Wisdom, Israel and Other Nations

Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible, Deuterocanonical Literature, and the Dead Sea Scrolls

Marko Marttila (University of Helsinki) and Mika S. Pajunen (University of Helsinki)

"Wisdom" is a central concept in the Hebrew Bible and Early Jewish literature. An analysis of a selection of texts from the Second Temple period reveals that the way wisdom and its possession were understood changed gradually in a more exclusive direction. Deuteronomy 4 speaks of Israel as a wise people, whose wisdom is based on the diligent observance of the Torah. Proverbs 8 introduces personified Lady Wisdom that is at first a rather universal figure, but in later sources becomes more firmly a property of Israel. Ben Sira (Sir. 24) stressed the primacy of Israel by combining wisdom with the Torah, but he still attempted to do justice to other nations’ contacts with wisdom as well. One step further was taken by Baruch, as only Israel is depicted as the recipient of wisdom (Bar. 3–4). This more particularistic understanding of wisdom was also employed by the sages who wrote the compositions 4Q185 and 4Q525. Both of them emphasize the hereditary nature of wisdom, and 4Q525 even explicitly denies foreigners’ share of wisdom. The author of Psalm 154 goes furthest along this line of development by claiming wisdom to be a sole possession of the righteous among the Israelites. The question about possessing wisdom has moved from the level of nations to a matter of debate between different groups within Judaism.

1. Introduction

Israel as the Chosen People is one of the central theological themes in the Hebrew Bible. Israel’s specific relationship with God gains its impressive formulation in the so-called Bundesformel: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people” (e.g., Exod 6:7; Lev 26:12; Deut 26:17–18; 29:12; Jer 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27). Israel’s position is based on divine

1 Although this article is very much a joint effort, Marttila has mostly been responsible for the sections up to Baruch and Pajunen for the subsequent sections.
Wisdom, Israel and Other Nations

election, but this raises the difficult question regarding the fate of the other nations.

Joel S. Kaminsky has demonstrated in his recent study⁴ that the biblical concept of election includes three categories of people: the elect, the non-elect, and the anti-elect. According to Kaminsky, only a few nations belong to the category of the anti-elect. He mentions the Canaanites as an example, and the Amalekites whose condemnation in the Hebrew Bible, in particular, is phrased in terms of a cosmic battle between YHWH and Amalek. Probably, the Philistines, too, should be reckoned in this group of anti-elect people. For the anti-elect nations it is characteristic that they are enemies of God and therefore God orders Israel to annihilate them. However, the largest group of foreign nations in the Hebrew Bible is simply the non-elect. Their fate depends crucially on the way they treat Israel. As a result of their conduct, God either blesses or punishes them.

The question of the foreign nations is closely related to the development that led from polytheism through monolatry to monotheism. In the polytheistic setting, several deities were worshipped, as is evident, for instance, in the Canaanite religion. Though the Israelites in certain respects felt themselves different from their Canaanite neighbors, it is indisputable that in the realm of religion they shared many similar features. Mark S. Smith points out that during the period of the Judges the major deities in the territory of Israel included YHWH, El, Baal, and possibly Asherah.⁵ Not only in the period of the Judges, but even later in pre-exilic times it is obvious that the religion in Israel/Judah was mainly polytheistic.⁶

The next step in the development was the monolatric period, which was particularly supported by the Deuteronomists. In the oldest stages of monolatry, the other gods were neither mentioned nor criticized. The main emphasis was on the relationship between YHWH and Israel. The nomistic Deuteronomists who were active during the exile and early post-exilic period were the actual creators of intolerant monolatry. It was their basic conviction that each people had its own gods, but YHWH was the only God of Israel. Worship of the foreign gods was not allowed. Accordingly, idolatry was one of the worst crimes that the Deuteronomists were able to envisage. Monotheistic thought

---

⁶ J. Pakkala, “Die Entwicklung der Gotteskonzeptionen in den deuteronomistischen Redaktionen von polytheistischen zu monotheistischen Vorstellungen,” in Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke: Redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven zur ”Deuteronomismus“-Diskussion in Tora und Vorderen Propheten (eds. M. Witte et al.; BZAW 365; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 239–48, outlines the development from pre-exilic polytheism through the monolatry of the late monarchical period and the intolerant monolatry of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. until the monotheistic concept of God was reached in the late nomistic texts in the fifth century.
originated, probably independently from each other, both in the latest additions to the Deuteronomistic History and in the proclamation of Deutero-Isaiah. The other gods were now deemed non-existent. Only the God of Israel was the true ruler of the cosmos, and he had created both heaven and earth. Even the foreign nations were under YHWH’s care.

Deutero-Isaiah brings a novelty to the Israelite history of religion by claiming that the other nations, too, have the possibility to worship YHWH (Isa 45:18–23). Thus, people responsible for composing the Deutero-Isaianic collection thought more in universal terms than did those who added monotheistic texts into the Deuteronomistic History. Eschatological visions in the Hebrew Bible (especially in some prophetic books) describing what will happen at the end of days contrast with the creation themes. These visions are strongly Israel-oriented: the dispersed Israelites return to Zion. Only seldom is anything concrete promised to foreign nations in connection with this endtime scheme. The foreign nations usually remain passive bystanders (e.g., Isa 62:10–12; Ezek 29:6; 36:23, 36; 38:16; Ps 126:1–2), or at worst they will be annihilated (e.g., Isa 63:19–64:3; Jer 46:25–26; Zeph 3:19–20). On a few occasions salvation seems to cover even the foreign nations, but the primacy of Israel comes clearly forth: without Israel the foreign nations cannot be saved (e.g., Isa 25:6; 66:21; Jer 16:19–21; Ps 87).8

It is our aim in the following article to shed light on the question of how “wisdom” was understood—as a property of Israel or of other nations, too—in certain texts from the Hebrew Bible, the deuterocanonical literature, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. One easily recalls the wise King Solomon, whose personal wisdom was a divine gift from YHWH. With his wisdom Solomon amazed the nations (1 Kgs 5:9–14). Solomon was an individual who was endowed with great intellectual skills, but some passages in the Hebrew Bible and related literature speak of wisdom that is given to peoples – instead of wise individuals. The most natural recipient of this wisdom is the elect people Israel, but there are also some passages that promise at least pieces of wisdom to other nations, too. The texts that we will discuss below are Deut 4:5–8, Prov 8:12–21, Sir. 24:1–8, Bar. 3:9–4:4; 4Q185; 4Q525, and Psalm 154.

---

7 Pakkala, “Entwicklung,” 244–47. The role of the foreign nations remained undecided in those monotheistic texts that were inspired by the nomistic heritage of the Deuteronomists. It was, of course, not meaningful for the foreign nations to continue worshipping their gods because they were not gods, but simultaneously the access of the foreigners to join the worship of YHWH was not promoted.

