Book of the Watchers, which was composed sometime during the latter half of the third century BCE.[32] This text describes how fallen angels (the Watchers) rebelled by descending to earth, teaching humanity forbidden knowledge, and producing gigantic offspring with human women. God judges these angels and their angelic-human descendants and promises eventual cosmic restoration. The text also details Enoch's visionary journeys, where he witnesses the heavens, the dwelling places of the dead, and the divine plan for final judgment. For this author, the corrupting influence of the Watchers damaged creation such that ultimate justice is postponed to the eschatological future.

In 1 Enoch 22, for example, Raphael, the angel in charge of the souls of the dead, shows Enoch the dwelling places where disembodied souls reside until the final judgment. Raphael takes Enoch to a great and tall mountain that contains four chambers where different categories of souls dwell, one chamber reserved for righteous souls but the other three for wicked souls. Importantly, the three chambers designated for wicked souls serve different purposes. The first chamber contains wicked souls for whom "judgment has not been executed on them in their life" (22:10).[33] These souls await their future resurrection and punishment at the final judgment when they will face God's justice. The other two chambers are designed for wicked souls who either died an unjust death on earth or who already received adequate punishment for their sins during their lifetime.[34] These souls will not be resurrected and punished at the final judgment because they have already received adequate punishment.

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[32] George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. Vanderkam, *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Fortress Press, 2012), 3.
[33] Ibid., 43.
[34] Sigvartsen, *Afterlife Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*, 101-2.

This chapter in 1 Enoch evidences complex reflection on the relationship between divine retribution and the fates of the dead in the afterlife. For the author of this text, God exercises his justice by resurrecting every righteous person for eternal life, whereas the wicked can be punished by 1) receiving suffering throughout the course of their life, 2) experiencing a harsh death on earth, or 3) being resurrected and tormented at the final judgment. Rather than portraying a simple binary in which the righteous go to heaven and the wicked go to hell, this text envisions a nuanced system where the fate of each soul is determined by the nature of their deeds, their earthly experiences, and the degree of justice already administered on earth.

As an educated scribe and leader of a scribal school in Jerusalem, Ben Sira would have been familiar with many of the ideas expressed in texts like Job, Qoheleth, and the Book of the Watchers. Many scholars have noted apologetic undertones behind many passages in Sirach, especially the ones that discuss theodicy and divine retribution.[35] Within this context, Ben Sira sought to preserve a more conservative interpretation of divine retribution that adhered more closely to the Deuteronomic view by maintaining the earthly nature of rewards and punishments.

The Finality of Death in Sirach

Several passages in Sirach indicate that Ben Sira subscribed to the view of death attested to throughout the Hebrew Bible. In 17:25-32, for example, Ben Sira praises and elevates repentance because it restores one's proper relationship with God. He encourages sinners to repent while they still can because, "Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades (ἐν ᾅδου) in place of the living who give thanks?[36] From the dead, as from one who does not exist,

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[35] For examples, see Samuel L. Adams, "Ben Sira's Apologetic Response," in *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (Brill, 2008); James L. Crenshaw, "The Problem of Theodicy in Sirach: On Human Bondage," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94, no. 1: 47-64; Pancratius C. Beentjes, "Theodicy in Wisdom of Ben Sira," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Brill, 2003).

[36] References to the Greek and Hebrew texts of Sir come from Takamitsu Muraoka, *Wisdom of Ben Sira* (Peeters, 2023).

thanksgiving has ceased; those who are alive and well sing the Lord's praises … For not everything is within human capability, since human beings are not immortal" (17:27-28, 30).[37] This passage reflects themes found in Psalm 6:5 and Isaiah 38:18.[38] Rather than offering a negative motivation for his audience to repent by appealing to the notion of postmortem punishment as a threat, he utilizes positive motivation: after death, no one is able to worship God, so people should worship him while they still have the opportunity.[39] For Ben Sira, repentance is motivated not by fear of postmortem punishment, but by the opportunity to be blessed by God in the present life. His statement presupposes that there is no heaven or paradise in which the righteous will continue to praise God after death.

Ben Sira also discusses the finality of death in 38:16-23. Here, Ben Sira instructs his audience on how to properly mourn for the dead. Ritual mourning for the dead was an established practice in Ben Sira's day, with some people even hiring professional mourners at funerals. The purpose of mourning rites was to show the deceased the proper respect he or she deserved.[40] While Ben Sira approves of these rites (38:16-17), he advises mourners not to be overly troubled by grief because "grief may result in death, and a sorrowful heart saps one's strength" (38:18). Being excessively grieved for the dead, says Ben Sira, makes little sense because "there is no coming back; you do the dead no good, and you injure yourself. Remember his fate, for yours is like it; yesterday it was his, and today it is yours" (38:21-22). Once again,

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[37] Hades (ᾅδης) is the Greek term that refers to the Hebrew concept of Sheol. The LXX translates Sheol using the Greek term Hades.

[38] Ps 6:5, "For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?"; Is 38:18, "For Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness."

[39] "Like many of his contemporaries, Ben Sira regarded Hades (or Sheol) not as a place of retribution for sinners but as a gloomy place of rest for sinners and saints alike." Walter T. Wilson, *The Wisdom of Sirach* (Eerdmans, 2023), 214.

[40] Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (Doubleday, 1987), 443.

Ben Sira clarifies that death is everyone's ultimate, irreversible end. Keeping one's mortality in mind, according to Ben Sira, helps one grieve appropriately for the dead.

Lastly, in 41:1-4 Ben Sira provides a brief meditation on the nature of death that also emphasizes its finality. He instructs his audience not to fear death because it is "the Lord's decree for all flesh; why, then, should you reject the will of the Most High? Whether life lasts for ten years or a hundred or a thousand, there are no questions asked in Hades" (41:4). This passage highlights a significant difference between Ben Sira's understanding of death and that of other Second Temple Jewish authors; he believes that death is a part of God's design in creation, not the result or consequence of human sin.[41] Death is not a corruption of God's design but an inherent part of it.[42] Because death is not viewed as an assault on God's righteousness, there is no need to appeal to the notion of an afterlife as a means of theodicy. Death equalizes the fates of the rich and the poor and of the righteous and the wicked, requiring no further action from God to rectify the situation.

Divine Retribution as Earthly in Sirach

A number of other passages demonstrate that Ben Sira thinks about divine retribution as occurring on earth. In 39:16-35, Ben Sira praises God for the inherent goodness of his created order: "All the works of the Lord are very good, and whatever he commands will be done at the appointed time … No one can say, 'What is this?' or 'Why is that?'—for everything has been

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[41] Sir 25:24 potentially problematizes the idea that God created death: "From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die." Regarding this verse, John Collins notes, "But while Sir 25:24 is indicative of the sage's notoriously negative view of women, it is not consistent with his other pronouncements on the origin of sin and death. It seems to be an ad hoc comment, made in the context of a lengthy reflection on 'the wicked woman,' but it has not been integrated into a coherent theological system." John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 80-1.

[42] Cf. Sir 17:1. See John J. Collins, "The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom," *Harvard Theological Review* 71, no. 3-4: 177-92. On this passage, Wilson remarks, "…throughout the passage, death is viewed in a neutral light, that is, not as punishment for disobedience (cf. 15:17) or in terms of the manner of one's death (cf. 11:26-28) but as the lot of all people." Wilson, *The Wisdom of Sirach*, 447.

created for its own purpose" (39:16, 21). For Ben Sira, everything in the world has been created by God for a good purpose, even the things that appear to be bad or harmful. He believes that the bad things in the world were created as a means of punishing the wicked: "From the beginning good things were created for the good, but for sinners good things and bad" (39:25).[43] He further elaborates on this point in vv. 28-31. He states that the natural world itself carries out God's judgment upon the wicked, including phenomena like violent winds, fire, hail, famine, pestilence, and dangerous animals. The natural world, then, operates not according to a series of impersonal causes, but according to God's personal will: "They take delight in doing his bidding, always ready for his service on earth; and when their time comes they never disobey his command" (39:31).[44] His allusion to the exodus in v. 17 reveals that he has in mind historical examples of God using nature as a tool of retribution.[45] In Ben Sira's worldview, God has engrained retribution into the workings of the natural world, executing justice on the wicked as soon as God demands it.

Sirach 11:7-28 includes several references to divine retribution on earth. Verses 14 and 17, for example, state, "Good things and bad, life and death, poverty (πτωχεία) and wealth (πλοῦτος), come from the Lord … The Lord's gift remains with the devout, and his favor brings lasting success." In these verses, Ben Sira portrays God as the ultimate source of blessing and curses, formulating them in terms of wealth (πλοῦτος) and poverty (πτωχεία).

Interestingly, however, in the Sirach 11:18-19 Ben Sira seemingly subverts the Deuteronomic ideology around the value of riches. In a tone reminiscent of Qoheleth, he

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[43] The Greek text of Sir is different but even stronger: "Good things were created for the good from the beginning, so evil things for sinners."
[44] For a brief discussion of this passage within the context of Ben Sira's broader theodicy, see Beentjes, "Theodicy in Wisdom of Ben Sira," 519-20.
[45] Sir 39:17c-d, "At his word the waters stood in a heap, and the reservoirs of water at the word of his mouth." Walter T. Wilson sees linguistic similarity to Ex 15:8. See Wilson, *The Wisdom of Sirach*, 433.

considers the example of a frugal man who, despite having diligently acquired wealth over the course of his life, dies before he enjoys the fruits of his labor: One becomes rich through diligence and self-denial, and the reward allotted to him is this: when he says, 'I have found rest, and now I shall feast on my goods!' he does not know how long it will be until he leaves them to others and dies."[46] Moreover, in v. 21 Ben Sira seems to implicitly acknowledge that an unrighteous person can possess riches, denying the naïve equation of possession of wealth with righteousness.[47] Despite this, he still maintains that God's blessing takes the form of material prosperity: "Do not wonder at the works of a sinner, but trust in the Lord and keep at your job; for it is easy in the sight of the Lord to make the poor rich suddenly, in an instant. The blessing (εὐλογία) of the Lord is the reward of the pious, and quickly his blessing flourishes" (vv. 21-22).

Ben Sira solves the tension between these ideas in a manner similar to Job; that is, he posits that divine retribution can be postponed or delayed. This theme of delay is especially evident in vv. 26-28: "For it is easy for the Lord on the day of death (ἡμέρᾳ τελευτῆς) to reward individuals according to their conduct. An hour's misery makes one forget delights, and at the close of one's life one's deeds are revealed. Call no one happy before his death; by how he ends, a person becomes known." This notion of the "day of death" (ἡμέρᾳ τελευτῆς) also occurs in 1:13, "Those who fear the Lord will have a happy end; on the day of their death they will be blessed." Unfortunately, Ben Sira does not elaborate on what divine retribution on the day of one's death looks like. His general point, however, is that while the wicked may at times prosper and the righteous may be temporarily destitute, God can postpone judgment until the day a person dies.

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[46] Cf. Qoh 2:21, "because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil."
[47] Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 240.

In 40:1-11, Ben Sira may shed some light on how a person could receive retribution on the day of their death. He explains that fear and anxiety about death is humanity's common lot: "Perplexities and fear of heart are theirs, and anxious thought of the day of their death (ἡμέρᾳ τελευτῆς)" (40:2). This universal anxiety concerning death affects both rich and poor (vv. 3-4). Moreover, this fear even torments people in their sleep, causing them to have nightmares and refusing to give them rest (vv. 5-7). Ben Sira concludes by saying, "To all creatures, human and animal, but to sinners seven times more, come death and bloodshed and strife and sword, calamities and famine and ruin and plague" (vv. 8-9). James Crenshaw notes that while the references to bloodshed, sword, calamities, famine, etc. seemingly refer to external ailments, the overall context of the passage focuses on internal human anxiety about death. According to Crenshaw, Ben Sira implies that can God punish the wicked by increasing their psychological torments. Crenshaw believes that Ben Sira's appeal to the psychological "break[s] new ground in the long-standing debate [of theodicy] in ancient Israel."[48] This psychological form of divine punishment also explains Ben Sira's statements about the day of death in 11:26-28. Although a wicked person may experience material prosperity throughout their life, psychological misery on the day of death nullifies any enjoyment they experienced from it. Or, in Ben Sira's own words, "An hour's misery makes one forget past delights" (11:27).[49]

Onomastic Immortality in Sirach

The above passages indicate that Ben Sira locates divine retribution in the earthly realm, aligning him with the Deuteronomic theology of divine retribution. While he does make some innovations, such as the notion of psychological punishment for the wicked, they do not change

[48] Crenshaw, "The Problem of Theodicy in Sirach," 58.
[49] "Hence, in v 27b Ben Sira suggests that only the final hours of a person can tell us what kind of life he has lived: if he dies content and at peace, his past poverty and affliction count as nothing; if he dies in disgrace and anxiety, his past wealth and prosperity are meaningless." Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 241.

his fundamentally conservative orientation. However, it would be inaccurate to say that Ben Sira does not posit some form of postmortem judgment. Several passages demonstrate that he believes God continues executing justice on the wicked even after their death. Moreover, Ben Sira also claims that people can achieve a form of immortality through notoriety in corporate memory and the prosperity of their progeny. Ben Sira formulates this idea in onomastic terms; while the individual person does not achieve immortality, their name (ὄνομα; שֵׁם) does. Although many scholars have noticed this feature of the text, few have recognized it as a legitimate afterlife motif.[50] I will also advance the argument that the means by which one acquires onomastic immortality depends on the social class to which one belongs.[51]

One example of onomastic immortality occurs in 37:25-26. In this passage, Ben Sira describes the life of the wise person. The wise person will be praised by many, "and all who see him will call him happy" (37:24). He continues, "The days of a person's life are numbered, but the days of Israel are without number. Those who are wise among their people (ὁ σοφὸς ἐν τῷ λαῷ αὐτοῦ; חכם עם) will inherit honor, and their names (ὄνομα; שֵׁם) will live forever" (37:25-26). Ben Sira's message is clear: while the wise may die, Israel will always survive and continue to remember them throughout their history. The deceased wise (σοφὸς; חכם) become immortalized through corporate memory. Ben Sira's statement here contradicts the sentiment expressed in Qoh 2:16, "For there is no enduring remembrance of the wise or of fools, seeing that in the days to

[50] Jack T. Sanders is an exception to this rule, "While *Ben Sira,* like Qoheleth, seems to be aware of a concept of immortality and to reject it, nevertheless he actually docs propose a kind of immortality that does not assume the continued existence of the person… Thus he seems to try to solve the theodicy problem by proposing a very circumscribed type of immortality, immortality of one's good name. Even if we do not receive our just rewards for righteousness and wisdom in this life, even if we do not receive them at the times of our deaths, still we can rest secure in the knowledge that our righteousness and wisdom will procure for us reputations that will live in eternity." "Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 36, no. 6 (2005): 271-2.

[51] Many scholars have noticed Ben Sira's emphasis on the enduring value of one's reputation and progeny after death, but none have recognized the implicit class ideology underlying it.

come all will have been long forgotten. How can the wise die just like fools?" Importantly, Ben Sira specifies that only the wise among the people are the ones who will receive immortality. In other words, immortality is a special privilege for a subgroup of the people. Verse 23 identifies the wise as those who "instruct their own people (τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λαὸν παιδεύσει; לעמו יחכם)," indicating that they serve a pedagogical role within the community. The wise, then, are not those who simply observe the precepts of wisdom, but those who teach these precepts to others: the scribe-sage leaders of the community.

This point becomes clearer in 39:1-11 where Ben Sira praises the activity of the scribe. These activities include interpreting ancient prophecies and proverbs, studying God's law, advising rulers, and travelling the world to acquire wisdom. The scribe will receive publicly recognized honor from his community for sharing his wisdom with others: "Many will praise their understanding; it will never be blotted out. Their memory will not disappear (οὐκ ἀποστήσεται τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτοῦ), and their names will live through all generations (καὶ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ζήσεται εἰς γενεὰς γενεῶν)" (39:9). Once again, the scribe receives a kind of immortality through the community's continued appreciation of his wisdom after his death. For Ben Sira, the scribal vocation provides a unique opportunity for immortalization. The priority he gives to scribal work becomes especially apparent when this passage is read in its immediate literary context. In 38:24-25, Ben Sira discusses the work of artisans and tradesmen, saying, "The wisdom of the scribe (σοφία γραμματέως) depends on the opportunity of leisure; only the one who has little business can become wise. How can one become wise who handles the plow, and who glories in the shaft of a goad, who drives oxen and is occupied with their work, and whose talk is about the offspring of bulls?" While the rest of the passage makes clear that Ben Sira attributes great value to those who work with their hands, he nonetheless ascribes greater

glory to scribes.[52] This contrast underscores Ben Sira's belief that the scribal vocation holds a superior and enduring role in preserving wisdom and achieving a form of immortality through communal remembrance.

The two passages above focus specifically on the ability of "the wise," i.e., the scribe-sage leaders of the community, to achieve immortality through corporate memory. Is there any indication that everyday people, the non-elites, can achieve immortality? Several passages might suggest so. In 41:5-14, Ben Sira uses the example of the wicked person's fate as a rhetorical strategy to encourage law obedience among his audience. Interestingly, rather than depicting God as directly punishing the wicked individual, he focuses instead on what happens to their descendants after the wicked die. He claims that their children will be cursed and their inheritance will perish (41:6). Their children will "blame an ungodly father, for they suffer disgrace because of him" (41:7). In good Hebrew antithetical parallelism, he changes his focus in vv. 11-13 to the fate of the righteous. He says, "The breath of humans is in their bodies, but a virtuous name (שׁם חסד) will never be blotted out.[53] Have regard for your name, since it will outlive you longer than a thousand hordes of gold. The days of a good life are numbered, but a good name lasts forever." Importantly, Ben Sira's focus in this passage is not on the scribal occupation, but on the general differences between wickedness and righteousness. This passage,

[52] Sir 38:31-34, "All these rely on their hands, and all are skillful in their own work. Without them no city can be inhabited, and wherever they live, they will not go hungry. Yet they are not sought out for the council of the people, nor do they attain eminence in the public assembly. They do not sit in the judge's seat, nor do they understand the decisions of the courts; they cannot expound discipline or judgment, and they are not found among the rulers. But they maintain the fabric of the world, and their concern is for the exercise of their trade." Many scholars have noted parallels between this passage and an Egyptian work called "The Satire on the Trades." Regarding these parallels, Skehan and Di Lella note, "If Ben Sira was familiar with the satire, he not only removed from his own composition all traces of ridicule, but showed a positive appreciation for manual workers and their essential contributions to society." Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 450.