2. Israel as a “Wise People” in Deut 4:5–8

(5) See, I teach you statutes and ordinances – as YHWH my God has ordered me – for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter to inherit it. (6) Keep and obey (them), for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say: “Only this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” (7) For what other great nation has a god so near to it as YHWH our God is whenever we call to him? (8) And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am giving you today? 9

This passage is literally not uniform. Timo Veijola has convincingly demonstrated that v. 7 is a later addition, because it deviates from the actual theme of these verses, which is the synthesis of wisdom and law. In contrast, v. 7 speaks of Israel’s intimacy with God and uses the first person plural, which is not evident elsewhere in the passage. The editorial nature of v. 7 becomes evident because it duplicates the question מי ידיעו (“What other great nation”) from the beginning of v. 8. Even vv. 5–6 and 8 belong to the latest layers in Deut 4, which, as a whole, is a late chapter. 10

Let us have a closer look at how Israel, wisdom, and other nations are depicted in Deut 4:5–8. Israel’s wisdom and discernment will be based on the diligent observance of the divine statutes and ordinances. Deuteronomy 4 is a kind of introduction that looks forward: statutes and ordinances will be given in the following chapters, and only Israel is their recipient. Verse 6 brings the other nations into the picture. They marvel at how wise and discerning Israel is. It is noteworthy that the adjectives “wise” (çon) and “discerning” (を探) are here used for the people of Israel, because elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible these words almost exclusively refer to qualities of individuals. 11

---

9 The English translation, here and in the following, of the canonical and deuterocanonical passages is taken from the NRSV with slight modifications.


11 Veijola, “Law and Wisdom,” 149. In addition to Deut 4:6, the attributes לֵאָב and לּוֹזְקָה are also used to denote Israel in Jer 4:22, but the setting there is completely different, because both
thus emphasizes that not only individuals but also the Chosen People as a whole can be called wise and discerning if they adhere to the Law. It was only Israel that God elected and – in connection with this election – gave to her the Law. The foreign nations did not participate in the events that took place at Sinai. No other nation possesses as just legislation as Israel. This passage indicates that law and wisdom are tightly bound together. Law is the necessary prerequisite for achieving wisdom. It is evidently implied that true wisdom can only be found in Israel because it is connected with the Torah of Israel, whereas the statutes of other nations remain defective. The later supplement in v. 7 further emphasizes Israel’s close relationship with YHWH. It does not directly deny the existence of other gods but maintains that they are clearly inferior to YHWH.

Dating biblical texts is always a demanding task. It is often said that Deut 4 is a late chapter, but how late? This chapter is clearly a patchwork; in its final form we can see compositions from several different authors. It seems probable that Deut 4:5–8* dates back to the fifth century B.C.E. These verses are written in the spirit of the earlier Deuteronomists, and accordingly, they do not promise very much to foreigners. Israel is an important sign among the nations, and the foreign nations are merely spectators who appear astonished about how YHWH guides his people and bestows them with wisdom and other good gifts. Of course, the text implies that the foreign nations – while recognizing the superiority of Israel’s legislation – possess a certain amount of wisdom and insight themselves, because otherwise they would be unable to make such an assessment. But the text does not state that the foreign nations would be called to leave their defective statutes and follow the Torah of Israel. Such a thought was simply impossible for those editor(s) who composed and added Deut 4:5–8*.

3. Wisdom and Earthly Rulers in Prov 8:12–21

The book of Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings that are not characteristically Israelite. The name “Israel” is mentioned only once in Proverbs, in the heading (Prov 1:1) where it is stated that these are the proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel. Chapter 8 is particularly interesting because there words are used in the plural and in a negative sense; see G. Braulik, “‘Weisheit’ im Buch Deuteronomion,” in Weisheit außerhalb der kanonischen Weisheitsschriften (ed. B. Janowski; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), 39–69 (esp. 57).

12 T. Krüger, “Gesetz und Weisheit im Pentateuch,” in Auf den Spuren der schriftgelehrten Weisen: Festschrift für Johannes Marböck anlässlich seiner Emeritierung (eds. I. Fischer et al.; BZAW 331; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 1–12. According to Krüger, Deut 4:5–8 underlines Israel’s wisdom as far as moral behavior is concerned, but this leaves the door open to the possibility that the other nations could possess wisdom – even a greater wisdom than Israel – in some other branches. Conceivable are the technical and astronomical capabilities of the neighboring nations.
we encounter personified Lady Wisdom for the first time in the Hebrew Bible. Job 28, too, speaks of wisdom and her hidden abode, but the personification there is not as clear as in Prov 8. Perhaps the most quoted passage in Prov 8 is the speech of Lady Wisdom in vv. 22–31 where she reveals her primordial existence: she was set up before the beginning of the earth. She was as an eyewitness beside God when the cosmos was created. For our topic, however, it is more relevant to take a look at the preceding passage (Prov 8:12–21), where the personified Wisdom describes how she gives knowledge to kings and rulers. A central question is whether these kings and rulers only refer to Israelite leaders or whether foreign leaders are also included. If a reference is made to foreign leaders, it shows that wisdom was not exclusively a property of Israel, but that the other nations as well were able to acquire their share of it.

(12) I, Wisdom, live with prudence, and I find deliberate knowledge. (13) The fear of YHWH is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and an evil way and perverted speech I hate. (14) Mine is counsel and success; I have insight, I have strength. (15) By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice; (16) by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly. (17) I love those who love me, and those who seek me shall find me. (18) Riches and honor are with me, hereditary wealth and justice. (19) My fruit is better than gold, pure gold, and my yield than choice silver. (20) I walk in the way of righteousness, in the middle of the paths of justice, (21) endowing with wealth those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

The crucial verses are 15 and 16. Altogether four nouns are used for the rulers: נורא שרים and הרעים מלכים. Most of them can be used for both Israelite and foreign rulers but the term הרעים (“rulers”) designates only foreign officials. This poem stresses the sovereignty of Lady Wisdom: she provides rulers with her wisdom. In fact, she is described nearly as a royal goddess under whose dominion are the earthly rulers. It is no wonder that many scholars have argued that the poet who created this text drew heavily on the myth of the goddesses Ma’at and Isis in Egyptian religion. This international background points toward a universal understanding of vv. 15–16. Specific Israelite tradi-


14 For minor text-critical issues in Prov 8:12–21, see O. Plöger, Sprüche Salomos / Proverbia (2d ed.; BKAT XVII; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2003), 86–87.


16 L. G. Perdue, Wisdom Literature: A Theological History (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 54. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that Lady Wisdom is a literary creation. She was not worshipped in religious practice and thus she cannot fully be compared with goddesses such as Ma’at and Isis. Fox, Proverbs, 345, puts it aptly when he concludes that, “wisdom helps people insofar as they help themselves by the wisdom they attain.” In fact, the only occurrence of the personified figure of Wisdom in
tions such as the exodus from Egypt or the covenant at Sinai are not at all discussed in Proverbs. Neither is there any reference to the Davidic monarchy apart from the secondary editorial heading in 1:1. With these observations in mind, it would be very peculiar indeed if vv. 15–16 suddenly had only Israelite rulers as their focus. On the contrary, the passage on creation that follows (Prov 8:22–31) increases the probability that the unit Prov 8:12–21 deals with universal issues. 17 Kings and rulers irrespective of their national background can be touched by wisdom. From v. 17 onward, it becomes obvious that not only kings and other mighty men, but anyone can enjoy the fruits of wisdom. Wisdom is available to anyone who loves her. 18 Here, for the first time, we encounter the concept of wisdom in a universal setting. There are no boundaries between the Jews and the Gentiles. The non-Israelites are not passive bystanders as in the description of Deut 4:5–8, where true wisdom was found only in the Torah of Israel.

The book of Proverbs consists of poems and sayings that probably stem from several different centuries. It has, however, become a commonly accepted opinion among scholars that chapters 1–9 contain the latest material. 19 It is not impossible that the passages of personified Wisdom date back to the Hellenistic period. 20 This picture of universal wisdom with no references to Israel’s specific position was too radical for those Jewish intellectuals who wanted to foster their ancestral heritage. An illuminating example of this is Ben Sira, to whom we shall next turn.

4. Personified Wisdom in Sirach 24

An important text for our topic is the beginning of Sir. 24, where the primordial Lady Wisdom speaks of herself in the first person singular. Though the Wisdom of Ben Sira was originally written in Hebrew, chapter 24 has unfortunately not been preserved in its Hebrew form. Therefore our translation must be based on the Greek text. It is a curiosity that the prologue in the Greek

---

17 Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 54. Further, R. E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson, 1998), 51, regards vv. 15–16 as remarkable statements about Wisdom’s worldwide influence over various classes of rulers. Fox, *Proverbs*, 274, says that Prov 8:12–16 recognizes that the potentates of all nations have access to wisdom.

18 Plöger, *Sprüche*, 90.


20 Leuenberger, “Weisheit,” 377 (though Leuenberger only discusses Prov 8:22–31). Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 272, is more cautious and suggests that Prov 1–9 was composed around 400 B.C.E.
Wisdom, Israel and Other Nations 9

*Sira* introduces the translator as the grandson of the man Ben Sira. If this piece of information is reliable – and most scholars consider it trustworthy – this would help us to locate both the grandfather and his grandson in the correct periods of time. According to the prologue, Ben Sira’s grandson came to Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of King Euergetes, which in our chronology would tally with 132 B.C.E. Because of certain linguistic observations (mainly the use of preposition ἐπί) it is probable that the grandson wrote his prologue and published his translation after the king’s death (117 B.C.E.).

On the basis of these hints, David S. Williams has made perhaps the most far-reaching calculations concerning Ben Sira’s lifetime, by examining how the dates for Ben Sira and his grandson work in tandem. According to Williams, a sixty-year gap between a grandfather and his grandson is plausible. He further argues that Ben Sira published his wisdom work ca. 175 B.C.E., at which time he was about sixty years old, and his grandson was an infant. Then the grandson arrived in Egypt in his early forties in 132. When the grandson completed the translation, in 116/115, he was himself approximately sixty years old. Because the Hebrew *Ben Sira* is devoid of any references to the turmoils of the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the subsequent Maccabean wars, it is generally supposed that Ben Sira finished his wisdom work slightly before the accession of Antiochus. Sirach 24:1–8 is an important textual unit for our understanding as regards the relationship between Wisdom, Israel, and other nations.

---

21 Of course, it is worth seriously considering that the whole prologue is fictitious: there was no familial relationship between Ben Sira and the later translator. Such a reference in the prologue has only been composed to gain more prestige for the translated text. In any case, the translator had to convince his audience of his own trustworthiness, and this explains why the prologue was composed. For further details, see A. Voitila, “For Those Who Love Learning: How the Reader Is Persuaded to Study the Book of Ben Sira as a Translation,” in *Houses Full of All Good Things: Essays in Memory of Timo Veijola* (eds. J. Pakkala and M. Nissinen; PFES 95; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 451–60.


26 The English translation is based on the Greek text from J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach* (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Societatis Litterarum Gottingensis editum, vol. XII/2; 2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980).
Marko Marttila and Mika S. Pajunen

(1) Wisdom praises herself, and in the midst of her people she vaunts herself. (2) In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his host she boasts. (3) “I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. (4) I dwelt in the heights, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. (5) The sphere of heaven I encircled alone, and I walked round in the depth of the abyss. (6) Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I had dominion. (7) Among them all I sought a resting place; in whose inheritance I would lodge. (8) Then the Creator of All commanded me, and my Creator settled my tent. He said: ‘In Jacob make your dwelling, and in Israel receive your inheritance.’

Because of the central character of ch. 24, scholars have spent much time retracing the possible sources that Ben Sira used when composing this poem. There are some similarities between Ben Sira’s poem and the aretalogies of Isis that stem from the Ptolemaic period (the most famous one is the Isis aretalogy from Cyme).27 In these aretalogies, Isis usually speaks in the first person singular and boasts about her role as a ruler of all lands and as a just legislator. But in modern research, the supposed connections between the aretalogies of Isis and Sir. 24 have fallen into disfavor.28 Rather, it is Prov 8 in the Hebrew Bible that has served as the most significant model and a source of inspiration for Ben Sira’s praise of wisdom. It is possible, of course, that Prov 8 was affected by some Isis aretalogy but even in that case Lady Wisdom is much more than a mere copy of the figure of Isis. Michael V. Fox is not convinced that the Hellenistic Isis religion had spread abroad when Prov 8 was composed but he nevertheless admits that Lady Wisdom could displace Isis in Hellenistic Jewish sentiments.29

From Prov 8, Ben Sira borrowed the figure of Lady Wisdom and composed a poem in which the primordial nature of Wisdom is maintained. Some traces of Proverbs’ universalism is preserved, too, when the personified Wisdom tells how she had dominion over all people and nations (v. 6). All these nations were thus somehow in contact with Wisdom, though the text does not convey any further details. But Wisdom was all the time seeking her dwelling place. She did not find her abiding domain among the nations, until God ordered her to settle down in Israel. It is noteworthy that the vocabulary of Sir. 24:1–8

27 Possible connections between Sir. 24 and the Aretalogy of Isis were strongly supported by H. Conzelmann, “Die Mutter der Weisheit,” in *Theologie als Schriftauslegung: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament* (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1974), 167–76. Conzelmann’s opinion was accepted by G. von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1970), 208 n. 17, who assumes that a foreign text was given a new context and that its contents were modified to fit the Israelite religion.

28 See, for instance, J. Marböck, “Gottes Weisheit unter uns. Sir. 24 als Beitrag zur biblischen Theologie,” in *Gottes Weisheit unter uns* (Herders biblische Studien 6; Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 73–87 (esp. 76). G. Schimanowski, *Weisheit und Messias: Die jüdischen Voraussetzungen der urchristlichen Präexistenzchristologie* (WUNT II/17; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 47–48, has pointed out that Sir. 24 is devoid of some characteristic features of Isis aretalogies: the construction ἐγώ εἰμι (“I am”) does not occur in Sir. 24, and the customary participial style of Isis aretalogies is not found in Sir. 24, which favors the indicative.

29 Fox, *Proverbs*, 337.
shares many striking similarities with Deut 4 and 12. Key terms in Sir. 24:7–8 are ἀνάπαυσις, κληρονομία, καταπαύω, and κατακληρονομέω. Their Hebrew equivalents occur in a similar context in Deut 12:9–10. Moreover, the primordial Wisdom chose Israel as her inheritance and Jerusalem (Sir. 24:10–11) as her dwelling place. This brings to mind the election of Israel that is so often emphasized in Deuteronomy: “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession” (Deut 7:6). Closely related is Deut 4:5–8, which—as we saw above—underlines Israel’s specialness in comparison with other nations.