[53] The Greek version of this verse is different: "People's sorrow concerns their corpses, but the name of sinners, which is not good, would be eradicated." Translation by Muraoka. The NRSVue follows the Hebrew MSS.

therefore, seems to focus more broadly on anyone who is righteous and has a "virtuous name" (שם חסד), rather than just scribal leaders.

Ben Sira clearly did not think that scribes were the only members of Judean society capable of living righteously. How, then, could someone achieve immortality who did not belong to Ben Sira's privileged scribal group? The answer seems to be implicit in 41:5-10. If God punishes the wicked after their death by causing disaster to fall upon their children, then perhaps God immortalizes the "virtuous name" by providing longevity and success to the righteous person's progeny. If this is true, Ben Sira therefore posits a difference between how scribes and regular people attain immortality. While he does not explicitly say this, his underlying logic appears to be that whereas scribes can achieve immortality through their occupation, the righteous *am ha-aretz* can only achieve immortality through their progeny.

Other passages further confirm this theory, such as in 30:1-13 where Ben Sira addresses how to properly raise children. The most important statement is in vv. 4-6: "When the father dies he will not seem to be dead, for he has left behind him one like himself, whom in his life he looked upon with joy and at death, without grief. He has left behind him an avenger against his enemies, and one to repay the kindness of his friends." Ben Sira depicts a father's son as an extension of his personhood and agency.[54] The continuation between them is so strong that the father will not even appear to be dead. Moreover, the son continues to uphold the father's honor and relationships after his father's death, punishing his father's enemies and maintaining his friendships. All of this, however, is conditioned upon the father properly disciplining his son.[55]

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[54] The masculine language of the passage is not accidental. Many scholars have noticed Ben Sira's patriarchal views. For example, Sir 22:3, "It is a disgrace to be the father of an undisciplined son, and the birth of a daughter is a loss."

[55] "Since there was no belief in a blessed immortality at that time, children gave parents a sense of continuance; hence it was important to train children to be upright, wise, and pious." Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 376.

Given that Ben Sira sees fatherly discipline as prescribed by the law, the father who disciplines his son would be acting righteously and simultaneously increasing his chances at immortalization through his future obedient son.

One passage that clearly distinguishes between two types of immortalization is the encomium in chs. 44-50, which is known as the Praise of the Ancestors. Starting with Enoch and ending with Simon ben Onias, Ben Sira lists the accomplishments of the influential characters throughout Israel's history. He begins, "Let us now sing the praises of famous (ἐνδόξους, חסד) men, our ancestors in their generations" (44:1). In vv. 3-6, Ben Sira references the various ways these figures acquired notoriety, including actions like political rule, acts of valor, intelligence and wisdom, prophecy, riches, and musical ability. Regarding these types, he claims that they have been properly recognized—they have received the praise they were due.

However, he concedes that others have been forgotten through time: "But of others there is no memory; they have perished as though they had never existed; they have become as though they had never been born, they and their children after them. But these also were men of compassion (ἐλέους; חסד), whose righteous deeds have not been forgotten" (44:9-10).[56] Ben Sira recognizes that many righteous people throughout Israel's history have, in a certain sense, been forgotten because they did not accomplish mighty acts. However, their righteous actions have given them a type of immortality: "their wealth will remain with their descendants, and their inheritance with their children's children. Their descendants stand by the covenants; their

[56] While some commentators have understood vv. 10-14 as further elaboration on the "famous men" of vv. 1-7, the reading offered here sees the forgotten ones of v. 9 as the subject of vv. 10-14. This reading is supported by two factors. First, the alternative reading causes vv. 8-9 to stand in blaring contradiction to Ben Sira's overall message about the value of righteousness, that is, that righteousness establishes one's name for eternity (e.g., 41:11-13). Second, the Hebrew MSS use the same word (חסד) to describe the men of v. 10 as they do the men of v. 1. In other words, Ben Sira argues that although some men have been forgotten, they are just as חסד as the famous men. By rending חסד as ἔνδοξος in v. 1 but as ἐλέους in v. 10, the Greek translator has obscured the meaning of the original Hebrew. For further support of this reading, see Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 502.

children also, for their sake. Their offspring will continue forever, and their glory will never be blotted out. Their bodies are buried in peace, but their *name* lives on generation after generation" (41:11-14). In verse 13, "offspring" and "glory" are set in synonymous parallelism, further strengthening the connection between progeny and immortality.[57] This passage further evidences that Ben Sira acknowledges two means by which one can acquire immortality: one acquired through corporate memory, reserved for the mighty figures of Israel's history, including Ben Sira's scribal community, and another through progeny.[58] Both involve the continuation of one's "name," although Ben Sira means this more literally in the case of the former and more figuratively in the latter.

Conclusion

How does Ben Sira's theory of onomastic immortality orient him in relation to the Deuteronomic theory of divine retribution and within the context of Second Temple Jewish retribution theologies? Ben Sira sought to preserve the basic framework of the Deuteronomic view. He unambiguously portrays divine justice as occurring on earth. Despite this, he expresses a discomfort with too simplistic an interpretation of the Deuteronomic perspective. To account for this, he accepts the possibility of delayed retribution, aligning him with the view of Job, and invents ideas like psychological torment for the wicked. Ben Sira's theory of onomastic immortality also seems to have been fundamentally concessive; aware that divine justice does not always occur during the life of the righteous or wicked individual, he postulated that God would administer justice after death. However, his theory of immortality differs significantly from the apocalyptic notion that was becoming increasingly popular. For Ben Sira, a person

[57] Skehan and Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 502.
[58] For Ben Sira, these two categories are not mutually exclusive; that is, the famous can also be immortalized for their righteousness, but not all the righteous are immortalized through fame.

could achieve immortality by either 1) accomplishing some great task that brought oneself fame or 2) living righteously, which caused one's progeny to flourish and continue the legacy of their deceased parents and ancestors. Both types, however, resulted in the longevity of one's name. Ultimately, Ben Sira's nuanced vision of onomastic immortality was overshadowed by the rising allure of apocalyptic theologies that promised a more personal and dramatic resolution through resurrection and eschatological judgment.

CHAPTER TWO

Afterlife and Status Preservation: The Ideological Function of Onomastic Immortality in Sirach

In the previous chapter, I discussed the theological explanation for why Ben Sira adhered to his particular ideas about the afterlife. More specifically, I argued that Ben Sira used the notion of onomastic immortality as a means to preserve a conservative interpretation of the Deuteronomic theory of divine retribution. It would be inaccurate, however, to view Ben Sira as a systematic theologian concerned primarily with the coherence of his theological beliefs. His beliefs about the afterlife were not formed in isolation from the social, economic, and political realities of his world. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Ben Sira utilized the idea of onomastic immortality as a strategy of status preservation. After identifying Ben Sira's social location, I will frame his rejection of resurrection and eschatological judgment within the context of inter-priestly and scribal conflict. Next, I will consider how Ben Sira and his scribal class's subservience to the ruling priests explains his attraction to the possibility of corporate notoriety. Then I will discuss how Ben Sira's emphasis on specifically male progeny functioned to maintain the longevity of the Judean scribal-priestly elites and the continued support of the Judean non-elites.

Identifying Ben Sira's Social Location

In his work on Ben Sira's social setting, Richard Horsley describes Ben Sira as belonging to a retainer class of scribes.[59] As a *retainer* class, they served and depended economically on the

[59] See Richard Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) for a broad sociological treatment of Judea during Second Temple period. See also Richard Horsley and Patrick Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," in *Second Temple Studies III: Studies in Politics, Class and Material Culture* (ed. P. R. Davies and J. M. Halligan; Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 74-107.

ruling aristocracy, that is, the priests who governed the Jerusalem temple.[60] Although these scribes were part of the elite in the Judean temple-state and members of the temple's staff, they were not included in the ruling class.[61] These scribes functioned essentially as middle-men between the priestly rulers and the Judean non-elites, representing both sides but socioeconomically closer to the aristocracy. They fulfilled a variety of roles that often overlapped with that of the priests, but their primary responsibilities were to preserve, interpret, and teach ancient traditions. They were the guardians of the law, prophecy, and proverbs—all forms of received wisdom. Because education was limited primarily to Judean elites, scribes exercised a significant degree of control over the production of knowledge and culture.[62] As Ben Sira himself states in his depiction of the scribe's role in society, they also advised the priestly rulers of the Judean temple-state and travelled to foreign lands, functioning as administrators and delegates. Whereas the priests' authority was vested primarily in the temple and its cultic practices, the scribes' authority centered on the law, prophecy, and wisdom. Put succinctly, they were the intellectual class of their day.

As servants of the ruling priests and their mediators to the Judean non-elites, these scribes functioned as the mouthpiece for priestly ideology.[63] Ben Sira's well-being and prosperity depended on the same of his priestly superiors. Thus, Ben Sira admonishes his audience to

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[60] Horsley argues that in Judea at this time there was no large "lay aristocracy." The priestly aristocracy possessed most of the wealth and virtually all political power, although rich families could intermarry with priestly families. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 63-4.

[61] "In the Judean temple-state before the Maccabean Revolt, belonging to the aristocracy presumably depended on having the requisite priestly lineage. Thus scribes from nonpriestly or ordinary priestly families could not have moved into the sacerdotal 'governing class' even if they held considerable de facto power." Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 67.

[62] Ibid., 89-108.

[63] For discussions of Ben Sira's relationship to the priesthood, see Saul M. Olyan, "Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood," *Harvard Theological Review* 80, no. 3 (1987): 139-54, and Benjamin G. Wright III, "'Fear the Lord and Honor the Priest': Ben Sira as a Defender of the Jerusalem Priesthood," in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research: Proceedings of the First International Ben Sira Conference* (De Gruyter, 1997), 189-222.

respect the priests' authority and vocation by bringing them sacrifices, otherings, and tithes, claiming that submission to them equals submission to God (Sir 7:29-31). Tithes, sacrifices, and offerings were the means through which the temple's elites maintained their socioeconomic status.[64] Moreover, because priestly status was determined by lineage, this system ensured that generational wealth and privilege remained concentrated within select families, further solidifying their socioeconomic dominance.

Additionally, one of the primary jobs of the local elites was to cooperate with their imperial overlords by governing Judea on behalf of the Seleucid empire. After his decisive victory over the Ptolemies at the Battle of Panium in 198 BCE, Antiochus III took control of Judea and decreed that it would be governed by a Judean council centered around the Jerusalem temple, with Judean ancestral law functioning as their national constitution. Antiochus III also supported the Jerusalem temple through royal subsidies and exempted those who worked in the temple, including the temple's scribes, from imperial taxes.[65] This arrangement not only reinforced the centrality of the Jerusalem temple in Jewish society but also ensured the elites' allegiance to the Seleucid empire, as their economic privileges and political authority were directly tied to imperial support. Additionally, Antiochus' tax exemptions further exaggerated the economic disparity between elites and non-elites.[66] In this context, the Judean elites and the ancestral customs they enforced became representative of imperial rule—a reminder that Judean autonomy depended entirely on the will of Antiochus. This symbiotic relationship between the

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[64] "The basis of their [the ruling priests] wealth, power, and privilege was their position as the representative head of Judean society as a whole … There would have been no glory for the high priest and priestly aristocracy—indeed no priesthood at all—without the peasant producers who supported the whole temple-state apparatus with their tithes and offerings." Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 65.

[65] Antiochus III also exempted all inhabitants of Jerusalem from taxes for three years to promote economic recovery in the area after the war. The tax exemption for the temple's elites, however, were lifelong. Moreover, Judeans who did not live in Jerusalem received no exemptions. See Anathea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Eerdmans, 2011), 55-7.

[66] Ibid., 63-73.

priestly elites and the imperial powers underscores how religious ideology was intricately woven into the mechanisms of social and economic control, reinforcing a system that benefitted both the local elites and their imperial patrons.

Besides the ruling priests and their retainer scribes, Judean society also included artisans and traders. Like the retainer scribes, they would have been dependent on the priestly aristocracy because "trade was a virtual monopoly of the imperial regime."[67] Additionally, as an agrarian society most of the peasant class consisted of agricultural workers. Horsley hypothesizes that they would have constituted roughly 90 percent of Judean society and existed at the subsistence level. As mentioned above, these peasant farmers formed the basis of the economy and tax base in the Judean temple-state because the aristocracy produced no wealth or goods of their own.

Overall, Ben Sira seems to have accepted the social hierarchy of his day. He never critiques the imperial powers nor the priests who cooperated with them. Ben Sira condemns neither the rich nor the poor for their status. For Ben Sira, rich and poor have their own set of hardships; riches bring increased temptation, but the poor are often exploited by those above them on the socioeconomic hierarchy. While Ben Sira urges his students to advocate for the poor's needs and to give alms (Sir 29:8-13), he does not offer a prophetic-like critique of the social structures that upheld economic imbalance. He instead sees the social hierarchy as ordained by God—a necessary part of his created order.[68] Within their context, Ben Sira advises his students to exercise caution in dealing with their superiors, showing proper deference and

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[67] Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and Politics*, 67.

[68] "But despite his understanding that the rich and poor are at odds, Ben Sira is no social critic. He does not blame the rich for creating the circumstances that oppress the poor, nor does he advocate any measures, other than almsgiving, that would redress the economic disparities that he sees around him. God decrees one's place in life, and what sets one person apart from another before God is not station in life, wealth or poverty, but keeping the commandments, fearing the Lord. Ben Sira is not engaging in the kind of social critique that the biblical prophets are." Benjamin G. Wright III, "'Who Has Been Tested By Gold and Found Perfect?' Ben Sira's Discourse of Riches and Poverty," in *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, The Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (Brill, 2008), 80-1.

etiquette at events like dinner parties (Sir 13:4-13; 31:12-18; 32:1-13).[69] Ben Sira knew how quickly his and his scribes' circumstances could change if they made the wrong move.

Ben Sira and the Enochic Tradition

In Ben Sira's world, not all priests and scribes enjoyed the luxuries of the ruling priests and Ben Sira's scribal class. Priests and scribes were not monolithic groups, and they often competed with one another for positioning in Judean religio-political affairs. Textual evidence contemporary with Ben Sira indicates that some scribal-priestly groups contested the authority and legitimacy of the ruling priests. One example is the section of 1 Enoch known as the Book of the Watchers. In their work on the Book of the Watchers, David Suter and George Nickelsburg have identified disguised criticism of the Jerusalem priests in the text.[70] They argue that the myth of the Watchers functioned as a critique of the Jerusalem priesthood concerning illegitimate marriage.

A number of parallels between the depiction of the Watchers and the well-known roles of priests suggest that the Watchers were intended to represent delinquent priests. First, the sin of the Watchers as depicted in 1 Enoch 15:3-12 is that they defiled themselves by procreating with human women and producing illegitimate children. Suter notes that the text focuses more on the pollution of the angel's bodies as a result of this illicit union rather than its effects on humankind.[71] He claims that the background for this concern is halakhic in nature and regards family purity, which "in Second Temple Judaism stems from a concern over priestly purity."[72]

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[69] See Jack T. Sanders, "Ben Sira's Ethics of Caution," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 50 (1979): 73-106.
[70] See David W. Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Purity in 1 Enoch 6-16," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 50 (1979): 115-35, and George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee," in *George W E Nickelsburg in Perspective: An Ongoing Dialogue of Learning* (Brill, 2003), 427-57. Benjamin Wright provides a helpful summary of their work in "'Fear the Lord and Honor the Priest,'" 197-201.
[71] Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest," 116.
[72] Ibid., 120.

Jews during the Second Temple period disagreed regarding the types of women ordinary priests could marry. Although the Torah dictates that only high priests must marry women who come from priestly families, some Second Temple Jews applied this rule to ordinary priests as well.[73] According to this interpretation, all priests should intermarry with other priestly families to guarantee their family lines remained pure. Martha Himmelfarb argues that while this interpretation of priestly marriage was a minority view, the Book of the Watchers seems to have adhered to it. Consequently, its critique of the Jerusalem priesthood centered on their intermarriage with non-priestly families.[74] The portrayal of the Watcher's sin as one of improper intermarriage suggests that the text's authors had priestly conduct in mind, namely, priests who were engaging in marriages that these authors saw as illicit.[75]

Additionally, 1 Enoch 15:2 describes the Watchers as God's intended intermediaries between humanity and himself—a job traditionally reserved for priests. The Watchers failed to fulfill their priestly duties, further suggesting that the authors used the Watchers to represent negligent priests. Third, the Watchers also committed the crime of teaching humanity forbidden knowledge. Teaching was an activity conventionally associated with priests.[76] The authors thus imply that the priests have perverted this role as well. Lastly, as a result of their misconduct, the Watchers are expelled from heaven, paralleling the protocol of excluding priests from altar service due to improper marriage.[77] This entire argument is further strengthened by the fact that

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[73] See Martha Himmelfarb, "Temple and Priests in the Book of the Watchers, the Animal Apocalypse, and the Apocalypse of Weeks," in *The Early Enoch Literature* (Brill, 2007), 224-6.
[74] "The priests who were the objects of criticism probably chose wives from non-priestly families with a clear conscience and viewed those who criticized them as extremists. The Book of the Watchers, then, takes a restrictive approach to priestly marriage that must have set it at odds with many priests of its day." Himmelfarb, "Temple and Priests," 226.
[75] "There is a parallel between the separation that the myth seeks to draw between the angelic and human realms and the tendency toward endogamy in priestly marriages." Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest," 122.
[76] See Mal 2:6-7 and Neh 8.
[77] Suter, "Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest," 123-4.

Second Temple Jewish literature often depicts the temple as a prototype of heaven, with angels functioning as its heavenly priests[78]; the authors utilized a common motif to make their critique of the Jerusalem priesthood.

While the evidence above shows the myth of the Watchers polemicizes against priests, what clues suggest what types of groups were behind these early Enochic texts?[79] Given that these groups were producing literature as complex as the Book of the Watchers, they were likely scribes; they were well-educated and possessed extensive knowledge of Jewish and broader Ancient Near Eastern traditions. Furthermore, their interest in priestly matters, including priestly purity, astronomy, and the calendar, suggests that some Enochic Jews may have been priests.[80] The depiction of Enoch as a priest and scribe, the figure with whom the group seems to have identified, in 1 Enoch 15:1-14 further supports the hypothesis that some Enochic Jews were themselves priests and scribes. Nickelsburg even argues, based on the explicit geographical references throughout the text, that they were located in northern Galilee.[81] Overall, the evidence

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[78] See James L. Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 418-20.

[79] The task of identifying social groups behind texts is notoriously difficult and often impossible. However, in the case of the Enochic texts, Gabriel Boccaccini claims "in recent years Enoch scholars appear more and more confident in talking of the existence of an Enoch group." Gabriel Boccaccini, "Enochians, Urban Essenes, and Qumranites: Three Social Groups, One Intellectual Movement," in *The Early Enoch Literature* (Brill, 2007), 307. Pierluigi Piovanelli explains that the reason for this involves the unique developmental history of the Enochic texts: "The possibility of the existence of some Enochic groups—perhaps as large and developed as to constitute organized communities—is suggested by the uninterrupted sedimentation of the Enochic traditions and texts. Such works seem to follow a coherent path of development … Accordingly, it is difficult to imagine such an ongoing process at work elsewhere than in what we could legitimately call some 'Enochic' circles from at least the third century BCE onward." Pierluigi Piovanelli, "'Sitting by the Waters of Dan,' or the 'Tricky Business' of Tracing the Social Profile of the Communities that Produced the Earliest Enochic Texts," in *The Early Enoch Literature* (Brill, 2007), 261-2.

[80] The Enochic groups' astronomical and calendrical beliefs are expressed most clearly in the Astronomical Book (1 Enoch 72-82).

[81] "At several points, *1 Enoch* asserts the geographical centrality and ultimate sanctity of Jerusalem (25:4-6; 26:1-2; 89:50; 90:20-36). It is striking, therefore, to say the least, that the compilers of this post-biblical document have incorporated into it a vision that grants sacred status to the territory around the ancient and bitterly denounced shrine of the north. The geographical rooting of the tradition must have been unshakably established. Furthermore, the precise and correct location of the sites of Dan and *Abel-Matn* indicates firsthand familiarity with the area at some point in the chain of tradition. These two data are best explained, I believe, by the hypothesis that these chapters constitute a tradition of northern Galilean provenance which, in turn, reflects visionary activity in the area of Dan and Hermon." Nickelsburg, "Enoch, Levi, and Peter," 585-6.

points towards groups similar to the later Qumran community, that is, groups of scribes and priests who rejected the Jerusalem priesthood and formed a community of their own. While there is not enough evidence to label these Enochic groups as "sectarian," the extent of their polemics indicates that they distanced themselves from the Jerusalem temple to some extent, possibly even withdrawing completely.

Was Ben Sira aware of these Enochic groups and their views on the ruling priests? Many scholars have noticed similarities in literary themes between Sirach and 1 Enoch.[82] At the least, Ben Sira was familiar with apocalyptic thought, and he intended to counter some common apocalyptic ideas. In his work on Sirach, Benjamin Wright has sought to go beyond establishing mere literary parallels by instead positing some kind of social relationship.[83] Ben Sira, says Wright, was not only aware of apocalyptic theologies but of Enochic groups, the general contours of their worldview, and their rejection of the Jerusalem priesthood. Wright sees implicit opposition to Enochic groups in several passages in Sirach.

Wright discusses four pieces of evidence to draw the conclusion that Ben Sira knew of and disagreed with the Enochic tradition. First, Ben Sira's statements about the astronomical bodies appear to implicitly undermine the solar-based, 364-day calendar. The question of which calendar Jews should follow emerged as a point of contention during the Second Temple period.[84] Central to Jewish belief was the conviction that God had designated specific times for sacred observances, encompassing everything from the weekly Sabbath to annual festivals such

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[82] See Randall A. Argall, *1 Enoch and Sirach: A Comparative and Conceptual Analysis of the Themes of Revelation, Creation, and Judgment* (Scholars Press, 1995); Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 BCE–200 CE* (Fortress Press, 1991); Samuel L. Adams, "Ben Sira's Apologetic Response," in *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (Brill, 2008), 153-213.

[83] Wright has several works devoted to this topic. Besides "Fear the Lord," see also "Putting the Puzzle Together: Some Suggestions Concerning the Social Location of the Wisdom of Ben Sira," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 89-112, and "1 Enoch and Ben Sira: Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Relationship," in *The Early Enoch Literature* (Brill, 2007), 159-76.

[84] Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (3rd ed.; Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 128.

as Passover. Adherence to an accurate calendrical system was essential for ensuring the proper timing of these holy days; observing them correctly was regarded as vital to maintaining covenantal faithfulness. Nonetheless, some Jews advocated for a lunar or luni-solar calendar while others argued for the solar calendar mentioned above. The Enochic tradition utilized the solar calendar, and many later texts that were influenced by it, such as Jubilees, also adhered to the solar calendar.[85] Ben Sira, on the other hand, in his descriptions of the sun and the moon strongly implies that the moon alone determines the timing of festivals and holidays (Sir 43:1-8; 50:6).[86] Although Ben Sira does not explicitly condemn the solar calendar, his emphasis on the moon's calendrical function and silence about the sun's, especially given the significance of the calendar in this period, suggests he implicitly opposed the solar calendar.

Wright's second and third points both involve epistemology.[87] Several passages in Sirach reveal Ben Sira's concern for the types of knowledge his students pursue and the methods through which they pursue them. In 3:21-24, Ben Sira advises his audience not to "seek what is too difficult for you, nor investigate what is beyond your power." (v. 21). They should, instead, focus on what God has already revealed, that is, their received traditions like the law: "Reflect upon what you have been commanded" (v. 22). These traditions, argues Ben Sira, have enough depth and substance to satisfy their intellectual curiosity (v. 23). Pursuing inappropriate knowledge evidences a lack of humility; his audience, then, should express intellectual humility by limiting their epistemological pursuits to inherited traditions. Related to this, in 34:1-8 Ben Sira condemns the practice of using dreams as a means of acquiring knowledge. Only fools rely on dreams (v. 1); trusting dreams is analogous to trying to catch a shadow or chasing after the

[85] James C. VanderKam, "Genesis 1 in Jubilees 2," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1, no. 2 (1994): 300-21.
[86] See Wright's discussion in "Fear the Lord," 204-8.
[87] Wright, "Fear the Lord," 208-14.

wind (v. 2). Dreams merely reflect the nature and desires of the one dreaming. That being the case, they should not be trusted because dreams have "deceived many, and those who put their hope in them have perished" (v. 7). Ben Sira also juxtaposes seeking dreams with obeying the law (v. 8).

The Enochic tradition, on the other hand, greatly emphasizes the revelation of esoteric knowledge via the medium of dreams.[88] The content of Enochic knowledge involves detailed schemes of eschatological judgment and the fates of the righteous and wicked, as seen in the Book of the Watchers. Moreover, the Book of the Luminaries, an Enochic text slightly older than the Book of the Watchers, discusses cosmic mysteries about the movement of astronomical bodies and natural phenomena. While knowledge in the Enochic tradition is primarily oriented towards future and cosmological wonders, Ben Sira focuses on the reception and interpretation of received wisdom. Unsurprisingly, the Book of the Watchers also depicts Enoch as embarking on his cosmological and eschatological tours through dreams. Within this context, Ben Sira's condemnation of pursuing esoteric knowledge through dreams takes on a polemical undertone, suggesting he was aware of groups who were characterized by these epistemological methods.

Lastly, Ben Sira's portrayal of Enoch also subtly challenges the Enochic tradition by confining Enoch's significance to biblical precedent.[89] In 44:16, Ben Sira references Enoch's being taken up directly by God, making him "an example of repentance to all generations." Similarly, in 49:14 he again refers to Enoch's miraculous ascension and claims that "few have ever been created on earth like Enoch." While Ben Sira certainly praises Enoch, Ben Sira's references are brief and restricted to what the biblical tradition says about him. Given that Genesis dedicates only four verses to Enoch, this brevity is unsurprising. However, Sirach 16:7

[88] Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire*, 291-2.
[89] Wright, "Fear the Lord," 214-7.

reveals that Ben Sira was aware of the myth of the Watchers, yet he deliberately avoids linking it to Enoch. He instead confines Enoch's legacy to piety and repentance, omitting his role as a revealer of divine mysteries. This omission reflects a conscious effort to distance Enoch from the apocalyptic speculation that centered around him in the Enochic tradition.

Had Ben Sira personally encountered members of Enochic groups? Had he ever read any Enochic texts such as the Book of the Watchers? The data do not permit these questions to be answered. While the exact relationship between Ben Sira's scribal group and the Enochic groups cannot be fully explicated,[90] there does seem to be enough evidence to support the idea that Ben Sira knew of and rejected the Enochic tradition. Within this context, Ben Sira's praise of the Jerusalem priesthood also takes on new meaning; aware of the Enochic tradition's critique of the Jerusalem priesthood, Ben Sira sought to simultaneously delegitimate their competing claims to authority and to promote the ruling priests. In doing this, he targets the epistemological foundation of the Enochic tradition: the use of dreams as a medium of revelation, astronomical and eschatological speculation, and the visionary role of Enoch. Ben Sira, instead, prioritizes inherited tradition and the law as a source of authority. Sirach and the Enochic tradition thus represent divergent streams of scribal wisdom[91]; whereas Ben Sira's wisdom focuses on the interpretation of inherited traditions, the Enochic groups focus on new revelation that God has uniquely given to them. To supersede Ben Sira and the Jerusalem priests' claim to authority, the Enochic tradition appealed to the antediluvian figure of Enoch who, unlike Moses, never died but

[90] Whereas Wright sees some type of direct social connection between Ben Sira and the Enochic groups, I think the evidence better supports Ben Sira's general familiarity with the Enochic tradition. Wright perhaps slightly overstates his case.

[91] Apocalypticism is a form of wisdom and not something separate. "The entities usually defined as sapiential and apocalyptic often cannot be cleanly separated from one another because both are the products of wisdom circles that are becoming increasingly diverse in the Greco-Roman period." George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in Early Judaism," in *Conflicted Boundaries in Wisdom and Apocalypticism* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 20.

was instead taken up to heaven.[92] Their utilization of Enoch as an ongoing prophetic voice allowed them to prioritize Enochic revelation over Mosaic law.

How does Ben Sira's view of the afterlife fit into this scheme? Ben Sira's affirmation of onomastic immortality reflects his larger rhetorical goal of status preservation. In the Enochic tradition, resurrection and eschatological judgement signified God's eventual reversal of the economic-political-religious structures of the Judean temple-state. God would intervene into Judean history, judge the wicked priests, and establish a new kingdom with true priests in control of God's theocracy.[93] Far from being about merely individual salvation and rescue into some otherworldly realm, these ideas represented the collective interests of disenfranchised scribes and priests. They indicated the expectation of a divinely orchestrated upheaval that would dismantle the existing power structures and replace them with a new, righteous order. Ben Sira's theory of onomastic immortality, on the other hand, fortifies the status quo of the Judean temple-state. For Ben Sira, onomastic immortality implied that divine justice was meted out on earth rather than in some future, transformative intervention. Ben Sira's onomastic immortality reinforced the legitimacy of the existing scribal and priestly hierarchy and dismissed any expectation of divine reordering of society, thereby upholding the authority of the Jerusalem temple and its ruling elites.

Onomastic Immortality and Corporate Fame in Ben Sira's Social World

The above discussion demonstrated why Ben Sira rejected the ideas of resurrection and eschatological judgment. But what features of Ben Sira's social context explain his attraction to

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[92] The relationship between "Enochic" Judaism and "Mosaic" Judaism in highly contested among Enochic scholars. For more on the significance of Enoch being the representative head of this tradition, see John Collins, "Enoch and Ezra," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch* (Brill, 2013), 83-97.

[93] Eschatological life in the Book of the Watchers occurs on earth and in physical bodies. For more on eschatology in the Book of the Watchers, see C. D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: 200 BCE–CE 200* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 140-5.

the idea of onomastic immortality? Ben Sira used the notion of onomastic immortality, specifically the idea of corporate fame, to ideologically reinforce the collective identity of his scribal group. Because they experienced economic immobility and subservience to the ruling priests, the promises of material reward ceased to be meaningful to his scribal group. To account for this, Ben Sira utilized the idea of corporate fame to foster a sense of class pride as a substitute for material wealth, giving these scribes an achievable goal at which they could aim.

The value system undergirding Ben Sira's theory of onomastic immortality involves notions of honor and shame. Scholars have long recognized that honor and shame values were a significant part of the cultural context of ancient Mediterranean societies. Bruce Malina defines honor as "the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) plus that person's value in the eyes of his or her social group. Honor is a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgement of worth."[94] In honor and shame cultures, the value and self-esteem of individuals depend on how they are perceived in their social group. These individuals do not look inward to determine their "true selves," as one might in modern western cultures, but they instead look outward for confirmation from their community to determine their identities. Honor functions as a kind of social credit—one of many factors that determine where one fits within the social hierarchy and how one should relate to others. Thus, in honor and shame cultures, the desire to acquire honor and avoid shame is a major factor that motivates action and behavior.

Many scholars have noted that Ben Sira expresses an increased concern for honor and shame as compared to his sapiential predecessors. Jack Sanders, for example, notes that while Ben Sira uses the traditional wisdom terminology of "life" and "death," he often defines life in a different way from Proverbs. Life, for Ben Sira, often refers to the preservation of one's good

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[94] Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed.; John Knox Press, 2001), 30.

name: "Thus a good name is even more important for Ben Sira than a good life … Indeed, shame is the key ethical sanction in Ben Sira."[95] One avoids shame by obeying the Torah, which, in turn, leads to one being honored by the community. Sanders finds the precedent for Ben Sira's concern for honor and shame in Proverbs, but he concludes: "In the book of Proverbs, then, we find the background of Ben Sira's ethics of caution well attested, although far more emphasis is given to life as motivation than is given to name and shame."[96] Overall, while Ben Sira does not invent concern for honor and shame and adopts this motif from Jewish traditions, as found in Deuteronomy and wisdom texts, his emphasis on it is one of his distinctive innovations.

John Collins similarly points out Ben Sira's distinctiveness in this regard: "The traditional eudaemonism of Near Eastern wisdom literature is overshadowed in Sirach by his great concern for honor and shame, which goes far beyond anything that we find in the Hebrew tradition."[97] Additionally, David deSilva, focusing on Ben Sira's use of honor and shame values as a rhetorical strategy to preserve Jewish culture, says, "As the influence of Proverbs on Ben Sira is pervasive, Ben Sira's distinctiveness, and the conservative direction of his program, become clearer through a comparison with this collection. Such a comparison brings into sharper relief his intensification of claims for Torah as the heart and sum of wisdom, and hence as the surest path to honor and approval."[98] Benjamin Wright and Claudia Camp also reach a similar conclusion in their co-authored essay, claiming, "… the earlier book [Proverbs] is much more wedded to a theologized logic of material retribution than is Ben Sira."[99]

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[95] Sanders, "Ben Sira's Ethics of Caution," 82-3.
[96] Ibid., 90.
[97] Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 76-7.
[98] David A. deSilva, "The Wisdom of Ben Sira: Honor, Shame, and the Maintenance of the Values of a Minority Culture," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (1996): 439.
[99] Wright, "Who has been Tested with Gold and Found Perfect?" 81-2.

Why would Ben Sira emphasize honor and shame more than previous wisdom texts? One answer lies in his social location. Ben Sira and his scribal group were subservient to the priestly aristocracy, with little hope of moving up the socioeconomic hierarchy.[100] Throughout Sirach, Ben Sira refers to "the rich" as being a separate class of people from the scribes, and he advises the scribes to express serious caution when engaging with them. The rich apparently determine the scribes' fates, so maintaining their approval is critically important. This implies that Ben Sira and his scribes were not members of the aristocracy—although they were certainly not members of "the poor," either. The scribes' middling status made it difficult for them to establish their collective identity within their social world.[101] Although they viewed themselves as playing a vital role in the Judean temple-state, they wrestled with the precarious and uncertain nature of their social position. Wright aptly notes that the scribes experienced cognitive dissonance because their ideals about the scribal occupation did not match with the reality of their subservient status.[102]

As a result of this dissonance, Ben Sira's scribal group developed their own class ideology that utilized the framework of honor and shame.[103] Because they did not have access to the same types of economic-political-religious resources as the priestly elites, they appealed to a different value system that ideologically elevated the scribes' position. This axiological

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[100] Immobility is due to the fact that priestly lineage determined who ruled in the Judean temple-state. Horsley and Tiller, "Ben Sira and the Sociology of the Second Temple," 100-1.

[101] "As persons in a social middle position between the rich and powerful and the tradespersons, craftspersons and poor, but mostly beholden to the powerful, Ben Sira's advice to his students about dealing with both rich and poor provides a good window into the social world of the sage in third- and second-century BCE Jerusalem." Wright, "Who has been Tested with Gold and Found Perfect?" 84.

[102] "On the one hand, then, Ben Sira's ideology of the sage should conceivably place him at the top of the social heap. The scribe/sage is endowed with divine inspiration and pours out his teaching like prophecy. He is an indispensable advisor and counselor to the powerful. But on the other hand, the reality appears to be that the social position of the scribe/sage is conditioned by the precarious balancing act of proper behavior and support of those who employ him and advocacy on behalf of those who are the socially and economically disadvantaged." Wright, "Who has been Tested with Gold and Found Perfect?" 87.