It is apparent that Ben Sira bases his wisdom teaching on two important traditions: the first is proverbial wisdom, and the second is Deuteronomic heritage. Ben Sira ingeniously combines these two traditions in chapter 24. He is more universalistic than the Deuteronomists had been. Ben Sira knew that there was wisdom also among the foreign cultures. Most likely he even made trips abroad to learn more (cf. Sir. 39:4). The literary genre that Ben Sira used in his famous “Praise of the Ancestors” (Sir. 44–50) was very likely borrowed from Hellenistic literature, the closest counterpart being encomium.

Although Ben Sira does not say it directly, it can be implied that in his opinion the wisdom of foreign nations was a defective wisdom. This does not mean rejection of or a hostile attitude towards the wisdom of other peoples. But the true wisdom was to be found in the Torah of Israel. The passage in Sir. 16:24–17:24 is branded by its firm adherence to the creation theology. After the introductory words, Ben Sira briefly describes the creation of celestial bodies (16:26–28) and stresses how obediently they follow the duties set by God. Imitating the sequence from the Priestly creation account, Ben Sira next mentions how plants and animals were created (16:29–30). Then he turns to the creation of humankind (17:1–10). Humanity’s intellectual and moral skills receive much attention in Ben Sira’s description: “He (God) filled them with knowledge and

---

30 For a more detailed analysis, see Veijola, “Law and Wisdom,” 150–51.
31 Translation according to NRSV.
33 Ben Sira’s knowledge of early Stoic thought is well defended by U. Wicke-Reuter, Göttliche Providenz und menschliche Verantwortung bei Ben Sira und in der frühen Stoa (BZAW 298; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 276, when she concludes: “Wie wir sahen, finden sich im Werk des Siraciden derart zahlreiche und enge Parallelen zum stoischen Gedanken von der göttlichen Pronoia, dass eine Bekanntschaft Ben Siras mit der stoischen Philosophie kaum verneint werden kann.”
35 Veijola, “Law and Wisdom,” 147, emphasizes that in Ben Sira’s opinion the Law given to Israel makes it possible to properly understand universal wisdom. See also J. Marböck, Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira (2d ed.; BZAW 272; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 69, 72–73.
understanding and showed them good and evil” (Sir. 17:7). Since creation, humankind has had basic wisdom and knowledge of good and evil, but Sir. 17:11 emphasizes that God further increased the amount of human wisdom by allotting a law of life to them. Thus, the gentiles have their share of knowledge, but without an extra measure of wisdom that knowledge remains incomplete. This extra measure was poured into the Torah of Israel.36

A similar twofold revelation of wisdom is also described in 1Q/4QInstruction (1Q26; 4Q415–18, 423), which seems to presuppose that the sapiential order of the world is accessible to the wise in the Mosaic Torah (4Q417 1 i 14). The other past revelation of wisdom was given to ḫaššù (4Q417 1 i 15–18), and it is debated whether this refers to humankind, Enosh, or Adam.37 Regardless of which of the three alternatives is preferred, 4QInstruction appears to suggest that an early basic access of wisdom was granted to humanity in general, but more particular insights are to be found in the inheritance of the addressees, namely the Torah. It seems that further access to the secrets of the sapiential order of the world is granted to the wise also in a work called the Book of Hagu.38 4QInstruction is of interest for the discussion here because it is a close contemporary to the Wisdom of Ben Sira,39 and seems to have a very similar basic understanding about the distribution of wisdom to humankind and Israel.

Ben Sira’s praise of wisdom culminates in 24:23. In this verse – which comprises a direct quotation from Deut 33:4 – Ben Sira creates a synthesis that unites universal wisdom and Israel’s Torah: “All these things are the book of the covenant of God Most High, the Law which Moses commanded for us as a heritage for the assemblies of Jacob.” It is definitely a new feature in the Israelite wisdom literature that wisdom gains such a strong nomistic emblem. Martin Leuenberger has suggested that the nationalization of wisdom that

36 G.S. Goering, Wisdom’s Root Revealed: Ben Sira and the Election of Israel (JSJSup 139; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 91–102, makes a useful distinction between a general wisdom that is poured out upon all creation and a special wisdom that has been revealed to Israel alone.


takes place in Sir. 24 would be a new innovation, but as we have seen above, the nationalization of wisdom has its roots in Deut 4:5–8.

Although Ben Sira’s praise of wisdom has its culmination in 24:23, the poem continues until v. 34. It is astonishing that in 24:25–27 Ben Sira compares the Torah to the famous rivers Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates (cf. Gen 2:10–14) that flow out of Eden, and also to the Nile and the Jordan. This metaphoric language suggests that the Torah waters the whole known world. The boundaries between Israel and other nations are flexible in Ben Sira elsewhere, as well. Creation theology is of utmost importance to Ben Sira, and he touches upon the creation of humankind at the beginning of ch. 17. In particular, verses 17:6–7 are revealing: “(6) Discretion and tongue and eyes, ears and a mind for thinking he gave them. (7) He filled them with knowledge and understanding, and showed them good and evil.” Later Ben Sira moves on to describe Israel’s special role as the recipient of the Torah, but with the assumption that some kind of basic knowledge and moral understanding was given to all mankind as well.

If Ben Sira left the door open for foreign nations to have access to the fruits of the Torah, his scribal successor Baruch a few decades later opted for a different solution. It is time to examine Baruch’s concept of Israel’s wisdom.

5. Baruch’s Nationalistic View of Wisdom

It is characteristic of the book of Baruch that it quotes heavily from earlier sources. Consequently, Baruch’s work can be called a “pastiche.” Baruch’s date cannot be defined as accurately as Sirach’s, but some firm facts provide us with wider perspectives. Baruch certainly knew the book of Daniel, because it is dependent on the penitential prayer of Dan 9, which can be verified on the basis of similar vocabulary and structure. Furthermore, Baruch seems to presuppose the existence of Sir. 1:1–10 and Sir. 24. These connections hint at the origin of Baruch after 165 B.C.E. The similarities between Baruch and the pseudepigraphic Psalms of Solomon are so striking that a literary dependence ought to be assumed. Without going into details here, certain features imply

---

41 Later rabbinic interpretations argued that the Law was originally offered to all, but that Israel was the only nation to accept it (see, e.g., Sifre Deut. § 343).
42 Hogan, Theologies, 80. Furthermore, Hogan argues that although Ben Sira’s poetic language is ambiguous here, the idea of the universal recognition of the Torah is present in embryonic form; see Hogan, Theologies, 136–37.
43 Translation according to NRSV.
45 Marböck, Weisheit, 57.
that the author of the *Psalms of Solomon* knew the basic form of *Bar*. 4–5.46 Because PsSol 11 presupposes Pompey’s entry into the temple of Jerusalem, we gain a terminus ad quem for the book of *Baruch*, but there remain, of course, many possibilities as to where to locate *Baruch* between 165 and 63 B. C. E.47 Perhaps the second half of the second century B. C. E. is the most likely date for *Baruch*.