[103] I owe much to Wright on this point, see "Who has been Tested with Gold and Found Perfect?" 89-94.

renegotiation produced the concept of onomastic immortality; if material wealth could no longer function as a meaningful reward for these scribes, the idea of an everlasting name could be a substitute. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ben Sira posited that one could achieve an immortal name through either corporate memory or progeny. Ben Sira suggested that only select types of people could attain corporate fame. In Sir 44:3-7, he lists some examples of how people have attained corporate fame in the past, including activities like political rule, militaristic achievement, musical composition, possessing wealth, prophesying, and, most importantly, possessing and sharing wisdom. Ben Sira, however, does not evenly divide his attention across these activities; while he devotes approximately one or two lines to each, he spends five lines describing scribal activities.[104] His uneven focus noticeably reveals a class bias. Ben Sira wants to communicate to his scribes that their class affords them a unique opportunity for achieving corporate fame. This point is further evidenced in other passages in Sirach that attribute corporate fame to "the wise" (i.e. the scribes) while completely leaving out groups like priests and political authorities (37:24-26; 38:24-25; 39:1-11).

Ben Sira, therefore, used the idea of corporate notoriety to ideologically negotiate the subservience of his scribal class to the priestly aristocracy. In the same way that his denial of resurrection and eschatological judgment reflected class conflict in Ben Sira's social context, so too does his notion of onomastic immortality. By emphasizing the retainer scribes' unique opportunity to achieve corporate fame, he created a common goal that united his scribal students and promoted a feeling of class pride. Corporate fame thus functioned as a strategy of status preservation.

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[104] This includes the reference to prophecy in 44:3d. Other passages in Sirach indicate that Ben Sira saw the expounder of ancient tradition as engaging in a form of prophecy (Sir 39:1-11).

Onomastic Immortality and Progeny in Ben Sira's Social World

Ben Sira's notion of onomastic immortality pointed not only horizontally and upward, that is, toward competing scribal groups and the priestly elites, but it also pointed downward toward the Judean non-elites. Although Ben Sira reserved a unique form of immortality for his scribal class, he still maintained that commoners could achieve immortality through their progeny. They did this not through their wisdom, as did the scribes, but through their righteousness. For Ben Sira, to be righteous means to abide by the laws and customs of the Jews. However, because the scribes functioned as the mediators, preservers, and interpreters of these traditions, they determined how they should be obeyed and how they should affect the lives of everyday Judeans. In other words, ancestral traditions were a device of social control that the scribes could use to enforce their and the ruling priests' authority. For this reason, Ben Sira equates submission to God with submission to the priests; giving the priests their due in the form of tithes and offerings was an essential part of righteous living. Onomastic immortality, then, could function as a means of fostering obedience to the law among the Judean commoners, which in turn preserved the social status of the priests and their retainer scribes.

More striking, however, is not the means through which the Judean commoners could achieve immortality, but the form this immortality took: continuation of one's name through progeny. As Ben Sira states in 30:4-6, a father's son acts on the father's behalf after his death and functions as an extension of his agency, maintaining the relationships the father established during his lifetime. For those who live righteously, God will guarantee their inheritance stays with their children, and their children will live righteously many generations after the father has passed (44:11-14). Ben Sira's statements about progeny reflect his larger concern for family morality and stability. For example, Ben Sira advises his implied audience—who are adult

men—to exercise serious caution when dealing with other women besides one wife (9:1-9). Fornicating with a prostitute leads to losing one's inheritance (v. 6). Ben Sira depicts the "loose woman" as a trap that a man can be ensnared by (v. 3). Men should not gaze too long on a woman's beauty, lest their passions be "kindled like a fire" (v. 8). And, of course, dining with another man's wife is prohibited (v. 9).

Moreover, men should exercise authority over the women in their household to maintain their own honor. Men should not choose wives based on the prospect of material gain because it is disgraceful when a wife financially supports her husband (25:21-22). A good wife submits to her husband's will, while an evil wife brings untold suffering and shame upon him (26:5-12). Men are not only to protect the modesty of their wives, but they also should keep a watchful eye on their daughters to guarantee their chastity (26:10-12; 42:11-13). Ben Sira even views the birth of a daughter as a loss and liability to her father, a constant source of anxiety for him (22:3; 44:9). Good daughters marry as soon as they are able (22:4; 42:9). Even then, however, her father worries that she may be unfaithful to her husband or unable to bear children (42:10). Rumors of a promiscuous daughter spread quickly, which brings shame to her father as he participates in civic life (42:11). Ben Sira summarizes his view of women in 42:14, "Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; it is woman who brings shame and disgrace."[105]

Ben Sira's ideal family, then, is one in which the father exercises full control over his household and produces male children that will continue to do the same after their father's death. The notion of onomastic immortality, with its emphasis on (male) progeny, fits within this broader patriarchal scheme. Why would Ben Sira emphasize the importance of male offspring?

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[105] Much has been written about Ben Sira's view of women. For a list of relevant works, see Jeremy Corley, "Sirach," in *Oxford Bibliographies* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

On the one hand, this reflects Ben Sira's desire for the ruling priestly and scribal classes to maintain their stability and longevity. As already indicated in this chapter, priests and scribes competed with one another for control over economic-political-religious resources in the Judean temple-state. Because the sons of priests continued the societal roles of their fathers, producing male children became an important means through which these ruling priests maintained their supremacy. A ruling class that did not generate male successors would not last long and would soon lose its prestige. On the other hand, the ruling priests and scribes also benefited from the family stability of the Judean commoners. The temple-elites maintained their economic prestige primarily through tithes and offerings. The Judean commoners, then, functioned as the economic base of the Judean temple-state. The stability of this tax base was essential for the elites to maintain their status. The more children the Judean commoners produced, who would be trained to follow Jewish law and would grow their family units, the larger and more secure the tax base of the temple-state became. Thus, Ben Sira's emphasis on male offspring not only reinforced patriarchal family structures but also served as a mechanism for preserving the economic and political stability of the Judean temple-state, ensuring the continuity of both the temple's elites and the non-elites that sustained it.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Ben Sira did not adhere to his views of the afterlife because of theological reasons alone. While Ben Sira certainly cared about issues of theodicy and divine retribution, his afterlife beliefs were not formed in isolation from the social, economic, and political realities of the Judean temple-state in the early second century BCE. To the contrary, his statements about the afterlife reflect the ideological and social conflict that Ben Sira and his retainer class of scribes experienced. Ben Sira denied resurrection and eschatological

judgment because he associated these ideas with the dissident Enochic groups of priests and scribes who rejected the legitimacy of the Jerusalem priesthood. For the Enochic groups, resurrection and eschatological judgment signified the reversal of the status quo in the Judean temple-state—a message Ben Sira, as a scribe who benefited from the priestly elites' religio-political rule, could not accept. Instead, Ben Sira posited the notion of onomastic immortality, which could be achieved through either corporate fame or progeny. Ben Sira employed the notion of corporate fame as a means to reaffirm the collective identity and class pride of his scribal community, who had become disenchanted with the promise of material prosperity due to their subservience to the priestly elites, by depicting the scribal class as having a privileged position to attain corporate fame. Additionally, his emphasis on male progeny revealed his strategy to guarantee that his scribal class maintained their status and that the Judean peasantry—the tax base of the Judean temple-state—remained stable and loyal to the state. For Ben Sira, the afterlife functioned as an ideological tool of status preservation.

CHAPTER THREE

"Like Sparks Through the Stubble": Astral Immortality and Eschatological Conquest in Wisdom

Ben Sira's afterlife and retribution theologies reflected the social location of a privileged class of scribes who had increased access to socioeconomic resources in the Judean temple-state. However, the allure of an immortal name did not capture the imaginations of many Jews during the late Second Temple period. The unprecedented persecution of Jews during this period so confronted them with the abject failure of Deuteronomic retribution theology that many appealed to resurrection and immortality as the only feasible solutions. Circumstances like Antiochus IV's persecution of the Jews, for example, seem to have proliferated the hope in resurrection and immortality such that they became engrained in the religio-cultural *zeitgeist* of "common Judaism." The fact of the unjust deaths of righteous Jews at the hands of the ungodly—best embodied by the Maccabean martyrs—would have rendered Ben Sira's onomastic immortality an irrelevant, elitist hope from the perspective of less fortunate Jews.

Onto this scene appears the Wisdom of Solomon.[106] In this text, its author, whom I will call Pseudo-Solomon, wrestled with the empirical reality of the unjust deaths of righteous Jews due to persecution from the ungodly. Far from being an exercise in speculative philosophy, his renegotiation of Deuteronomic retribution theology and belief in immortality developed in close contact with said persecution. In this context, Pseudo-Solomon *reversed* the signifiers of divine

[106] The Wisdom of Solomon is the second wisdom text of the Protestant Apocrypha. A product of Alexandrian Judaism and composed in Greek, the Wisdom of Solomon combines Jewish wisdom traditions with Greco-Roman philosophy in a manner similar to Philo. The authorship of the text is unknown, but scholars refer to its author as Pseudo-Solomon because he portrays himself as Solomon, the legendary wise king of Israel. While some scholars have specifically dated the Wisdom of Solomon to sometime during the reign of the emperor Caligula, most prefer to locate it more broadly to the early Roman period, between approximately 30 BCE and 70 CE. See David deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Baker Academic, 2018), 131-60.

blessing and curse according to the Deuteronomic theory, even going as far as claiming that premature death could be a sign of divine blessing and personal virtue. In keeping with this theme of *reversal*, I will argue that Pseudo-Solomon imagined a scenario of eschatological reversal in which God would defeat competing kingdoms and appoint the glorified righteous as judges and governors over the nations. I will begin by discussing Pseudo-Solomon's view of death and its origin before proceeding to discuss his renegotiation of Deuteronomic retribution theology. Then I will conclude with an analysis of his depiction of the eschatological judgment.

Pseudo-Solomon on the Origin and Nature of Death

Pseudo-Solomon reflects on death primarily in the section of Wisdom known as the Book of Eschatology (1:1–6:20). Most of this literary unit describes a situation in which the "ungodly" (pl. ἀσεβεῖς) attack and kill the "righteous man" (δίκαιος). This unit follows a roughly chronological scheme where Pseudo-Solomon depicts 1) the thought process of the ungodly motivating their hatred and persecution of the righteous (2:1-24), 2) the intermediate period between the ungodly's murdering the righteous man and the final judgment (3:1–4:15), and 3) the final judgment of the ungodly and the vindication of the righteous (4:16–5:23). Unlike apocalyptic literature, however, Pseudo-Solomon's description of these events is not "visionary"; that is, he does not utilize the literary motif of a seer, such as Enoch or Ezra, to take his audience on a visionary journey in which they *see* these events unfolding. Rather, he simply tells his audience what will generally happen in the future while fully acknowledging the apparent discrepancy between his description of the future and his audience's present experience. Thus, the depiction of the afterlife in Wisdom resists simplistic categorization, and many of the details cannot be clearly discerned.

Pseudo-Solomon's view of the origin of death is most evident in 1:12-15 and 2:21-24. These passages form the beginning and end of an inclusio in which Pseudo-Solomon discusses the ungodly's thought process. Wisdom 1:12-15 states:

> Do not court *death* (θάνατον) by the *error* (πλάνῃ) of your life,
> or bring on *destruction* (ὄλεθρον) by the works of your hands;
> because God did not make *death* (θάνατον),
> and he does not delight in the *destruction* (ἀπωλείᾳ) of the living.
> For he created all things so that they might exist;
> *the generative forces of the world are wholesome* (σωτήριοι αἱ γενέσεις τοῦ κόσμου)
> and there is no *destructive poison* (φάρμακον ὀλέθρου) in them,
> and the dominion of Hades is not on earth.
> For righteousness is *immortal* (ἀθάνατός).

Likewise, as the end of an inclusio Wisdom 2:21-24 returns to the ideas raised in 1:12-15:

> Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray,
> for their wickedness blinded them,
> and they did not know the secret purposes of God,
> nor hoped for the wages of holiness,
> nor discerned the prize for blameless souls;
> for God created us *for incorruption* (ἐπ' ἀφθαρσίᾳ),
> and made us *in the image of his own eternity* (εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας ἰδιότητος),
> *but through an adversary's envy* (φθόνῳ δὲ διαβόλου) death entered the world,
> and those who belong to his company experience it.

Pseudo-Solomon's main goal in these passages is to create distance between God and the origin of death, pinning it instead on a combination of human "error" (πλάνη) and "an adversary's envy" (φθόνῳ διαβόλου). Whereas Ben Sira has no qualms with attributing death to God's decree (Sir 41:1-4), Pseudo-Solomon expresses the opposite disposition. For Pseudo-Solomon, humanity was created "for incorruption" (ἐπ' ἀφθαρσία), which most likely refers to humanity being originally created in an immortal state.[107] As is clear from the synonymous parallelism in

[107] Scholars debate whether this phrase refers to humanity being created in an immortal state or being created for the purpose of achieving immortality. I defer to the majority of scholars who go with the former interpretation. See, for example, Karina M. Hogan, "The Exegetical Background of the 'Ambiguity of Death' in the Wisdom of Solomon," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 30, no. 1 (1999): 1-24. For an argument that these two interpretive choices are not mutually exclusive, see Réka Valentin, "Immortality as Presence and Destination in the Book of Wisdom with a Special Focus on Wisdom 2:22-23," *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Theologia Catholica Latina* 60, no. 2 (2015): 21-30.

v. 23, Pseudo-Solomon understands the creation of humankind in God's image (εἰκών) to refer to its ability to share in God's immortality. Both Genesis 1:27 in the LXX and Wisdom use the term εἰκών, demonstrating that Pseudo-Solomon has the creation account in mind. Moreover, Pseudo-Solomon's use of ἀφθαρσία in 6:19, "and immortality brings one near to God," further strengthens the idea that immortality involves participation in and likeness to God's nature. His statements in 1:14, being focused more broadly on the world (κόσμος) as a whole rather than just humanity, reinforce the idea that every form of destruction or privation is absent from God's creation.

If God's creation is inherently good, then from where does death come? Pseudo-Solomon posits a dual answer to this question: death entered the world through the ungodly ("But the ungodly by their words and deeds summoned death," Wis 1:16) and the "devil/adversary" (διάβολος). Although the sentiments expressed here may resemble later Christian traditions about the Fall—where the serpent in Genesis 3, identified as Satan, tempts Adam and Eve into sin, leaving a lasting impact on their descendants—Pseudo-Solomon means something quite different. First, it is unclear to whom or what διάβολος refers. This term is used nowhere else in Wisdom. The LXX translates the Hebrew word שָׂטָן ("adversary" or "accuser") with διάβολος, such as in the prologue of Job to refer to the spiritual being who challenged God, but διάβολος can also refer to wicked humans like Haman.[108] Thus, while διάβολος could refer to a spiritual being who tempts humans, as it does in Job, its broad semantic range makes it impossible for us to say with confidence that Pseudo-Solomon has such a spiritual being in mind. Some

[108] David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (Yale University Press, 1979), 121.

interpreters have even argued that the διάβολος is Cain because Pseudo-Solomon elsewhere portrays him as the archetypal sinner (10:1-4).[109]

Second, Pseudo-Solomon disregards any notion of "original sin." That is, the effects of death brought about by the ungodly's actions only affect those who "belong to his [the διάβολος] company" (2:24). In other words, Pseudo-Solomon's etiology of death contrasts significantly with Paul's, who sees some type of causal connection between Adam's sin and his progeny (Rom 5:12-21).[110] By contrast, in Wisdom only the ungodly experience death because they "court death by the error of your [the ungodly] lives" (1:12). Even when Wisdom references Adam, it praises him for his resistance to transgression and instead condemns Cain as the archetypal sinner, on account of whom God flooded the earth (10:1-4). In traditional sapiential fashion, Pseudo-Solomon maintains the "free will" theology expressed so clearly in Sir 15:17, "Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given."

Given that Pseudo-Solomon is aware that everyone physically dies, what could he mean by saying that only the ungodly experience death? Scholars have long noted this ambiguity in Pseudo-Solomon's references to death.[111] More specifically, it is unclear if by death he means literal biological death or some kind of spiritual death. Overall, the best solution to this problem is what Luca Mazzinghi calls "double death": not only do the ungodly physically die, but they also experience a spiritual or pneumatic death.[112] Other passages in Wisdom demonstrate that Pseudo-Solomon subscribed to this dualistic view of the person in which they are composed of body and soul (9:15; 1:4; 3:1-4; 8:19-20). Similar to Sirach and other wisdom texts, Pseudo-

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[109] While Winston himself does not seem to agree with this interpretation, he discusses it in *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 121.
[110] For more comparisons between Paul and Wisdom, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Rhetoric of Death in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Letters of Paul," in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy* (JSOT, 1987), 127-45.
[111] Michael Kolarcik, *The Ambiguity of Death* (Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991).
[112] Luca Mazzinghi, *Wisdom* (W. Kohlhammer, 2019), 67.

Solomon seems to have believed that God did not create the physical body in an immortal state (7:1), although he is intentionally ambiguous on this point. Philo, a contemporary of Pseudo-Solomon, also attests to this notion of pneumatic death, suggesting it may have been an established motif in Alexandrian Judaism.[113]

In sum, "death" is an ambiguous term in Wisdom that primarily refers to pneumatic death. While Pseudo-Solomon does not explicitly say that God created humanity with a mortal body, several statements in Wisdom imply that he believed this. In Wisdom, pneumatic death only occurs to the ungodly. Pseudo-Solomon makes no connection between the transgression of Adam and his descendants, affirming the free will theology characteristic of Jewish sapiential and legal traditions. However, his inclusion of pneumatic death into the Jewish sapiential tradition is a significant innovation that set him at odds with more traditional sages.

Pseudo-Solomon's Condemnation of Afterlife Denial

Pseudo-Solomon not only departed from previous sages on the origin and nature of death. Wisdom is also one of two Second Temple Jewish texts that condemn those who deny the afterlife. In 2:1-20, Pseudo-Solomon uses the rhetorical technique of diatribe to represent the internal thought-process of the ungodly.[114] According to Wisdom, the fundamental problem of their reasoning is their belief that death marks the cessation of a person's existence.[115]

In 2:1-5, Pseudo-Solomon describes the ungodly's "unsound reasoning" (λογισάμενοι οὐκ ὀρθῶς) regarding their perspective on death. They believe that life is "short" and "sorrowful" because of the permanence and irreversibility of death: "no one has been known to return from Hades" (v. 1). One's birth is the byproduct of "chance," and after one dies it is as if

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[113] Ibid., 67-8.
[114] Ibid., 70.
[115] See Daniel J. Harrington, "Transcending Death: The Reasoning of the 'Others' and Afterlife Hopes in Wisdom 1–6," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins* (Eerdmans, 2011), 204-17.

they had never existed. In vv. 2-3, Pseudo-Solomon represents the ungodly as having a materialist view of the person, such that people consist of nothing but "breath" and "smoke" and their spirit "dissolves" after death. Moreover, even people's names and accomplishments are forgotten. Pseudo-Solomon draws from both Jewish and Hellenistic sources in this passage, including motifs from Job, Qoheleth, and Epicurean philosophy.[116] While Pseudo-Solomon certainly utilizes rhetorical flourishes in this passage, he nonetheless presents the ungodly as having a view of death that aligns with that of Jewish sapiential texts.

He then elaborates on how the ungodly's perspective on death leads them to indulge in hedonistic pleasures in 2:6-10. Using a series of hortatory subjunctives, the ungodly exhort one another to "enjoy the good things that exist" and "make use of the creation to the full as in youth."[117] They engage in activities like buying expensive wines and perfumes, echoing themes found in Qoheleth (9:7, 11:9) and Sirach (14:14-17). Worst of all, however, the ungodly decide to "oppress the righteous poor man" and "the widow," justifying their decision with a might makes right mentality (vv. 10-11). In 2:12-20, Pseudo-Solomon further describes why the ungodly oppress the righteous man. The righteous man's presence reproves the ungodly for their unlawful lifestyle, and the righteous man avoids them because he considers them "as something base" and "unclean." Moreover, the ungodly view the righteous man's lifestyle as "unlike that of others" and "strange." While the identities of the ungodly and the righteous man will be discussed in the next chapter, it is worth mentioning here that Pseudo-Solomon portrays the ungodly as apostate Jews who have abandoned Jewish ancestral customs. More than that, however, they attack the righteous man because they do not believe that God will defend him:

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[116] Mazzinghi, *Wisdom*, 75-7. See also Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 116-8.
[117] The notion that one should enjoy the good things in life before one's death is prevalent in the ancient world. See Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 118.

"Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected" (v. 20).

The similarities between Pseudo-Solomon's characterization of the ungodly and the language of wisdom texts like Qoheleth, Job, and Sirach is not coincidental. Mazzinghi, focusing on Qoheleth, suggests that although "it is unlikely that the author of Wisdom is depicting the ungodly as disciples of Qoheleth," Pseudo-Solomon does depict them as "Jews who know Scripture but distort its message, beginning precisely with that of Qoheleth."[118] Part of Pseudo-Solomon's agenda in this passage, then, is to subvert the view of death presented in sapiential texts like Qoheleth, Job, and Sirach.

Ekaterina Matusova also argues that Pseudo-Solomon was aware of and intentionally polemicized against Sirach in 1:12-16 and 2:23.[119] Her analysis recognizes linguistic and conceptual parallels between Wisdom 1:12-16, 2:23 and Sirach 14:17-19, 17:30–18:1, 41:1-4. Whereas Pseudo-Solomon asserts that "God does not delight in the death of the living" and that "the dominion of Hades is not on earth," Ben Sira states that death is God's "decree (εὐδοκία, literally good-will or pleasure) for all flesh" and that "there are no questions asked in Hades." Overall, every negative statement in Wisdom 1:12-16 systematically negates Ben Sira's claims in the above collection of passages. Given that Ben Sira's grandson had travelled to Alexandria and translated his grandfather's work into Greek well before Wisdom was composed, Matusova notes, "the author of Wisdom read Ben Sira by excerpting from his translation and combining passages referring to the same theme."[120]

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[118] Mazzinghi, *Wisdom*, 80-1.
[119] Ekaterina Matusova, "The Making of the Theme of Immortality in the Book of Wisdom," in *Reading, Writing, and Bookish Circles in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Bloomsbury, 2022), 28-52.
[120] Ibid., 43.

Pseudo-Solomon's discourse on death is radically innovative compared to previous sapiential texts. By incorporating immortality into his worldview, he introduces the idea of pneumatic death for the ungodly while still implicitly affirming that humanity's physical bodies are mortal. Not only does he characterize the ungodly as maintaining a view on death that matches that of traditional wisdom texts, but he even directly rebuts statements found in Sirach. In contemplating the example of the unjust persecution of the righteous, Pseudo-Solomon renegotiated the wisdom tradition so that he could maintain God's justice.

Epistemological Reversal in Wisdom

Pseudo-Solomon's inclusion of immortality into his worldview had significant implications for his conceptualization of blessedness and cursedness. More specifically, he subverted the signifiers of blessedness and cursedness according to the Deuteronomic theory, rendering traditional symbols of divine favor such as long life theologically meaningless and elevating premature death as a potential sign of divine provision. This subversion reversed the epistemology of conventional wisdom and created a Platonic-like distinction between reality and appearances. Moreover, this rhetorical move situated Pseudo-Solomon and his audience as the true possessors of wisdom who alone understood the retributive framework behind the world.

This epistemological reversal is most evident in 3:1–4:15 where Pseudo-Solomon describes the intermediate period between the righteous man's death and the eschatological judgment. He begins in 3:1-9 by saying that the souls of the righteous are safe in God's hands. In fact, the righteous only *seem* to have died: "In the eyes of the foolish they seemed (ἔδοξαν) to have died … For though in the sight of others they were punished (κολασθῶσιν), their hope is full of immortality" (vv. 2, 4). Pseudo-Solomon then explains that although the ungodly intended to punish (κολάζω) the wicked, God used their punishment as a means of disciplining (παιδεύω)

the righteous so that they would become worthy of himself (v. 5). He first compares the righteous to gold that has been purified in a fire and then to a whole burnt offering given to God. The notion of suffering as discipline appears many times throughout Second Temple Jewish literature.[121] In v. 9, Pseudo-Solomon concludes, "Those who trust in him will understand truth." Overall, in this passage Pseudo-Solomon reframes the ungodly's persecution of the righteous as God's fatherly discipline of his children, preparing them to receive communion with himself. For Pseudo-Solomon, appearances and reality do not match. Of course, only those who possess wisdom (i.e., Pseudo-Solomon and his audience) perceive the reality of the righteous' blessing behind their suffering.

The motif of epistemological reversal becomes especially evident in 3:13-14. Here, Pseudo-Solomon contemplates two prototypical examples of figures who were considered cursed according to Deuteronomic reasoning: the infertile woman and the eunuch. In the biblical tradition and broader Ancient Near Eastern world, sterility was viewed as a sign of divine judgment due to sexual sin.[122] Moreover, the eunuch was also viewed negatively. Deuteronomy 23:1 prohibits anyone "whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off" from being admitted into the assembly of the Lord. That is, they are excluded from membership in the covenant and its benefits.[123] Pseudo-Solomon, however, says that "the barren woman who is undefiled … will have fruit when God examines souls" (v. 13). Likewise, the eunuch who has

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[121] The author of 2 Maccabees, for example, portrays God as allowing Antiochus IV to persecute the Jews so that they would return to law obedience (2 Macc 6:12-17). Interestingly, 2 Maccabees also uses the word παιδεία in the above passage. Pseudo-Solomon's comparing of the righteous' death to a whole burnt offering also has parallels in 2 Maccabees, where the Jewish martyrs' sacrificial deaths atone for the sins of the whole nation. The similarities between Wisdom and 2 Maccabees here are striking.

[122] "A person's status and stature in the Middle East were deeply affected by the number of his progeny. Sexual sin, whether intentioned or inadvertent, was believed to result in sterility." Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 132.

[123] "The *qāhāl*, 'assembly,' refers to participation in corporate worship, sacral war, and civil gatherings. In Deuteronomy, however, this religious assembly has been generalized into a synonym for the national community as a whole." Richard Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 278.

not committed "lawless deeds" is blessed and will even receive "a place of great delight in the temple of the Lord" (v. 14). Pseudo-Solomon removes the stereotypes associated with these figures, arguing instead that virtue, not reproductive capacity, signals divine blessing. His comment about the eunuch is especially striking; the eunuch, who according to Deuteronomic thought is excluded entirely from the people of God, will worship God in closest proximity to him in the heavenly temple. Once again, Pseudo-Solomon reverses the signifiers of divine blessings and curses by utilizing the examples of the infertile woman and the eunuch as recipients of God's favor.

Pseudo-Solomon also subverts the idea that long life signals divine blessing. In 3:16–4:6, he discusses God's judgment upon the ungodly and their children in juxtaposition to his blessings upon the infertile woman and the eunuch. He notes that the ungodly's children will "not come to maturity." He continues, "Even if they live long they will be held of no account, and finally their old age will be without honor. If they die young, they will have no hope and no consolation on the day of judgment" (3:17-18). Pseudo-Solomon disregards long life as an indicator of God's favor, claiming that it makes no difference in how one is judged by God.[124] Whereas traditional wisdom texts would express discomfort with the idea that the ungodly (or their children) could potentially live long lives, Pseudo-Solomon accepts this as fact. He uses antithetical parallelism in 4:7-9 and turns his attention to the righteous: "But the righteous, even if they die early, will be at rest. For old age is not honored for length of time, or measured by number of years; but understanding is gray hair for anyone, and a blameless life is ripe old age." For Pseudo-Solomon, old age is measured by virtue and possession of wisdom, not biological age.

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[124] David Winston, "Theodicy in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible* (Brill, 2003), 525-45.

His most radical statements, however, come in 4:10-15 where he frames premature death as a sign of God's approval. He considers the example of an unnamed righteous person who "pleased God and was loved by him and while living among sinners was taken up" (v. 10). Pseudo-Solomon explains that God removed this righteous person from earth so that evil did not corrupt his mind. Returning to the theme of old age, he says, "Being perfected in a short time, he fulfilled long years, for his soul was pleasing to the Lord; therefore he hastened him from the midst of wickedness" (vv. 13-14). Pseudo-Solomon seems to be referring to the figure of Enoch.[125] Pseudo-Solomon here makes use of a Jewish tradition in which Enoch lived in an exceedingly wicked generation, such that God translated him to the heavenly realm to spare him from witnessing the flood and to protect him from sinners. Pseudo-Solomon appeals to the example of Enoch as a meaningful analogue to the premature death of the righteous man. In doing so, however, he capitalizes on his subversion of the traditional indicators of divine blessedness and cursedness. Premature death becomes a signal of exceptional virtue rather than divine punishment.

Divine Retribution and Eschatological Conquest in Wisdom

Thus far, I have discussed Pseudo-Solomon's view of death and his reversal of the signifiers of divine blessing and curse. However, the question of the relationship between his understanding of divine retribution and his eschatology still remains unanswered. In this section, I will demonstrate that despite the general consensus that the final judgment in Wisdom is a postmortem judgment of disembodied souls, Pseudo-Solomon actually portrays the final judgment as occurring on earth. Divine retribution is rooted in the structure of the cosmos itself;

[125] "As background to vv. 10-12, our sage has in mind not so much the Greek myth of Ganymede as rather the biblical case of Enoch. In fact, the use of the verbs 'translate' (μετατίθημι) and 'find favor' (ευάρεστος) refer to Gen 5:21-24 LXX." Mazzinghi, *Wisdom*, 135. See also Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 140.

through Sophia, an intermediary being who permeates creation, God protects the righteous and punishes the wicked by harnessing the powers of the natural world. For Pseudo-Solomon, this retributive pattern also applies to God's eschatological defeat of the ungodly rulers.

Divine retribution in Wisdom cannot be separated from Pseudo-Solomon's creation theology and understanding of Sophia. In continuity with previous wisdom texts like Proverbs and Sirach, Wisdom refers to a feminine personality called "Wisdom" (σοφία) who was present when God created the cosmos (7:22; 9:9). Pseudo-Solomon develops this tradition well beyond what previous wisdom texts said about her. Whereas Proverbs and Sirach describe God creating Sophia as his first creative act, Pseudo-Solomon portrays her as an emanation of God's divine nature, seemingly implying her eternality. Sophia possesses a much closer relationship to the divine nature in Wisdom than previous wisdom texts, even sharing many of God's attributes. She is described as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (7:23). She is the "breath of the power of God" and the "pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty"—a "spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness" (7:25-26).

In a manner reminiscent of the Logos in Stoic philosophy, Sophia permeates the created order: "because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things" (7:24).[126] She preserves the basic integrity and structure behind the world. She even "passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God," guiding and protecting the righteous on God's behalf (7:27). She was the one who delivered Noah from the flood, Lot from Sodom's destruction, and Joseph from his brothers' envy (10:4-14). As God's intermediary between himself and the world, she

[126] For a discussion of the influence of Middle Platonic and Stoic philosophy on Wisdom, see Gregory E. Sterling, "The Love of Wisdom: Middle Platonism and Stoicism in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *From Stoicism to Platonism: The Development of Philosophy, 100 BCE–100 CE* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 198-213.

also functions as his agent of retribution. Given her oneness with the created world, Pseudo-Solomon depicts her as using nature as her tool of retribution.

In the last literary unit of the book, the Book of History (10:1–19:22), Pseudo-Solomon traces Sophia's actions in history from Adam through the Exodus and the Canaanite conquest. Pseudo-Solomon, for example, attributes the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea to Sophia—an act of deliverance for God's people but of destruction for the Egyptians (10:15-21). He then contrasts Sophia's use of water to destroy the Egyptians with her miracle of causing water to pour out of the rock during the Israelite's wilderness wanderings: "For through the very things by which their enemies were punished, they themselves received benefit in their need" (11:5). In 11:15-20, Pseudo-Solomon discusses the various plagues sent upon the Egyptians, claiming they were sent by Sophia as punishment for the Egyptian's idolatry "so that they might learn that one is punished by the very things by which one sins" (11:16).[127] Sophia also punished the inherently evil Canaanites by sending wasps to destroy them gradually, thereby giving them a chance to repent. Pseudo-Solomon summarizes his retribution theology nicely in 16:24: "For creation, serving you who made it, exerts itself to punish the unrighteous, and in kindness relaxes on behalf of those who trust in you."

This conceptual framework of divine retribution through the natural world functions as the background for Pseudo-Solomon's depiction of the day of judgment. While many scholars have posited that Pseudo-Solomon portrays the judgment scene in Wisdom as a postmortem judgment of disembodied souls, Wisdom 5:17-23 clearly demonstrates that this eschatological judgment would occur on earth. In this passage, Pseudo-Solomon depicts God putting on

[127] The notion that one's punishment is in exact proportion to the wrong one has committed is common in ancient Jewish literature. For a discussion of this "measure-for-measure" principle in Wisdom, see Yehoshua Amir, "Measure for Measure in Talmudic Literature and in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 29-46.

metaphorical armor in preparation for his battle against the ungodly. Pseudo-Solomon states that God "will arm all creation to repel his enemies" and that "the world will join with him to fight against the senseless" (vv. 17, 20). In describing this judgment, Pseudo-Solomon says,

> Shafts of lightning will fly with true aim, and will leap from the clouds to the target, as from a well-drawn bow, and hailstones full of wrath will be hurled as from a catapult; the water of the sea will rage against them, and rivers will relentlessly overwhelm them; a mighty wind will rise against them, and like a tempest it will winnow them away. Lawlessness will lay waste the whole earth, and evildoing will overturn the thrones of rulers. (vv. 21-23)

Given the prevalence of the theme of judgment via the natural world elsewhere in Wisdom, the language in this passage should be taken literally, not as metaphor. Moreover, other passages in the Book of Eschatology also seem to confirm this reading. Wisdom 4:18-19, for example, says that the final judgment will result in the ungodly becoming "dishonored corpses (πτῶμα)" because God will "dash them speechless to the ground." The use of πτῶμα here most plausibly refers to the literal dead bodies of the ungodly. Additionally, other scholars have also noticed the implicit eschatology in 3:1-8 where Pseudo-Solomon says that although the "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God," they still await their "visitation" when they will "shine forth" and will "govern nations and rule over peoples."[128] The statement in 3:4 even seems to imply that the deceased righteous have actually not yet achieved immortality, despite their pneumatic abode with God. These statements imply that the deceased righteous, although present with God, still await a future glorification. These points considered together provide significant evidence against the immortal soul interpretation of Wisdom, which posits that the righteous' already immortalized souls are freed from their bodily chains upon death. Rather, in Wisdom

[128] See Jan Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature* (T&T Clark, 2019), 56-7 and N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Fortress Press, 2003), 167.

immortalization of the righteous occurs at their "visitation" when they are ontologically transformed by God. I will expand more on this below.

In sum, Pseudo-Solomon's description of the final judgment in 5:17-23 clearly refers to an earthly judgment enacted by Sophia. For Pseudo-Solomon, Sophia will utilize the natural world to punish the wicked in a manner comparable to her previous actions throughout history. The eschatological judgment, therefore, does not stand out as *sui generis*. Unlike some streams of apocalyptic thought that have a pessimistic view of creation, Wisdom maintains the traditional sapiential belief that God's creation is inherently good and orderly, even if the ungodly at times appear to prevail over the righteous. The final judgment in Wisdom deals with the situational problem of the unjust deaths of the righteous. Thus, while Pseudo-Solomon incorporates some views that resemble those found in apocalyptic texts, he is not quite an apocalypticist.[129]

Eschatological Reversal in Wisdom

For Pseudo-Solomon, the final judgment involves more than God's vengeance upon the ungodly through the natural world. He also imagines that, in some sense, the righteous will be ontologically transformed by God and will also judge the ungodly. I will argue that the final judgment results in the status reversal of the persecuted righteous and the ruling ungodly. The ungodly, who are depicted as political rulers, are dethroned at the final judgment while the righteous are glorified and assume positions of judicial and political authority. The glorified righteous are then able to avenge themselves by condemning the ungodly rulers to execution.