Because the book of *Baruch* consists of textual units that differ from each other as regards style and vocabulary, some scholars have argued that these sections were originally independent and only later put together by editor(s).48 It is, however, better to follow Odil Hannes Steck’s suggestion and regard *Baruch* as an intentional unity despite the seemingly different styles of the sections.49 The differences in style and vocabulary depend on the source texts that *Baruch* so faithfully quoted. Although we simply speak of “*Baruch*,” it does not necessarily mean that one individual wrote this book. Rather, it is more likely that a group of scribes was behind this name.50

The book of *Baruch* can be divided into four parts: 1) narrative introduction (1:1–15aa); 2) prayer of penitence (1:15aβ–3:8); 3) exhortative speech (3:9–4:4); and 4) words of consolation (4:5–5:9). The most important connections with our topic concerning the possession of wisdom occur in the third part, the exhortative speech. We now turn to its concluding lines (3:36–4:4). Our analysis must be based on the Greek translation, 51 because the original Hebrew has disappeared, but there can be no doubt that the original language of *Baruch* was Hebrew.52

---

46 See the discussion in Steck, *Baruchbuch*, 240–42.
47 See the useful survey of earlier attempts to date the book of *Baruch* in D. G. Burke, *The Poetry of Baruch: A Reconstruction and Analysis of the Original Hebrew Text of Baruch 3:9–5:9* (SBLSCS 10; Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1982), 26–32. Steck, *Baruchbuch*, 294–303, attempted to be very precise and prove that the book of *Baruch* was written in 163–162 B. C. E. Steck argues that *Baruch* was written after the death of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, which is a plausible starting point. Steck then suggests that the political stability as reflected by *Baruch* does not coincide with the sudden assassination of Antiochus V that took place in autumn 162; neither does *Baruch* hint at the inner Jewish military achievements of subsequent years. Consequently, Steck concludes that the book of *Baruch* must have been written before the end of the reign of Antiochus V. Though Steck has done meticulous work with innovative observations, certain scepticism is required. Most likely, the origins of *Baruch* cannot be defined so specifically. The book of *Baruch* contains only minimal material that could reliably be connected with any actual historical events of the author’s own day.
50 Steck, *Baruchbuch*, 306–7, derives the authors from the circle of the Hasideans.
(36) This is our God; no other can be compared to him. (37) He found the whole way of knowledge, and gave her to his servant Jacob and to Israel, whom he loved. (38) Afterward she appeared on earth and lived among people. (4:1) This is the book of the commandments of God, the law that endures forever. All who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die. (2) Turn, Jacob, and take her; walk toward the shining of her light. (3) Do not give your glory to another, or your benefits to an alien people. (4) Happy are we, Israel, for we know what is pleasing to God.

These verses form a climax to the whole exhortative speech. The first part of this speech quotes much material from Job 28 by stressing how inaccessible wisdom is (Bar. 3:15–23).53 The wealthy rulers of nations – despite their riches – did not learn the ways of wisdom and neither did the descendants of Hagar – who were seeking understanding – nor the merchants of Merran and Teman find her paths (3:23). These desperate efforts to gain wisdom are contrasted with Israel’s special position which is, in fact, stressed already at the beginning of the exhortative speech: “Hear the commandments of life, O Israel, give ear, and learn wisdom!” (Bar. 3:9).54 Only God has found the whole way of knowledge, and he has given this knowledge to Israel (v. 37). This is a central statement, one that leaves the other nations completely in the shadow of the Israelites. Foreign nations struggle in vain, because wisdom is accessible only to Israel. Verse 38 is problematic in Baruch’s poem, because Baruch does not refer elsewhere to the personified Wisdom.

Even more problematic is the content of this verse, that Lady Wisdom would have lived among people, which resembles Sir. 24:6–7. This contradicts everything else that Baruch says about the relationship between Israel and Wisdom. Therefore it is plausible to assume that v. 38 is a later Christian interpolation that was inspired by the prologue of the Gospel of John (John 1:14 in particular).55 If we omit 3:38 as secondary, “the whole way of knowledge” that God gave to Israel (v. 37) is easily identified with the following statement in the book of the commandments of God (4:1).56 Baruch 4:1 is based not only on Sir. 24:23 but also on Deut 4:5–8. True wisdom is identifiable with the Torah of Israel. While Ben Sira used universal terms in describing wisdom and implied that other nations, too, are touched by wisdom whose brightest manifestation can be found in the Torah, Baruch’s view is clearly particularistic.57 Other na-
tions remain outsiders, because they do not possess wisdom. This divine gift was entrusted to Israel alone. Here we can see how the circle closes: Baruch with his strict particularism returns to the ideas with which we started our survey, for Deut 4:5–8 emphasized Israel’s wisdom and left the other nations as passive bystanders. Baruch’s view is completely in line with this. The beatitude at the end of the third section (Bar. 4:4) very likely stems from Deut 33:29, where Moses praises Israel as happy. Intentionally, Baruch wanted to conclude his exhortative speech by alluding to the last words of Moses, who originally transmitted the divine law.

6. Wisdom as a Gift in 4QSapiential Admonitions B (4Q185)

Manuscript 4Q185 consists of six fragments that present the remains of a wisdom admonition. Different forms typical of wisdom literature such as rhetorical questions, exhortations and beatitudes are used in the extant parts of the composition. Neither the beginning nor the end of the composition has survived, but the structure of the best-preserved parts can be presented in roughly the following way. First there is a section dealing with the justice of God and the brevity of human existence (4Q185 1–2 i 13). Then follows a recollection of the Exodus traditions and a challenge to draw wisdom from them (4Q185 1–2 i 13–ii 3), and after that comes an exhortation on the two ways and their future rewards (4Q185 1–2 ii 3–8). These make up a didactic speech that is followed by at least two beatitudes, the first concerning to whom wisdom is given (4Q185 1–2 ii 8–13) and the second on one who practices wisdom (4Q185 1–2 ii 13–iii 1).

Their wisdom works. Ben Sira represented an optimistic worldview, but Baruch apparently responded to a national crisis.

58 Hogan, Theologies, 83–84.
59 According to Hogan, Theologies, 95, Baruch even goes a step further than Deut 4:5–8 in claiming Israel’s exclusive possession of wisdom in the form of the Torah.
The sage’s addressees reflect the same kind of structure, moving from all humanity (דִּבְּרֵי הָאדָמָה; 4Q185 1–2 i 9) to the people of Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל; 4Q185 1–2 i 13) and finally to the sage’s own listeners/students (בְּנֵי; 4Q185 1–2 ii 3). While the intended audience remains the same throughout, the designation of the addressees serves to direct the listeners to the correct level of the discussion, i.e., to the brevity of all human life, to the acts of deliverance performed by God on behalf of his chosen nation, and finally to the alternative destinies open to each individual through their choice of one of the two ways. The last aspect is reflected also by the beatitudes; it is the purpose of the sage to lead his listeners along the “path to life” (4Q185 1–2 ii 1–2).

The dating of this composition is difficult because there are not many markers for its establishment. The text is most likely non-sectarian, as there are no apparent affinities with any of the writings or central ideas usually associated with the Qumran movement. Positive evidence for dating the text can be derived from the role of the angels in the text (4Q185 1–2 i 8–9, ii 6), and the use of some late texts of the Hebrew Bible (especially 1 Chr 29:15 and Ps 105), which suggest that a rough terminus a quo for the composition should be put in the second century B.C.E. Because a non-sectarian provenance does not necessitate a pre-sectarian origin, and nothing in the text precludes the possibility of dating the text to the first century B.C.E., it is safest to put the terminus ad quem to the time when manuscript 4Q185 was written.