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[129] For more works that discuss apocalyptic elements in Wisdom, see John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology in Philosophical Dress in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Shem in the Tents of Japhet: Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism* (Brill, 2002), 93-107. Michael Kolarcik, "Sapiential Values and Apocalyptic Imagery in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Studies in the Book of Wisdom* (Brill, 2010), 23-36. Shannon Burkes, "Wisdom and Apocalypticism in the Wisdom of Solomon," *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 1 (2002): 21-44.

Additionally, I will argue that Pseudo-Solomon envisages the righteous' glorification in terms of their angelification and adoption into the divine council.

The Book of Eschatology characterizes the literary figures of the ungodly as political rulers. They enjoy great wealth (2:6-9; 5:8) and are in positions of judicial authority such that they can execute the righteous. Moreover, as indicated in 1:1 and 6:1-11, the entire Book of Eschatology directly addresses political rulers as its implied audience: "To you then, O monarchs, my words are directed" (6:9). Pseudo-Solomon rhetorically frames the Book of Eschatology as an exhortation to earthly kings to rule justly; a day of judgment is coming when God will vindicate the marginalized righteous and dethrone the rulers who oppress them. The ungodly, then, are those rulers who have not taken Pseudo-Solomon's advice. As a result, the final judgment will result in the "whole earth" being desolate and the "thrones of rulers" being overturned (5:23). The final judgment, therefore, involves the degradation of the ungodly's status as figures with political authority.

On the other hand, the status elevation of the righteous is indicated in several passages in Wisdom. In 3:7, Pseudo-Solomon says that at the final judgment the righteous "will shine forth (ἀναλάμψουσιν), and will run like sparks through the stubble." Pseudo-Solomon's reference to the righteous' "shining" most likely refers to Daniel 12:3, which also portrays the resurrected righteous as shining and resembling stars.[130] Wisdom and Daniel testify to a common motif regarding depictions of the resurrected righteous in Second Temple literature. Many of these texts do not imagine that resurrection entails the restoration of the deceased righteous into physical bodies. Rather, resurrection in these texts involves the ontological transformation and

[130] Mazzinghi, *Wisdom*, 110.

glorification of the righteous such that they share an embodied state with the angels.[131] Given the widespread belief that stars were celestial beings, Second Temple texts frequently illustrate this transformation by likening the resurrected righteous to the luminous brilliance of the stars in the night sky. Pseudo-Solomon's language reveals the implicit logic of this type of resurrection to "astral immortality." Although he never explicitly uses resurrection language, his imagery suggests a resurrection in which the righteous attain a glorified, angelic state.

Within this context, the statement in Wisdom 5:5 that the resurrected righteous will be "numbered among the sons of God" and his "holy ones" also appears to indicate the righteous' angelic status. The phrase "sons of God" most likely refers to the notion of the divine council. The idea of the divine council appears across Ancient Near Eastern texts, the Hebrew Bible, and Second Temple literature. In its most basic form, the divine council refers to the idea that God possesses a heavenly royal court in which other divine or angelic beings serve him as their king.[132] They perform various tasks, such as delivering messages, offering political advice, or fighting on God's behalf. In some biblical texts, such as Deuteronomy 32:8 and Psalm 82, God even divides the nations among these "sons of God" and allows the divine council members to govern the nations on his behalf—with the exception of Israel, which is God's own portion.[133] This idea that each nation has its own patron angel became more prominent in the Second Temple period.[134] Sirach 17:17, for example, preserves this tradition: "He appointed a ruler for every nation, but Israel is the Lord's own portion." Some texts, such as Jubilees, reinterpret this

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[131] For more on the angelification of the righteous, see John J. Collins, "The Angelic Life," in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body, and Transformation Practices in Early Christianity* (Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 291-310.
[132] Carol A. Newsom and Duane F. Watson, "Angels," ABD 1:248-55.
[133] For a discussion of the MSS differences concerning Deut 32:8, see Darrel D. Hannah, "Guardian Angels and Angelic National Patrons," in *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings: Origins, Development and Reception* (Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 413-45. Regarding this verse, he says, "It seems safe to conclude that the original text of the Song of Moses (Deut 32:143) affirmed a belief in heavenly guardians, whether lesser deities or angels, set over the nations as a kind of cosmic patron, although later editors sought to remove this," 417.
[134] Ibid., 418-21.

tradition by suggesting that God appointed angels over the nations to intentionally lead the nations astray because of their sin. In sum, the notion of the divine council and angelic national patronage was an established tradition in the theological milieu of the late Second Temple period.

Other evidence in Wisdom also suggests Pseudo-Solomon believed the righteous would be adopted into the divine council. Pseudo-Solomon depicts the righteous not only being angelified, but also assuming positions of judicial and political power—the righteous become judges and kings who condemn the ungodly and rule over nations. In 3:7, he refers to the righteous' "visitation" (ἐπισκοπή). This word, although uncommon in secular Greek, became popularized in the LXX where it is often used for judicial punishment, whether human or divine.[135] Prophetic texts like Jeremiah and Isaiah describe God's judgment upon the disobedient Israelites and foreign nations as his ἐπισκοπή. Wisdom uses ἐπισκοπή six times, each of which is consonant with its usage in the prophetic texts. In this context, ἐπισκοπή in 3:7 clearly denotes the righteous engaging in judicial activity.

Further evidence of the righteous' judicial and political roles at the final judgment is provided by Pseudo-Solomon's statement that the righteous will "run like sparks through the stubble" (3:7). The imagery employed here alludes to a number of prophetic texts that speak of God's judgment, including Isaiah 1:31, Obadiah 18, and Zechariah 12:6.[136] The latter two texts in particular use the imagery to refer to the Israelites' militaristic triumph over foreign enemies. Pseudo-Solomon therefore seems to be utilizing a metaphor that signified Israelite subjugation of their enemies in the prophetic tradition to describe the righteous' triumph at the final judgment.

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[135] Hermann W. Beyer, "ἐπισκοπή," TDNT 2:606-8.
[136] Mazzinghi, *Wisdom*, 110-1.

The clearest illustration of the righteous' judicial and political activity comes in 3:8, "They will govern nations (κρινοῦσιν ἔθνη) and rule over peoples (κρατήσουσιν λαῶν), and the Lord will reign (βασιλεύσει) over them forever." In the LXX, κρίνω almost unanimously refers to execution of justice, resulting in either vindication or condemnation. In 4:16, Pseudo-Solomon uses κατακρίνω, a cognate of κρίνω, to refer to the righteous' condemnation of the ungodly. Wisdom 4:20–5:14 also frames the final judgment as a trial scene in which the ungodly stand terrified before the righteous and give an account for their actions.[137] Although the ungodly repent of their misdeeds, the possibility for forgiveness has passed (5:3). Wisdom's use of κρατέω in 3:8 is also significant. Κρατέω carries more political connotations and means to "conquer," "seize," or "subdue." It is used roughly 150 times in the LXX, where it often refers to militaristic conquest, such as the Israelite conquest of foreign nations, or to physical arrest. Even when used in non-violent contexts, it often denotes physical manipulation of an inanimate object. Wisdom uses the participial form of κρατέω twice to refer to political rulers. In essence, κρατέω means to gain or maintain control of someone or something for one's personal use. Overall, κρίνω and κρατέω are used synonymously to illustrate the righteous' combined roles as judicial and political figures at the final judgment.

Given the above evidence, one could identify the divine council as the backdrop of 3:8. The righteous will be the judges and kings of the "nations" (ἔθνη) and "peoples" (λαῶν), which clearly refer to the gentiles. The Lord himself, however, will reign (βασιλεύσει) over the righteous who are his people.[138] Overall, the paradigm of the divine council seems to have

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[137] George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, Expanded Edition (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 78-88.

[138] While the use of "them" in 3:8b is ambiguous and could refer to either the righteous or the foreign nations, the surrounding literary context supports the former interpretation.

informed pseudo-Solomon's thinking about the ultimate fate of the righteous at the final judgment.

When 5:23 and 3:8 are considered together, Pseudo-Solomon seems to suggest that the ungodly rulers will be replaced by the angelified righteous. After the eschatological battle in which God dethrones these rulers, God will appoint the righteous as new kings over the nations that the ungodly once ruled. Interestingly, rather than God himself being the ultimate judge of the ungodly, God instead hands them over to the righteous who will judge them on his behalf. The righteous will then condemn and sentence the ungodly to execution by God. In sum, the theme of eschatological reversal prevails throughout the Book of Eschatology. The fates and statuses of the righteous and the ungodly are reversed; the marginalized righteous who had been killed by the ruling ungodly will be resurrected, adopted into God's royal council, and appointed as judges over the ungodly and rulers over the nations.

Conclusion

As the first sage to incorporate immortality into the sapiential tradition, Pseudo-Solomon innovatively renegotiated the Deuteronomic theory of divine retribution in numerous ways. This renegotiation primarily involved his reversal of the signifiers of divine blessing and curse. The typical symbols of divine favor, such as long life and progeny, were rejected by Pseudo-Solomon, and he instead elevated figures like the barren woman, the eunuch, and the young martyr as the recipients of God's love.

I have also argued that the central motif of Pseudo-Solomon's eschatology is status reversal. Overall, Pseudo-Solomon imagines that the day of judgment will occur on earth and involves the overturning of pagan rulers, the resurrection and angelification of the righteous, and the righteous' adoption into the divine council as God's representative governors over the earth.

Given the non-apocalyptic genre of the text, Pseudo-Solomon leaves many questions unanswered because his primary concern is not to provide an in-depth vision of the afterlife.[139] While several statements in Wisdom imply the resurrection of the righteous, this resurrection is not bodily but leads instead to astral immortality.

[139] Pseudo-Solomon, for example, never indicates what happens to ungodly people who have died prior to the eschatological judgment. Will they be resurrected so that they can be judged by the righteous? Or do they simply reside in Hades with no hope of immortality? It is also unclear if Pseudo-Solomon envisions all the righteous being resurrected or only a select few. The text does not provide enough data for these questions to be answered.

CHAPTER FOUR

Afterlife and Status Reversal: Afterlife as Ideology in Wisdom

Although both Ben Sira and Pseudo-Solomon renegotiated the wisdom tradition to better fit their rhetorical needs and exigencies, Pseudo-Solomon's renegotiation was much more drastic. Ben Sira's social location as a privileged elite in the Judean temple-state allowed him to maintain the wisdom tradition's standard, Deuteronomic retributive framework and denial of the afterlife. Pseudo-Solomon, on the other hand, while still an elite, lived in a more precarious environment; Alexandrian Jews were often the subject of social discrimination and marginalization at the hands of their Greco-Roman neighbors. Because of this, as John Collins notes, Alexandrian Jewish literature often assumes an apologetic tone.[140] Many Alexandrian Jews sought to maintain their ancestral customs while also competing with their Greek and Egyptian neighbors for cultural prestige and political rights. Even for the most conservative Jews, Hellenization could not be fully resisted.[141] For other Jews, however, the allure of the Hellenistic world and the benefits it brought proved too tempting, which resulted in either the relaxation or abandonment of traditional Jewish practices. The agonistic world of Alexandrian Judaism called for a serious adaptation of traditional wisdom to ensure its survival.

The Wisdom of Solomon is an example of an attempt to do exactly that. Pseudo-Solomon's reworking of the wisdom tradition is innovative in numerous ways. Of central importance to this thesis, of course, has been his inclusion of immortality. In this chapter, I will ask how Pseudo-Solomon's views about the afterlife functioned ideologically in the social world

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[140] John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 135.

[141] Even texts that explicitly polemicize against Hellenism, such as 2 Maccabees, still incorporate elements of Greek culture. Second Maccabees, for example, writes in Greek and utilizes many Greek rhetorical devices, suggesting he had some type of Greek education.

of Alexandrian Judaism. I will argue the following three points: 1.) Pseudo-Solomon utilized immortality to incentivize Jews to abide by their ancestral customs, thus preserving Jewish identity; 2.) Pseudo-Solomon condemned denial of the afterlife because he perceived afterlife denial as a feature of an aristocratic ideology that legitimized oppression of the marginalized; and 3.) Pseudo-Solomon's depiction of the day of judgment employs the language of imperial domination to protest Greco-Roman imperial ideology. After discussing the social world of Alexandrian Judaism and Pseudo-Solomon's location within it, I will discuss the above points in order.

Locating Pseudo-Solomon in the Social World of Alexandrian Judaism

The Alexandrian Jewish community was the largest diasporic Jewish community in the Greco-Roman world. Diasporic Jews typically enjoyed a degree of semi-autonomy in their own ethnic communities. It was common for immigrants of all ethnicities to form their own ethnically based associations wherever they settled around the Mediterranean.[142] These ethnic associations allowed these groups to maintain bonds with people of their homeland and preserve aspects of their culture and ancient religious customs. Roman and local officials generally recognized the legitimacy of these groups, often providing them with special rights and privileges. It was not uncommon for well-off citizens of the local community to sponsor these associations, thereby entering into patron-client relationships with them. One inscription dated around 100 CE from Phrygia, for example, indicates that the Jewish association there was sponsored by a priestess of the local imperial cult named Julia Severa, who provided the funds for the construction of their synagogue.[143]

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[142] John S. Kloppenborg, "A World of Associations," in *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (Yale University Press, 2020), 23-54.
[143] MAMA VI 264. See John S. Kloppenborg, "Associations in the Ancient World," in *The Historical Jesus in Context* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 325.

The Alexandrian Jewish population was large enough that it was recognized as a *politeuma*, which was a "common form of formal association for ethnic groups in the cities of the Hellenistic world."[144] This *politeuma* had its own internal political and judicial structures, administrators and court systems. Philo notes that the Jewish *gerousia*, senate, in Alexandria was appointed by Augustus himself after the Jewish ethnarch died in 11-12 CE.[145] Although the Alexandrian Jews were granted a degree of semi-autonomy, the Roman government, even at the imperial level, had a hand in their internal affairs.

Alexandria was renowned throughout the Greco-Roman world as a philosophical center. It was especially famous for its museum where philosophers gathered to discuss their theories of ultimate reality and the good life.[146] Alexandria even superseded Athens as the philosophical capital of the world after the Romans besieged Athens in 86 BCE.[147] Importantly, the Romans valued the cultural heritage of the Greeks and appropriated Greek philosophy and rhetoric for their own purposes. Jewish literature of Alexandrian provenance reflects this intellectual environment, blending Jewish theological concepts with Greek philosophy in an attempt to reconcile their faith with the dominant cultural and intellectual trends of the time.

During the period of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt, the relations between Jews and Greeks in Alexandria seems to have been largely positive. When the Romans conquered the Ptolemies and took control of Alexandria in 30 BCE, however, the Jews saw a gradual decline in their social status and an increase in conflict with the native Greeks. In 24 BCE, the Romans imposed a poll tax in Egypt called the *laographia* that applied to everyone who was not a citizen of a Greek city,

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[144] Lester L. Grabbe, "Hellenistic Judaism," in *Judaism in Late Antiquity 2: Historical Syntheses* (Brill, 1994), 61.
[145] Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 137-8.
[146] Malka Z. Simkovich, *Discovering Second Temple Literature: The Scriptures and Stories that Shaped Early Judaism* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 91.
[147] Gregory E. Sterling, "The Love of Wisdom: Middle Platonism and Stoicism in the Wisdom of Solomon," in *From Stoicism to Platonism: The Development of Philosophy, 100 BCE–100 CE* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 199.

thereby exempting the Greeks but not the Jews and native Egyptians.[148] One acquired Greek citizenship by receiving a Greek education through the gymnasium.[149] The problem for Jews, however, was that participating in the gymnasium involved partaking in idolatrous civic and religious practices.[150] Thus, the wealthy and educated Jews of Alexandria, those who could afford a Greek education, found themselves in a dilemma: while they wanted to distinguish themselves from the native Egyptians, whom the Greeks generally disliked,[151] in order to acquire Alexandrian citizenship they had to compromise on their observance of Jewish law. Many Jews were not willing to compromise their Jewishness to achieve the political, economic, and social prestige that came with participation in the gymnasium.[152] Consequently, they advocated for a privileged status where they could maintain their distinctive communities and practices yet were elevated above the socially indigent Egyptians, thus receiving exemption from the *laographia*.

The Alexandrian Greeks, of course, did not like this proposition. From their perspective, the Jews were asking for privileges that they did not deserve because they did not fully participate in the Greek way of life. The Alexandrian Greeks' animosity toward the Jews slowly increased until it led to pogroms in 38 CE, which resulted in the destruction of synagogues and the deaths of many Jews.[153] As a result, the Jewish *politeuma* sent a delegation, headed by Philo, to the emperor Caligula to petition for peace and the recognition of their civic rights. The Alexandrian Greeks, however, sent their own counter-delegation led by Apion who formally

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[148] Mary E. Smallwood, "The Jews in Egypt and Alexandria," in *The Jews Under Roman Rule From Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations* (Brill, 2001), 231.
[149] Ibid., 231.
[150] Ibid., 234.
[151] Marie-Françoise Baslez, "The Author of Wisdom and the Cultured Environment of Alexandria," in *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology* (Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 35.
[152] Luca Mazzinghi, "Wisdom 19:13-17 and the Civil Rights of the Jews of Alexandria," in *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research: Studies on Tradition, Redaction, and Theology* (Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 76.
[153] Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (3rd ed.; Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 38-9.

argued for the Jews' religious inferiority and illegitimacy.[154] The Jewish delegation failed. After Caligula was assassinated in 41 CE, the Alexandrian Jews revolted, which resulted in Claudius sending a letter to Alexandria and requesting the Greeks to live peaceably with the Jews. Claudius, however, also barred the Jews from participating in the gymnasium, definitively relegating them as non-citizens subject to the poll tax. The Jews revolted in 66 CE and again in 115 CE, which resulted in Trajan essentially annihilating the Alexandrian Jewish community in 117 CE. While the Wisdom of Solomon's date cannot be specifically located to any one of these riots, the text must be viewed from the perspective of the broad historical survey presented here.