The beatitudes are the most important part of the composition for this investigation. The first beatitude in particular is quite fragmentary, but the general way the text proceeds can still be discerned. It emphasizes that the feminine figure, which is referred to in the beatitudes only by feminine 3rd person singular suffixes, is something that God has given (ןָתַנְתָּה) to all Israel (4Q185 1–2 ii 8–10). The rewards connected with this figure are described in the following way: “And with it[ are length of days, sparkle of eyes and joy of heart” (4Q185 1–2 ii 11). This appears to be an allusion to the rewards of wisdom in the Proverbs (see esp. Prov 3:16, 15:30a, but also Sir. 30:22). The second beatitude deals with the same topic, but from a slightly different angle. It concentrates on the correct practice for dealing with this feminine figure and emphasizes that it has been inherited by the person, and he in turn will give it to his children (cf. Sir. 24:33).

---


64 The script of 4Q185 has been dated to the end of the Hasmonean period by Strugnell, “Notes,” 163. Lange, “Weisheitstexte,” 11, suggests that the composition on 4Q185 dates back to the third century B.C.E, and Goff, Discerning, 123, proposes either the second or first century B.C.E.
13. Blessed is the man who practices it and does not repay [ ]

14. (with) treachery he does not seek it and with flatteries he does not grasp it. As it was given to his fathers so in turn inherits it[ ].

15. in all the power of his strength, and with all his [mig]ht, without fail And he will give it as inheritance to his descendants, and my knowledge to l’m[ ]wb III 1 toward it.

The feminine figure in these beatitudes is best seen as a combination of wisdom and Torah. The language used about pursuing the figure and the benefits derived from acquiring it (4Q185 1–2 ii 11–12, 14) are reminiscent of the Proverbs and most naturally connected with personified Wisdom. On the other hand the key words in the beatitudes about receiving it and of doing it (שָׁלוֹם) are more compatible with the notion of the Law as something given to Israel and meant for them to observe. Also noteworthy are the following instances in the other parts of the text: fulfilling the will of God (4Q185 1–2 ii 1), observing the terms of the covenant (4Q185 3 3), and the path that has been decreed to Isaac (4Q185 1–2 ii 4). Moreover, the boast of the wicked presented in the first beatitude, that it has not been given to him (4Q185 1–2 ii 9–10), is difficult to read as a bragging reference to wisdom. It is almost certainly the Law that the wicked would boast has not been given for him to observe, which is a claim evidently denied by the sage.

Hermann Lichtenberger claims that this text exhibits wisdom as a universal gift available to all wise nations. Because of the two extant sections dealing with general human conditions, it may be correct to say that the horizon of the text is not limited to Israel, i.e., it does not just reflect upon national topics; but a view of wisdom as a universal gift is not present in this text.
On the contrary, according to the beatitudes it is given to Israel and, as suggested, at least to some degree combined with the Torah. The text also draws on the national events of the Exodus (4Q185 1–2 i 14–15), the correct way of life is equated with the one commanded to the patriarchs (4Q185 1–2 ii 3–4), and the text speaks about fulfilling the terms of the covenant (4Q185 3 3). Furthermore, the addressees of the sage indicate that the audience is a group within Israel. Foreign nations are not mentioned in the extant composition (except the miracles of God in Egypt) and plainly were not of any particular interest for the author when dealing with this specific topic. The envisaged hereditary system where wisdom/Torah is passed on from one generation to the next seems to exclude the availability of wisdom to the foreign nations, as the beatitudes speak only of Israel as recipients of wisdom/Torah. On these grounds it is plausible to conclude, similarly to John Strugnell, that in 4Q185 wisdom is meant especially or only for Israel.70

7. Holding on to Wisdom in 4QBeatitudes (4Q525)

Manuscript 4Q525 is another fragmentary wisdom text, and it consists of fifty fragments.71 Its most studied feature is a sequence of beatitudes in frgs. 2–3 ii.72 The composition has similarities with 4Q185,73 especially in discussing the two ways, emphasizing heritage, and in connecting wisdom with the Torah.74 However, 4Q525 is much more explicit with this identification than 4Q185. Perhaps the most straightforward example is the juxtaposition of the two in 4Q525 2–3 ii 3–4, which reads: אָשֶׁר אֵדֵם חַגִּים הָוֹסְם נְאוֹם הַרְוָאֵל בֵּית הַלִּי הָאָדָם "Blessed is the man who attains wisdom, and walks in the law of the Most

73 There actually appears to be an unnoted direct textual connection between the two texts. As seen above, a bicolon in 4Q185 1–2 ii 13–14 reads אֲלֵי רָמִים לֹא בֶּסְכַּתָּהּ הָּבְלָכָה לֹא תַחְפַּחְתָּה, and the last part of 4Q525 5 7 in turn reads: בֵּית אֲלֵי רָמִים לֹא בֶּסְכַּתָּהּ הָּבְלָכָה. The first is connected to a beatitude and the second to an admonition, but the wording appears to be the same and consequently they should each be reconstructed accordingly. Thus, instead of reconstructing the words in 4Q525 with Puech, “525. 4QBéatitudes,” 131, 133, as אֲלֵי רָמִים לֹא בֶּסְכַּתָּהּ הָּבְלָכָה, the bicolon should probably be restored as אֲלֵי רָמִים לֹא בֶּסְכַּתָּהּ הָּבְלָכָה. There is no indication as to which text might have been the source of the other.
74 For similar views on the connection of wisdom and Torah in 4Q525, see, e.g., Harrington, Wisdom, 69; Goff, Discerning, 199; Wright, Praise, 12.
"High." A noteworthy feature in this beatitude is the use of the expression “law of the Most High” because it is found in three of the compositions discussed in this article, namely Ben Sira (41:4, 42:2, 49:4; cf. 24:23), Psalm 154 (11QPs XVIII:12) and 4Q525, but nowhere else.  

The dating of the text of 4Q525 is a debated issue. There are some similarities between 4Q525 and the writings usually associated with the Qumran movement, and these have led Jacqueline de Roo to argue that 4Q525 is a product of the movement. However, the similarities are not specific enough and as demonstrated by Matthew Goff, the differences between 4Q525 and the writings of the movement are far more significant. If there is direct influence between the texts, it is plausible that it would be coming from 4Q525 to the texts of the community and not the other way around. Thus, Émile Puech’s dating of the composition to approximately the middle of the second century B.C.E. appears to be the most plausible option, but a first century B.C.E. date cannot be entirely ruled out.  

The most illuminating passage for the question of foreign nations is found in fragment 5. The remaining text on this fragment utilizes much of the same vocabulary that is found in the beatitudes, and Puech is probably correct in his proposal that the text of the fragment continues the context of the beatitude collection. It appears that the sage is using admonitions to further emphasize the main points of the beatitudes.