Although much can be said about the nature of Alexandrian Judaism during the early Roman period, locating Pseudo-Solomon within a specific social context proves extremely difficult. Wisdom provides few details that shed light on its author's social status. He was clearly well-educated in both Greek philosophy and Jewish traditions.[155] The didactic nature of his work suggests he was a teacher in one of Alexandria's many synagogues.[156] Beyond this, it is unclear if, like Philo, he came from an aristocratic family or how much influence he had in the broader Jewish *politeuma*. Nonetheless, it seems appropriate to describe Pseudo-Solomon as one of Alexandria's Jewish leaders and as an elite.

Throughout Wisdom, Pseudo-Solomon speaks simultaneously as a Greek philosopher and a Jewish sage. As with much Alexandrian Jewish literature, Pseudo-Solomon attempts to demonstrate the basic compatibility of Hellenistic philosophy with Jewish traditions—that is, insofar as the former does not compromise Jewish monolatry and cultural practices. Rather than

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[154] Ibid., 39.
[155] It is unclear what the process of education looked like for Jewish youth in Alexandria. See Michael Kolarcik, "The Sage Behind the Wisdom of Solomon," in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 246. Collins thinks Pseudo-Solomon was probably not as well-educated in Hellenistic philosophy as Philo, *Jewish Wisdom*, 153.
[156] Kolarcik, "The Sage Behind the Wisdom of Solomon," 256.

appealing to the exclusive authority of the Jewish scriptures to argue for divine justice, he employs philosophical reasoning in a manner reminiscent of Hellenistic philosophers. Success in this endeavor would indicate to his Jewish audience that their traditions contained as much if not more philosophical depth than Hellenism, encouraging them to take pride in their Jewish identity. Pseudo-Solomon clearly values Hellenism and incorporates much of it into his worldview.

On the other hand, Pseudo-Solomon was not ashamed of his Jewishness. He often appeals to the Jewish scriptures (the entire third section of the book is an extensive midrash), and he views the Jewish law as the Jews' unique possession that distinguishes them from the pagans (6:18, 16:6, 18:4, 9). Moreover, Pseudo-Solomon criticizes the Greeks for their idolatrous practices and for worshipping the beautiful things in creation rather than the Creator.[157] He speaks here as a traditional pious Jew who values his national heritage. Overall, then, Pseudo-Solomon keeps Judaism and Hellenism in harmony while making evident his allegiance to his Jewish identity.

Immortality and the Preservation of Jewish Identity

Not all Alexandrian Jews, however, valued their Jewish customs as much as Pseudo-Solomon. Although many Jews carefully resisted assimilation into Hellenistic culture, the evidence suggests that some Jews were not as cautious. Malka Simkovich has demonstrated the presence of what she calls an Ethical Universalist worldview among some Alexandrian Jews.[158] According to Simkovich, this worldview emphasized the ethical unity of humanity under one God while downplaying or even ignoring specific Jewish practices or beliefs that created cultural

[157] Pseudo-Solomon softens his critiques of the Greeks slightly in 13:6-7, "Yet these people are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For while they live among his works, they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful."
[158] Malka Z. Simkovich, *The Making of Jewish Universalism* (Lexington Books, 2017).

boundaries between Jews and gentiles. These Jews deemed the differences between Jews and gentiles insignificant because all could worship the same God. Simkovich argues that Ethical Universalist Jews were "influenced by the rise of Stoic thought in the Greco-Roman period."[159] She even suggests that Ethical Universalism "could have been normative among [Alexandrian] Jews" during the first century BCE and first century CE.[160]

Simkovich points to Philo's *The Migration of Abraham*, where Philo critiques a group of Alexandrian Jews who exclusively interpreted the Jewish scriptures allegorically and neglected the literal observance of the laws.

> There are some who, regarding laws in their literal sense in the light of symbols of matters belonging to the intellect, are overpunctilious about the latter, while treating the former with easy-going neglect. Such men I for my part should blame for handling the matter in too easy and off-hand a manner: they ought to have given careful attention to both aims, to a more full and exact investigation of what is not seen and in what is seen to be stewards without reproach.[161]

Philo agrees with these Jews that the law does have allegorical value, but he argues that its allegorical meaning should not replace its literal meaning. He says, for example, that while circumcision symbolically communicates the "excision of pleasure and all passions," the law still requires Jews to circumcise their sons. Philo's comments suggest this phenomenon was widespread enough that he felt the need to address it.

Simkovich also sees the Ethical Universalist worldview present in Alexandrian Jewish texts such as the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides and the Third Sibylline Oracle.[162] For example, Pseudo-Phocylides, despite its clear dependence on legal material in the Torah, omits laws that imply Jewish particularism and instead portrays the law as a universal ethical code consistent

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[159] Ibid., 142.
[160] Ibid., 142.
[161] Philo, *Migr.* 89.
[162] Simkovich also cites The Testament of Abraham and The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs as Ethical Universalist texts, see *Jewish Universalism*, 103.

with Stoic values. Any references to the Sabbath, circumcision, dietary laws, or God's election of the Jews—the very foundation of the law—are excluded. For Pseudo-Phocylides, the law is intended for anyone who pursues the virtuous life, not only the Jews. Philo's comments about the radical allegorizers and texts like Pseudo-Phocylides suggest that some Alexandrian Jews, who would have been contemporaries of Pseudo-Solomon, sought to harmonize their religious heritage with Greco-Roman thought at the expense of the traditional Jewish boundary markers.

Given the limited nature of our sources, we cannot determine if these Ethical Universalist Jews represented a unified or monolithic social group or movement. Nor can we discern with any confidence how widespread this worldview was among Alexandrian Jews. The basic contour of their worldview, however, seems clear. They relativized the traditional Jewish boundary markers, arguing that the law was primarily about virtue, because of their favorable disposition toward Hellenism. Some Ethical Universalist Jews likely participated in the gymnasium and may have been able to garner special privileges for themselves. Given these Jews' proclivity for Greek philosophy and textual composition, some of them were likely scribes and sages, making them competitors with Pseudo-Solomon as representatives of a more assimilationist wisdom tradition.

Does Pseudo-Solomon express any awareness of these Ethical Universalist Jews? Several passages in Wisdom seem to contain polemics that sound like references to Jews who ceased observing Jewish boundary markers.[163] In 2:12-16, for example, Pseudo-Solomon describes a

[163] Using Pseudo-Solomon's polemics in the Book of Eschatology to determine social groups or historical circumstances behind the text requires serious caution. This is because the Book of Eschatology is highly *rhetorical* and *intertextual*. His accusations of immorality and hedonism against the ungodly are "stock items in the polemical repertoire" of ancient rhetoric (Miller, 201). His characterization of the ungodly's beliefs and actions, therefore, cannot be taken at face value. Moreover, various biblical narratives and Jewish traditions—including Enochic, Danielic, Isaianic, and potentially even Maccabean traditions—informed pseudo-Solomon's construction of the Book of Eschatology. In other words, the Book of Eschatology is more a reflection on and conglomeration of scriptural traditions than it is an historical account of persecution of Alexandrian Jews. On the other hand, some features of the Book of Eschatology certainly correspond with historical reality. In order for rhetoric to be effective,

situation in which a righteous man reproaches the ungodly for their "sins against the law" and "sins against our [the ungodly's] training." The righteous man considers the ungodly "as something base," and he avoids the ungodly "as unclean." The ungodly, however, perceive the righteous man's way of life as "unlike that of others" and "strange." The ungodly find the righteous man's presence offensive and therefore kill him. Because of the language in the text, many scholars have noted that the ungodly are presented here as apostate Jews who have ceased obeying Jewish law.[164]

Moreover, in 3:16 and 4:6 Pseudo-Solomon condemns "unlawful unions," which he says will result in judgment upon the illicit offspring and their parents. In the Second Temple period, intermarriage between Jews and gentiles was widely condemned by Jews because it was believed to compromise Jewish identity. Pseudo-Solomon most likely has Jewish-gentile intermarriage in mind here, further enhancing his rhetoric against Jewish "apostates." While Pseudo-Solomon's rhetoric cannot be taken at face value or as a direct reflection of his social context, when his polemics are considered together with Simkovich's analysis it becomes evident that he was reacting to a similar phenomenon as Philo: Jews who, for one reason or another, stopped observing Jewish boundary markers.

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it must be backed by some degree of truth. The audience must be able to recognize a connection between the rhetorician's language and their perceived reality. While rhetoric might embellish facts, it does not completely fabricate them. Likewise, although scriptural traditions shaped the narrative in the Book of Eschatology, Pseudo-Solomon certainly intends his work to address the needs and exigencies of his community. Given the frequent marginalization—and at times violent persecution—of Alexandrian Jews, the Book of Eschatology's portrayal of the persecuted righteous man likely reflected the general experiences and concerns of its audience. Overall, the best approach forward is one that views the "ungodly" as an eclectic and polymorphous antagonist in the Book of Eschatology. That is, there is no single, coherent social group behind this character. For pseudo-Solomon, the ungodly is a rhetorical construct that combines various social groups and embodies numerous competing ideologies with which he disagrees. The ungodly is a patchwork character, with each individual thread possessing some truth yet ultimately woven together into a broader rhetorical construct that serves his ideological agenda.

[164] See Robert Miller, "Immortality and Religious Identity in Wisdom 2-5," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L Mack* (Trinity Press International, 1996). Baslez, "The Author of Wisdom and the Cultured Environment of Alexandria," 36-7. Daniel J. Harrington, "Transcending Death: The Reasoning of the 'Others' and Afterlife Hopes in Wisdom 1–6," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins* (Eerdmans, 2011), 209.

Pseudo-Solomon may have had Ethical Universalist Jews in mind when he composed parts of his text. Although he views these Jews as apostates, they most likely considered themselves to be faithful Jews (Philo's comments do in fact support this). Like Paul the apostle, they may have believed that "true Jewishness" consisted not of flesh and blood but of spirit and virtue—although we know much less about these Alexandrian Jews than Paul. Overall, in the context of Alexandrian Judaism, Pseudo-Solomon and these Ethical Universalist Jews represent divergent approaches to the same question of how Jews should respond to their social environment. While Ethical Universalist Jews embraced Hellenistic philosophy and de-emphasized traditional Jewish boundaries, Pseudo-Solomon prioritized Jewish identity while selectively incorporating Hellenistic influences.[165]

As a leader in the Alexandrian Jewish community, Pseudo-Solomon sought to utilize the wisdom tradition to push back against this alternative approach to Jewish law. Like Ben Sira, Pseudo-Solomon viewed the law as the path to righteousness and blessing from God (Wis 6:18). Both also attempted to foster law obedience by offering incentives of divine reward. However, while Ben Sira and Pseudo-Solomon adopted similar rhetorical strategies, their understandings of divine reward were significantly different. Ben Sira, in line with traditional wisdom, promised a form of earthly prosperity and longevity. He argued that law obedience resulted in one's name achieving honor and social prestige through corporate fame or progeny. Pseudo-Solomon, on the other hand, incorporated immortality into the sapiential tradition, which fundamentally changed how divine retribution worked according to the traditional system.

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[165] Although Pseudo-Solomon does not explicitly mention the traditional boundary markers, his text is still thoroughly particularistic. See Collins' discussion of particularism in Wisdom in *Jewish Wisdom*, 218-21. Simkovich also considers Wisdom a particularistic text, *Jewish Universalism*, 51.

Why would Pseudo-Solomon modify the wisdom tradition in such a drastic way? Why integrate immortality into the tradition if it required such a significant alteration of the act-consequence nexus? There are two closely related answers to this question: incentivization and competition. On the one hand, traditional wisdom's promise of earthly prosperity could not function as an effective means of incentivization for law obedience for Alexandrian Jews. Alexandrian Jews were aware of too many counter-examples of law obedience leading to persecution rather than long-life, wealth, and honor. The violent pogroms of 38 CE, and smaller scale events like this, demonstrated that law obedience could lead to death. The popularity of the Maccabean martyrdom tradition among Alexandrian Jews likely reflects their awareness of the dangers associated with obedience to Jewish customs.[166] Similarly, rather than leading to wealth, Jewish identity led to one's subjection to the Alexandrian poll tax—a constant reminder for Alexandrian Jews of their inferiority in the eyes of their Greek and Roman neighbors.

Ben Sira's emphasis on social prestige and honor through Jewish law would have also appeared oxymoronic to Alexandrian Jews. Certain Jewish customs, such as circumcision, were viewed as barbaric and offensive by Greeks and Romans.[167] Robert Hall notes,

> Since Jews were widely known to be circumcised, they were frequently ridiculed and ostracized. The Greek gymnasium or the Roman bath, both favorite institutions of those

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[166] 2 and 4 Maccabees are Alexandrian text. Numerous internal parallels between the Book of Eschatology and the Maccabean martyrdom tradition suggest Pseudo-Solomon had the latter in mind during his composition of the former. First, the ungodly persecutors are depicted as persons with wealth and judicial and political authority. Second, the persecution of the righteous centers around their obedience to Jewish ancestral law (2:12-16). Third, the righteous are tortured prior to their execution (2:19-20). Fourth, the righteous' persecution is framed as God's discipline and testing (3:5-6). Lastly, an atoning quality is attributed to the righteous' deaths (3:6). Besides these internal parallels, the Maccabean tradition in general flourished in Alexandrian Judaism, with the texts of 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees most likely being of Alexandrian provenance. These internal and external factors support the proposition that Pseudo-Solomon was not only aware of the Maccabean martyrdom tradition but utilized its framework in his composition of the Book of Eschatology.

[167] Robert Hall, "Circumcision," ABD 1:1025-31. "With the arrival of the Greeks came strong cultural pressure against circumcision. Greek sensibility accepted public nudity but strongly recoiled against removing the foreskin. Greeks considered a bare glans so repugnant, perhaps indecent, that those born with a defectively short foreskin frequently submitted to epispasm, surgery designed to restore the foreskin to its natural shape… Since the Romans shared the Greek repugnance toward circumcision, circumcision became the target of horror, contempt, scorn, and ridicule throughout the period."

> who could afford them, presupposed public nudity. The severe social stigma against circumcision discouraged Jews from participating.[168]

Especially in Alexandria, where access to the gymnasium was a requirement for citizenship, Jewish law restricted Jews from obtaining symbols of social prestige like Alexandrian citizenship. Jewish customs thus created a glass ceiling for Jews who aspired to public honor.

In light of these factors, the wisdom tradition required significant modification if it were to remain meaningful to Alexandrian Jews. Pseudo-Solomon wants his audience to value the law and their Jewish identity, but the incentives of traditional wisdom could not function in the agonistic world of Alexandrian Judaism. Moreover, Pseudo-Solomon was also in competition with a more liberal ideology that downplayed the importance of Jewish customs: Ethical Universalism. If Pseudo-Solomon were going to accomplish his goal of encouraging Jews to take pride in their Jewish identity, he would also have to effectively compete against Ethical Universalism. Ethical Universalism would have been particularly attractive in the cosmopolitan environment of Alexandria, where cultural assimilation could provide access to the social and economic benefits denied to those who maintained strict Jewish customs. By advocating for a wisdom tradition that tied righteousness to immortality, Pseudo-Solomon countered the allure of assimilation by offering an incentive that transcended the immediate social and political disadvantages faced by Alexandrian Jews. In this way, Pseudo-Solomon's adoption of immortality into this new version of Jewish wisdom must be seen as a response to the social demands of Alexandrian Judaism.

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[168] Ibid., 1027.

Condemnation of Afterlife Denial and Aristocratic Ideology

The above discussion explains why Pseudo-Solomon included immortality into the sapiential tradition. Pseudo-Solomon, however, does not only affirm immortality, but he also polemicizes against afterlife denial. As discussed in the last chapter, the ungodly are presented as having a view of death that closely aligns with that of wisdom texts like Qoheleth, Job, and Sirach. In fact, Pseudo-Solomon seems to have been aware of and intentionally countered passages in Sirach that affirm the finality of death. As a sage and inheritor of Jewish wisdom, why would Pseudo-Solomon adopt such a negative orientation toward these traditional sapiential beliefs? I will argue that Pseudo-Solomon viewed afterlife denial as a feature of an aristocratic ideology that legitimized oppression of the marginalized.

In the last chapter, I briefly discussed how Pseudo-Solomon depicts the ungodly's status. Overall, Pseudo-Solomon portrays the ungodly as wealthy and as residing in positions of judicial and political power. This combination of wealth and power suggests Pseudo-Solomon intends to portray the ungodly as aristocratic figures. According to Pseudo-Solomon, the central error of these aristocrats is their denial of the afterlife. For Pseudo-Solomon, however, this denial equates to a repudiation of divine justice entirely. As a result, they adopt a philosophy of survival of the fittest and oppress the "righteous poor man" and the "widow": "But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless" (2:11). Pseudo-Solomon, therefore, associates afterlife denial with an aristocratic ideology that legitimizes oppression of the marginalized.

Wisdom is not the only text that associates afterlife denial with an oppressive aristocratic ideology. The Epistle of Enoch 102:4-11 contains a strikingly similar discourse to Wisdom 2:1-20.[169] Here as in Wisdom, the speech of the "sinners" is presented in first-person narration.

[169] C. D. Elledge suggests Pseudo-Solomon may have been aware of the Epistle of Enoch and used it to compose his work, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism: 200 BCE–CE 200* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 98.

> "The pious have died according to fate, and what have they gained from their deeds? Look, then, how they die in grief and darkness, and what advantage do they have over us? Henceforth let them arise and be saved, and they shall forever see <the light>. But, look, they have died, and henceforth (and) forever they will not see the light. Therefore it is good for us to eat and drink, to plunder and sin and steal and get wealth and see good days. Look, then, those who consider themselves righteous—of what sort their destruction has been—no righteousness was found in them until they died. And they perished and became as those who are not, and their souls descended with pain into Sheol.[170]

Like Wisdom, this text equates denial of the afterlife with rejection of divine justice. These "sinners" are also wealthy and adopt a philosophy that justifies their oppression of others.[171] Once again, as with Wisdom, afterlife denial is associated with an oppressive aristocratic ideology. The presence of this motif in both Wisdom, an Alexandrian text composed sometime between 30 BCE and 70 CE, and the Epistle of Enoch, which was composed in Palestine during the second century BCE, hints at its popularity among scribes who perceived themselves to be disenfranchised and subordinate to other more powerful elites.[172]

The evidence from the Second Temple period suggests these texts' rhetoric was not entirely fabricated. Afterlife denial appears to have been common among the Judean aristocracy. As discussed in chapter two, Ben Sira, for example, was a member of a retainer class of scribes who served the priesthood of the Jerusalem temple. As someone whose social standing depended on the prosperity of these ruling priestly elites, Ben Sira propagated their interests and ideologies. Notably, afterlife denial was integrally connected to his attempts at reinforcing the authority and stability of the ruling priestly elite against competing Enochic scribes and priests.

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[170] George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. Vanderkam, *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Fortress Press, 2012), 157.

[171] "Throughout these three sections, 'the sinners' are often described as socially elite, wealthy, idolators and as propagators of false teaching; in stark contrast, the 'righteous', with whom the writer identifies, are oppressed, without social influence and recipients of revealed Enochic wisdom." Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91-108* (Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 3.

[172] Even if Wisdom relies on the Epistle, this does not undermine the argument that a perceived connection between afterlife denial and social status existed.

Furthermore, the Sadducees, the priestly aristocracy of Jesus's day, were well known for their denial of resurrection.[173] The source that provides the most in-depth description of the Sadducees' beliefs even mentions their emphasis on progeny as a form of positive afterlife, putting them in continuity with their predecessors as represented by Ben Sira.[174] Beyond the literary sources, C. D. Elledge also cites the Mt. Scopus Ossuary (first century CE) and the Tomb of Jason (first century BCE) as inscriptional evidence supporting afterlife denial among Judean aristocrats.[175] For good reason, then, Elledge notes "denial of the afterlife was a significant feature of 'aristocratic' wisdom."[176]

This aristocratic denial of the afterlife was the byproduct of their subscription to traditional wisdom and a conservative interpretation of sapiential retribution theology. As discussed in chapter one, although he made some slight modifications, Ben Sira preserved the basic retributive framework of the sapiential tradition, namely, that God distributes rewards and punishments on earth. Like Ben Sira, the Sadducees also held to a conservative interpretation of the wisdom tradition and believed divine retribution occurred on earth. The Sadducees also adhered to a more conservative epistemology in which they prioritized the Torah's authority and rejected apocalyptic revelation and the Pharisaic notion of the tradition of the elders.[177] Thus, denial of the afterlife for the Judean aristocracy resulted from their generally conservative worldview.

The Judean aristocracy's attraction to traditional wisdom makes sense given its potential to ideologically legitimize their authority in Judean society. That is, the equation of earthly

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[173] See Elledge *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism*, 101-6. See also Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 101-6.
[174] Hippolytus, *Ref.* 9:24. See Elledge, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism*, 102-4.
[175] Ibid., 98.
[176] Ibid., 100.
[177] E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (Fortress Press, 2016), 521-6.

blessing with righteousness proved to Judean non-elites that the Judean aristocracy were truly righteous and deserving of their high status. In several New Testament texts, we actually observe traditional wisdom functioning in this way. In the infamous story of the rich young man (Mark 10:17-31; Matt 19:16-30; Luke 18:18-30), Jesus tells his disciples that "it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:23). The disciples, shocked by Jesus's comment, respond with the question, "Then who can be saved?" Although implicit, the logic of traditional wisdom ungirds the disciples' question. They believe that wealth is a sign of divine blessing and righteousness.[178] The rich young man, therefore, must have been righteous and deserving of entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The Synoptic Gospels use this narrative to undermine traditional wisdom and enforce their apocalyptic message of status reversal in the kingdom of God.

The story of the blind man in John 9 demonstrates how traditional wisdom could also function to marginalize the vulnerable. While they were visiting Jerusalem, Jesus and his disciples encounter a blind man at the Pool of Siloam. The disciples, once again assuming the perspective of traditional wisdom, ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Because of their adherence to traditional wisdom, the disciples assume the blind man or his parents had sinned and that his condition was God's punishment.[179] Like the Synoptic Jesus, the Johannine Jesus rebuts the assumption behind their question, saying,

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[178] "Perhaps in this case the obtuseness of the disciples is best understood as a rhetorical expedient, their astonishment at Jesus's words reflecting ambivalence about wealth among Matthew's readers. After all, both the Deuteronomic and sapiential traditions indicate that those who keep the commandments will be blessed with prosperity (e.g., Deut 28:1–14; Prov 10:22; Sir 11:17)." Walter T. Wilson, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2: Matthew 14-28* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 152.

[179] "Despite the Book of Job, the old theory of a direct causal relationship between sin and sickness was still alive in Jesus' time, as this question and the similar one in Luke 13:2 indicate. If an adult got sick, the blame could lie in his own behavior. The problem of a baby born with an affliction offered greater difficulty. Yet, Exod 20:5 offered a principle for the solution: 'I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation.…'" Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, I-XII* (Yale University Press, 1966), 371.

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (John 9:3). Like the Synoptic evangelists, the Johannine author uses this narrative to reject the retributive logic of traditional wisdom.

These narratives in the Gospels demonstrate how deeply engrained traditional wisdom was in the Jewish *zeitgeist*, both in Judea and in the diaspora, and how it could function ideologically to legitimize aristocratic authority and oppress the already marginalized. Of course, this is not to say that the Judean elites were necessarily aware that traditional wisdom functioned this way; it would be inappropriate to think of the Judean elites as malicious enforcers of a kyriarchal ideology who intentionally disadvantaged non-elite Judeans for their own personal gain. Ideology often does not operate at the conscious level. Nor should we say that *all* Judean aristocrats denied the afterlife or that *all* non-elite Jews affirmed resurrection and immortality. Such an overgeneralization cannot account for the data. Nonetheless, the inherent logic of traditional wisdom reifies hierarchical systems of domination, and we have evidence demonstrating that traditional wisdom functioned in exactly this way.

What kind of presence did traditional wisdom thought have in Alexandria? Do we have any evidence of traditional wisdom functioning in an analogous way in Alexandria as it did in Judea? On the one hand, the translation and transmission of traditional wisdom texts into Greek, including Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, and Sirach, indicate that Alexandrian Jews had access to Jewish texts in which afterlife denial was assumed. Moreover, Egyptian Jews appeared to have recognized afterlife denial as a feature of these texts and considered it problematic because, in the cases of Job and Sirach, Jewish scribes added references to resurrection.[180] It seems likely,

[180] LXX Job, for example, adds the following to Job 42:17, "And it is written that he shall rise again with the ones whom the Lord shall raise up." The Testament of Job, which was also probably an Alexandrian work, incorporates notions of resurrection into its rewritten version of Job's narrative.

however, that some Alexandrian Jews would have taken afterlife denial in these texts seriously. Rather than viewing Alexandrian Jews as unanimously affirming resurrection and immortality, we should assume that there was a diversity of views among them, with some accepting afterlife denial as a legitimate perspective while others sought to modify or reinterpret these texts to align with beliefs in an afterlife.[181]

In addition to the literary evidence, inscriptional evidence in the form of Jewish epitaphs indicates afterlife denial may have been relatively widespread among Egyptian Jews. William Horbury notes that Egyptian Jewish epitaphs expressing "fierce lamentation" with "little or no consolation" concerning the fate of the dead greatly outnumber Jewish epitaphs with a hope in resurrection or future life.[182] He concludes that "opinions on death which can broadly be called Sadducaic seem therefore to have been influential among Jews in Egypt."[183] Moreover, he also notes linguistic similarities between statements in Sirach and many of these Jewish epitaphs, suggesting that "the grandson's [Greek] translation of Ben Sira for circulation in Egypt preserved the strong statements of the original on this subject."[184] In other words, Ben Sira's afterlife denial seems to have had a meaningful impact on how Egyptian Jews thought about the afterlife, despite some scribes' attempt to add in references to resurrection and immortality. Horbury even

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[181] 3 Maccabees serves as an example of an Alexandrian text that omits any mention of resurrection or immortality, even in contexts where such references might be expected from an Alexandrian Jew. "A number of theological motifs that are prominent in other Hellenistic Jewish writings are lacking from 3 Maccabees… [such as] the after-life and retribution, the final judgment, the messianic hope, and the in-breaking of the new age. This is, in effect, to observe that 3 Maccabees does not bear the marks of apocalyptic, despite the presence of such motifs in some related writings (e.g., 2 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees). Neither does 3 Maccabees betray the coloration of wisdom literature or platonic philosophy. The author of 3 Maccabees is an old-school, Deuteronomic theologian using a narrative mode." N. Clayton Croy, *3 Maccabees* (Brill, 2006), xviii-xix.

[182] "The two inscriptions expressing hope of an after-life will represent circles in which this argument might be acceptable, but these inscriptions are much outnumbered by those in which the departed is in Hades, and there is fierce lamentation but little or no consolation." William Horbury, "Jewish Inscriptions and Jewish Literature in Egypt, with Special Reference to Ecclesiasticus," in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy* (Brill, 1994), 40-1.

[183] Ibid., 40.

[184] Ibid., 40.

sees inner-Jewish scribal conflict concerning the afterlife as the social context behind Wisdom's polemics in the Book of Eschatology.

Pseudo-Solomon, therefore, was most likely aware of Jewish scribes who held to the more conservative view of death. In the context of Alexandrian Judaism, these conservative scribes most likely did not form an aristocratic faction that exercised broader influence over Alexandrian Jews, as we saw in Judea. Thus, the competition between Pseudo-Solomon and these conservative scribes reflected inner-scribal conflict among Jewish elites, each advocating for the superiority of their wisdom among Alexandrian Jews.[185] Much like the scribes behind the Epistle of Enoch, Pseudo-Solomon recognized the kyriarchal logic behind traditional wisdom and sought to combat it. Moreover, skepticism toward the likelihood of a positive afterlife also prevailed in elite Hellenistic circles.[186] Pseudo-Solomon may have recognized the similarity between conservative Jewish views of death and the same of their Greco-Roman oppressors.[187] He may have thought that traditional wisdom vindicated their Greco-Roman overlords. From Pseudo-Solomon's perspective, then, traditional wisdom represented an aristocratic ideology that legitimized oppression in any context, whether Judean or diasporic.

Within this context, Pseudo-Solomon's polemic against afterlife denial was not merely a theological assertion but a broader ideological critique of the aristocratic wisdom tradition that justified social hierarchies and oppression. By affirming the afterlife, Pseudo-Solomon

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[185] Elledge says it nicely: "At the same time, it is important to recognize that the scribal circles in which the Epistle and Wisdom were composed were perhaps no less 'elites' than Ben Sira. Perhaps one should refer to their perspectives as arising from circles of 'elites,' who were nevertheless removed from official forms of authority… Instead of a conflict between differing social classes, the treatments of death in the Epistle and Wisdom more likely reflect a context of competition within scribal circles that held similar social status and sought to rally their contemporaries around their own views." *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism*, 101.

[186] Jon Davies, *Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity* (Routledge, 1999), 129. "The late Republic and early Empire were rather diffident about post-mortem survival, let alone post-mortem flourishing."

[187] Pseudo-Solomon seems to be aware of Epicurean psychophysical theories of the soul. See Elledge, *Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism*, 99.

challenged a system in which the wealthy and powerful legitimized their dominance through the belief that divine justice was meted out solely in this life. This critique aligns with a broader trend in Jewish apocalyptic thought that resisted the ideological function of traditional wisdom, as seen in texts like the Epistle of Enoch and the Gospels. The evidence from the Second Temple period suggests that afterlife denial was indeed a feature of aristocratic thought that reinforced their claims to divine favor and authority. However, Pseudo-Solomon and other disenfranchised scribes sought to dismantle this worldview by emphasizing divine justice beyond the earthly realm as a means of advocating for the oppressed. Ultimately, for Wisdom affirming the afterlife was not just a theological innovation but a form of social resistance against entrenched power structures.

Eschatological Reversal and Imperial Ideology

The details of Pseudo-Solomon's depiction of the day of judgment only require brief comment. As discussed in the last chapter, Pseudo-Solomon imagines that the day of judgment results in the status reversal of the persecuted righteous and the ungodly rulers. In this eschatological judgment, God conquers the ungodly rulers of the earth through the powers of the natural world. Additionally, the righteous are angelified, adopted into the divine council, and appointed as judicial and political authorities over the earth. Pseudo-Solomon emphasizes the righteous' ultimate vengeance against the ungodly rulers as the righteous condemn them to execution and eternal shame in Hades.

In this depiction of the final judgment, Pseudo-Solomon utilizes the language of imperial conquest against his Greek and Roman overlords. First, throughout the text, Pseudo-Solomon strongly implies that the righteous are Jews while the ungodly refer to pagan rulers. Here, "righteous" and "ungodly" are not merely ethical distinctions but also ethnic ones. The day

of judgment, then, demonstrates the Jews' ethnic superiority over the foreign nations and their oppressive empires.[188] This rhetorical move undermines Greco-Roman imperial ideologies, which used the notion of ethnic superiority to legitimize imperial domination. Second, the scope of the eschatological conquest is worldwide, with the "whole earth" being laid waste (5:23). Jewish victory over their enemies results not in the mere reclamation of their land, but in the expansion of Jewish sovereignty beyond the borders of Israel. This reflects the fundamental logic of imperial rule, which constantly strives to expand national sovereignty and hegemony.

Third, as members of God's royal council, the righteous essentially function as God's representatives who rule over the nations on his behalf. This imitates the political structure of the Roman empire, which appointed governors to administer provinces in the name of the emperor, ensuring loyalty, enforcing laws, and maintaining order throughout the realm. Lastly, the transformation of the righteous into angelic beings, elevating them beyond human status, mirrors the Greco-Roman concept of kings and emperors as divine figures. In sum, Pseudo-Solomon's portrayal of the final judgment uses the language of imperial rule to undermine Greco-Roman imperial ideology, subverting its claims to power by redefining conquest, sovereignty, and divine rule in favor of Jewish righteousness and supremacy.

For an Alexandrian Jewish audience living under Roman rule, Pseudo-Solomon's depiction of status reversal on the day of judgment would have been deeply appealing. He offers a vision of divine justice in which the oppressed are vindicated and their oppressors are overthrown. As a colonized people, Alexandrian Jews faced systemic discrimination and violence, making the promise of ultimate vengeance, sovereignty, and divine elevation

[188] Simkovich describes Wisdom as subscribing to a subjugation model of the eschaton in which the Jews will subdue and rule over the foreign nations. The Qumran sectarian literature is another example of texts that affirm this subjugation model. See Simkovich, *Jewish Universalism*, 51-2.

particularly powerful. By framing Jewish righteousness as the true mark of superiority and appropriating the language of imperial conquest, Pseudo-Solomon not only challenges Greco-Roman hegemony but also promises his audience that their suffering is not in vain because their future is one of divine rule rather than subjugation. In the end, promises Pseudo-Solomon, their enemies will "be shaken with dreadful fear" (5:2) before God "dash[es] them speechless to the ground" (4:19).

Conclusion

This final chapter has demonstrated how Pseudo-Solomon's renegotiation of the wisdom tradition should be seen as a response to the social world of Alexandrian Judaism. Overall, Pseudo-Solomon incorporated immortality into the sapiential tradition so that he could more effectively incentivize his Jewish audience to observe their ancestral customs, especially in light of competing Ethical Universalist scribe-sages who downplayed the traditional markers of Jewish identity. Additionally, he adopted such a negative stance toward denial of the afterlife because he perceived it as a feature of an aristocratic ideology that legitimized marginalization of the oppressed. Afterlife denial seems to have been more prevalent among Jewish scribal circles, both in Judea and Egypt, than many scholars have recognized. Finally, I briefly hinted at some ways Pseudo-Solomon's depiction of the final judgment mimicked the logic of imperial ideology. In sum, Pseudo-Solomon's reimagining of wisdom and the afterlife emerges not only as a theological innovation, but also as a strategic and polemical intervention within the complex sociopolitical and religious landscape of Alexandrian Judaism.

Conclusion

What can we say about how social location factored into the ideological renegotiation of the wisdom tradition's view of divine retribution and the afterlife in the latter half of the Second Temple period? In short, social location significantly determined these sages' orientation towards ideas like afterlife denial and resurrection. For Ben Sira, an elite in the Judean temple-state who depended on its priestly aristocracy, afterlife denial represented the affirmation of the status quo—the affirmation that the current social, political, and economic order aligned with God's desire for Judean society. With afterlife denial as his foundation, Ben Sira could emphasize onomastic immortality, with its dual focus on corporate honor and progeny, to promote the longevity of the priestly aristocracy, of his elite scribal class, and of the Judean temple-state at large. He could also use onomastic immortality to promote the non-elites' loyalty to the Judean-temple state by guaranteeing them generational prosperity through their adherence to Jewish national law, which, of course, included their support of their priestly and scribal authorities. In the eyes of a scribal elite like Ben Sira, afterlife denial and onomastic immortality functioned as a means of status preservation.

On the other hand, for politically and socially disenfranchised Jews such as Pseudo-Solomon and those behind the Enochic tradition, resurrection and astral immortality represented the reversal of the status quo. The afterlife signified for them not only a solution to the theological dilemma of theodicy, but a rejection of the social, political, and economic order of their world. Corrupt priests will be overthrown. Evil gentile rulers will be defeated. God will bring the terror of imperial conquest back upon their imperial oppressors. The vindicated, angelified righteous will have the last word as they stamp a death sentence upon their enemies. Divergent afterlife theologies in the Second Temple period were not merely speculative doctrines

but strategic responses to lived realities, with each vision of eternity reflecting a stake in the present social order and a hope, or fear, for its transformation.

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