7. listen, do not [s]eek it with a deceitful heart and with fla[teries do not try to grasp it. Do not  
8. a]bandon to str[angers] your [inheritan]ce or your lot to foreigners. For wis[e are  ]  
9. they] instruct in sweetness. Those who fear God keep its ways and walk in[ ]

76 The script of 4Q525 has been dated by Puech, “The Collection,” 354, to the Herodian period.  
78 Goff, Discerning, 227–28.  
79 See, e.g., Puech, “525. 4QBéatitudes,” 141–42.  
10. its statutes and do not reject its chastisements. Those who understand speak[ ]
11. Those who walk in perfection turn aside injustice and do not reject its punish-
ments [ ]

Similarly to 4Q185, wisdom/Torah is seen as an inherited portion in line 6 (cf. 4Q525 13 2–5, 14 ii 14). The exhortation not to abandon it to strangers and foreigners makes it explicit that it is only meant for Israel. The emphasis comes quite close to Bar. 4:3 discussed above: “Do not give your glory to another or your benefits to an alien people”. But where Baruch and the sage of 4Q185 connect wisdom/Torah firmly as given to the whole of Israel and use proper names and events from the nation’s past, the sage of 4Q525 is more particularistic in concentrating almost exclusively on his listeners. As Puech suggests, these are depicted as members of an elect group, e.g., in fragment 5 by using terms such as “those who fear God” (l. 9), “the understanding ones” (l. 10), “those who walk in perfection” and “those who love God” (l. 13). On the basis of the fragmentary evidence it cannot be conclusively decided whether this group is to be identified more broadly as the members of the covenant community of Israel, following Goff, or to be taken in a more narrow sense as a reference, for example, to the Hasidean group proposed by Puech. The lack of language incorporating the whole Israel does suggest the latter alternative. This however does not mean that the group would necessarily be a sect.

Another noteworthy feature of 4Q525 is the emphasis on perseverance along the correct path even in the face of hardship (esp. 4Q525 2–3 ii 4–6). In times of trial and hardship the listeners are not to abandon or forget wisdom/Torah (cf. 4Q525 5 2–3, 8–9). Goff draws attention to parallel ideas in Ps 119 (vv. 23, 69, 92, 110, 143) and Ben Sira (1:13, 2:4–5, 18:13–14), and concludes that 4Q525 uses the theme of persevering through adversity to assert the importance of the pursuit of wisdom. He further remarks that, “there is no indica-
tion that the addressees of 4QBeatitudes are being persecuted.” This appears to be true, but the topic is covered in much more detail than in other wisdom writings, and even if it does not relate to an imminent crisis, it has to resonate with something concrete in the past or the present. If a situation where people could possibly abandon the practice of wisdom/Torah when faced by hardship or even persecution was not perceivable, there would be no need to assert the proper course of action with such strong emphasis. The sage might be drawing from a past experience of a conflict such as the Maccabean times, but the theme still needs to correspond with some real or imagined threat in the foreseeable future.

Related to this question is another characteristic feature of this composition that is unfortunately only found in the smaller fragments, namely, detailed

84 Goff, Discerning, 218–19.
86 Goff, Discerning, 214.
descriptions of the wrath of God (esp. frgs. 15, 22 and 23). The enumerated punishments are plausibly the ones facing anyone who turns away from wisdom/Torah. Where Baruch is content to state merely that “all who hold her fast will live, and those who forsake her will die” (Bar. 4:2), the sage of 4Q525 paints a vivid picture of the punishments. It is possible that the punishments are discussed in such an emphatic way (even as part of a wisdom admonition) in order to give another reason for the audience to persevere on the right path: the fear of a fate more terrible than the limited period of hardship that is meant only to test them.

8. Wisdom of the Righteous in Psalm 154 (Syriac Psalm II)

The last text to be dealt with in this article is a wisdom psalm found in the large Psalm scroll from Qumran cave 11 (11QPs a XVIII:1–16), but known already before that in Syriac and labeled as Psalm 154 (and as Syriac Psalm II). The Psalm emphasizes glorifying God, making known his might, and wisdom’s role in this proclamation. Wisdom is personified in the Psalm at least to some degree (e.g., Ps 154:12 קולハו “her voice”, הירוח “her song”; cf. Prov 1:20, 8:1, 4). It is also associated with the Torah as shown by: “When they eat in abundance it (wisdom) is cited, and when they drink, bound together as one, their conversation is on the Law of the Most High, their words making known his might” (11QPs a XVIII:11–12).

There are similarities in the Psalm with many of the other wisdom texts discussed thus far. As James Sanders suggests, it appears to rely on Proverbs (esp. 8:34, 9:1–12), and Dieter Lührmann has demonstrated that wisdom and

87 Cf. de Roo, “Is 4Q525,” 342–43; Goff, Discerning, 219–22. As Goff notes, some of the language used in 4Q525 to describe the punishments particularly recalls the covenant curses in Deut 29 and the punishments envisaged in Deut 32.


89 For studies dealing with the Hebrew and Syriac versions of Ps 154 see, e.g., J. Strugnell, “Notes on the Text and Transmission of the Apocryphal Psalms 151, 154 (= Syr. II) and 155 (= Syr. III),” HTR 59 (1966): 257–81; H. F. van Rooy, Studies on the Syriac Apocryphal Psalms (JSSSup 7; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), esp. 133–47.


91 Cf. Harrington, Wisdom, 28; Goff, Discerning, 245.

92 Sanders, The Psalms, 67–70.
praise are also intertwined in *Ben Sira* (see, e.g., 15:9–10, 17:10, 39:15).93 Similar to *Ben Sira*, 4Q185, and *Baruch*, Psalm 154 uses the proper names Jacob and Israel (note also Zion and Jerusalem). As with 4Q185, Psalm 154 too declares that wisdom is something given (םז) by God and both texts also lay emphasis on the might of God.94 As already noted, the Psalm uses the rare term “law of the Most High” found also in *Ben Sira* and 4Q525. It is furthermore similar to 4Q525 in applying a number of group terms, although the expressions used are different.

The origin of the poem is outside Qumran,95 but the dating of the text is once again ambiguous. Most scholars prefer to date it to the late third century or early second century B.C.E.,96 but the publication of 4Q448 in 1991 has had an impact on the dating of Psalm 154.97 There are significant overlaps between the remains of 4Q448 A 6–10, and the beginning and end of the Psalm. Esther and Hanan Eshel have proposed that the text found in 4Q448 would present the original nucleus of Psalm 154.98 This is an intriguing possibility, but while a textual connection appears to exist between the texts, further study is still needed to determine the way it goes.99 The Eshels date a prayer for King Jonathan, which is also found in 4Q448, between 103 and 88 B.C.E.100 This gives a terminus ad quem for the existence of at least some version of Psalm 154. However, regardless of how the textual connection is evaluated, it is not necessary to posit from this a first century B.C.E. date for the complete Psalm 154 (as

---

99 While it is possible that the section of Ps 154 that is apparently completely absent on 4Q448 (namely vv. 4–15) and largely centers on wisdom could in theory be missing because it was only later incorporated into the Psalm, it is also possible that it was not considered important or appropriate in the context of 4Q448. Repetition is a stylistic device used by the author of Ps 154, and the lexical similarities between the parts found on 4Q448 and the ones missing from it show that if vv. 4–15 were a later addition, they were written expressly for that Psalm, not taken from another source (note especially the numerous uses of the root רָאָה, the use of both הָדוּד and הָתִּים for God and the use of the root הָבִר, etc.). Furthermore, if a later writer had added the wisdom motif, this does not explain the absence of v. 19 in 4Q448, which is on a different topic. Its absence would be easier to explain as a deliberate omission in 4Q448 if the author of that text did not want to connect these messianic images with King Jonathan. Also, the apparent differences between the Syriac v. 20 and the 4Q448 version require further examination (e.g., why reconstruct 4Q448 A 10 מָשָׁרָה בִּשְׁלֹשָׁהּ לְחַיָּה, and not מָשָׁרָה בִּשְׁלֹשָׁהּ לְחַיָּהְוַי, which would leave the verbs open for further discussion). All in all, the question is not straightforward and merits further study.
100 Eshel and Eshel, “4Q448, Psalm 154,” 656.
found in 11QPs⁵), because two versions of the Psalm could have existed side by side for some time, as is consistent with the textual plurality exhibited by the Qumran finds for both “biblical” and “non-biblical” material.

It has previously been shown that Psalm 154 depends on the Proverbs, but it also appears to have a more direct link with Ben Sira. Even though the texts are quite different, the thematic similarities between Sir. 24 and Psalm 154 are too many to ignore. Sirach 24:1–2 speaks about glory and praise, the power of God and assemblies/congregations and the multitude of the elect. These are all themes found in the first verses of Psalm 154. Slightly further on, both texts refer to eating and drinking connected with wisdom (Sir. 24:20; Psalm 154 v. 13), and directly after this both texts equate wisdom with the Torah (Sir. 24:32; Psalm 154 v. 14). Ben Sira asserts that Wisdom’s abode is in the assembly of the saints (24:12) and Psalm 154 that “From the gates of the righteous is Wisdom’s voice heard, from the pious assembly her song” (v. 12). Furthermore, both texts mention Jacob, Israel, Zion and Jerusalem (Sir. 24:8, 10–11; Psalm 154 vv. 9, 19–20) and use the designation “Most High” on several occasions (Sir. 24:2–3; Psalm 154 vv. 3, 6, 7, 12). In view of all these connections, it seems plausible to date Psalm 154 to the second century BCE. The most relevant section, as regards the foreign nations, is found in vv. 5–8 (= 11QPs⁵ XVIII:3–6).

5. In order to declare God’s glory has wisdom been given,
6. and to recount His many deeds has she been made known to a man.
7. To make known to the witless His might, to teach the foolish His glory
8. – those far from her gates, those astray from her portals.

The section deals with the purpose of wisdom, and it explains in a roundabout way what a person possessing wisdom should do. He should basically teach about God and his works to those who still lack understanding of these matters. But how should בְּרָא be interpreted in this context? Matthew Goff is certainly right in rejecting Adam as the translation, but while his own understanding of the word in this context as “humanity” cannot be dismissed outright, it seems unlikely especially in view of the whole Psalm. First, the use of the proper names Jacob, Israel etc. and expressions describing the elect status of Israel such as “for the Most High is lord over Jacob” (v. 9) and mentioning the law of the Most High (v. 14), suggest that the discussion is on the national level. Second, the psalmist uses numerous group terms and these imply that he divides the people (of Israel presumably) into three categories. Sanders has distinguished these as: 1. the in-group, righteous, pure, good, etc.;

101 The Hebrew text follows Sanders, The Psalms Scroll, and the translation is an adaptation of his.
2. the wicked, insolent, enemies; and 3. the senseless and simpletons.\textsuperscript{103} It is obvious that the righteous assembly possesses wisdom, as its voice is heard from their meetings (vv. 12–13). The above section shows that the simple ones should be educated, and this would probably consequently lead to their inclusion in the assemblies of the righteous. The wicked and the insolent on the other hand apparently cannot become wise (v. 15).\textsuperscript{104} Thus, "\textit{בךכ}" is probably not meant to encompass all of humanity or even the whole of Israel here, as only the righteous portion has already been given wisdom and has the obligation to teach it to others. Therefore, the word is to be taken in a way similar to that of verse 10, namely, as meaning individuals. According to Psalm 154, wisdom is granted to those among the people of Israel who correctly follow the Law. It is the duty of these righteous to teach the correct practices to others so that they in turn will also gain wisdom.

9. Conclusions

We have investigated an intriguing panoply of different but related views about possessing wisdom. Deuteronomy 4 speaks of Israel’s wisdom in the form of the Torah. This passage is probably the oldest of the texts analyzed in this article, and has consequently served to influence most of the others. Proverbs 8, on the other hand, refers to universal wisdom that is not confined nationally. Ben Sira tried to combine these two rather divergent views by maintaining the primacy of Israel, but also admitting other nations’ contacts with wisdom (\textit{Sir.} 24). After Ben Sira, Baruch, who certainly knew the work of Ben Sira, rejected the universal terms and stressed only Israel’s role as the recipient of wisdom (\textit{Bar.} 3–4). A similar view was enforced by the sage of 4Q185, who emphasized the hereditary nature of wisdom. The sage of 4Q525 also understood wisdom as a hereditary portion and denies the foreigners any share in it. However, his point of view was found to be even more particularistic than Baruch’s and the 4Q185 sage’s, in focusing on a particular group within Judaism and leaving aside the national topics. Whether only the 4Q525 sage’s group possessed wisdom or it still belonged to the whole of Israel cannot be answered, but the author of Psalm 154 explicitly makes this differentiation in his work. He claims that wisdom is possessed only by the assemblies of the righteous, and the wicked cannot even learn it.

Apart from Prov 8, all the other authors focus on Israel or groups within it when touching upon the topic of wisdom. But Prov 8 contributes remarkably to the discussion by introducing the personified figure of Wisdom. This character has a significant impact on later compositions, some of which is seen in the compositions analyzed in this article. Another important aspect is the

\textsuperscript{103} Sanders, \textit{The Psalms}, 69–70; idem, "Psalm 154 Revisited," 303.
\textsuperscript{104} Harrington, \textit{Wisdom}, 27.
identification of wisdom with the Torah. This development has its seed already in Deut 4, manifestly begins with Ben Sira, and turns in a more exclusive direction in the works of Baruch and the sage of 4Q185. Since true wisdom is only found in Israel’s Torah, Baruch and the sage of 4Q185 simply leave foreign nations out of the equation. In 4Q525 and Psalm 154 the development continues in a more distinctive direction, as it is no longer a question of categorizing nations, but rather of labeling different groups within Judaism. The intertwining of wisdom and Torah leads to a development where a narrower possession of one automatically leads into a similar treatment of the other. Thus, if only a certain group practiced the Torah correctly, the same group was the only one able to possess wisdom. It seems that Joel Kaminsky’s classification, referred to at the very beginning of this article, between elect, non-elect, and anti-elect nations is useful even when different Jewish groups are at the focus. Those who felt themselves to possess wisdom – the right interpretation of the Torah – regarded themselves as the elect. Their adversaries were the anti-elect, but at least according to Psalm 154, between these two extremes a kind of middle group existed as well. From this category of non-elect one was able to move to the other two groups (and presumably one could also move from the elect to anti-elect, but not vice versa). Education was the means by which the elect endeavored to “convert” people from the middle group to learn the correct interpretation of the Torah and subsequently receive true wisdom.