

The Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira

According to *Pirke Aboth* 1:2 Simeon the Just (whom we should perhaps identify with the Simeon ben Johanan of Ben Sira 50:1) used to say that “the world is sustained by three things: by the Law, by Temple service (עבודתה), and by deeds of loving-kindness”. There is a growing awareness in the scholarship of late Second Temple Judaism(s) of the centrality of the Temple and Priestly power, particularly in the pre-Herodian period and before the rise of Pharisaism. There is also a growing recognition among scholars of all periods of Israelite and Jewish history in antiquity that the Temple stands at the apex of a highly developed imaginative view of the world and that the Temple service was designed to complete creation and maintain the stability of the cosmos.

In this essay I intend to demonstrate the centrality of the Jerusalem Temple’s cosmological power for the Wisdom collection originally compiled by Jesus Ben Sira (Ben Sira) in Hebrew in the first decades of the second century B.C., which was then later translated into Greek by the author’s grandson (Sirach) in the last decades of the same century. The two most significant chapters in the entire work (24 & 50) attest a profound and complex tradition of interpretation of Pentateuchal material which sets creation and the Temple in a cosmological and anthropological–theological dialectic.

1. Sirach 24

Sirach 24 is one of the most discussed passages of the entire work, indeed of the whole of Israel’s Wisdom corpus. Many of its marvels have already been uncovered, yet others, some of its most precious secrets, have lain forgotten within the text’s complex literary structure and intertextual space.

We begin with a translation and critical notes to the text, relying primarily on the Greek translation in the absence of the Hebrew original [70]:¹

- 24:1 Wisdom praises herself,
and tells of her glory in the midst of her people.
2 In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth,
and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory:
- Day 1 4 I dwelt in the highest heavens,
and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.
- Day 2 5 Alone I compassed the vault of heaven
and traversed the depths of the abyss.
- Day 3 6 Over waves of the sea, over all the earth,
and over every people and nation I have held sway.
- (Day 7) 7 Among all these I sought a resting place;
in whose territory should I abide?
8 Then the Creator of all things gave me a command,
and my Creator chose the place for my tent.
He said,
“Make your dwelling in Jacob,
and in Israel receive your inheritance.”
9 Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me,
and for all the ages I shall not cease to be.
10 In the holy tent I ministered before him,
so I was established in Zion
11 Thus in the beloved city he gave me a resting place,
and in Jerusalem was my domain.
12 I took root in a glorified people,
in the portion of the Lord, his inheritance.
13 I grew tall as a cedar in Lebanon,
and as a cypress on the heights of Hermon.
14 I grew tall as a palm tree in En-gedi,
and as rosebushes in Jericho;
as a fair olive tree in the field,
and as a plane tree beside water I grew tall.
- Day 4 15 As cinnamon and camel’s thorn I gave forth perfume,
and as choice myrrh I spread my fragrance,

1. For a thorough discussion of the text see R. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach erklärt* (Berlin: Reimer, 1906), *ad loc*; J. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (BBB 37; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1971), 34–41; O. Rickenbacher, *Weisheitsperikopen bei Ben Sira* (OBO 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 113–130.

- Day 5 as galbanum, onycha, and stacte,
and as the smoke of frankincense in the tent
16 As a terebinth I spread out my branches,
and my branches are glorious and graceful.
17 As the vine I bud forth delights,
and my blossoms become glorious and abundant fruit.
- Day 6 19 Come to me, you who desire me,
and eat your fill of my fruits.
20 My memorial is sweeter than honey (ὕπερ τὸ μέλι γλυκύ),
and the possession of me sweeter than the honeycomb
(ὕπερ μέλιτος κηρίον).
- Day 7 21 Those who eat of me will hunger still,
and those who drink of me will thirst still. [71]
22 Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame,
and those who work in me will not sin.”
24:23 All this is the “*Book of the Covenant*” (Exod 24:7) of the Most
High God, *the law that Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the
congregations of Jacob* (Deut33:4).
- 24:25 It [the Torah] fills up wisdom, as the Pishon,
and as the Tigris at the time of the first fruits.
24:26 It runs over, as the Euphrates, with understanding,
and as the Jordan at harvest time
24:27 It pours forth instruction as the Nile,²
as the Gihon at the time of vintage.
24:28 The first man did not know wisdom fully,
nor will the last one fathom her.
24:29 For her thoughts are more abundant than the sea,
and her counsel deeper than the great abyss.
24:30 As for me, I was as a canal from a river,
as a water channel into a garden.
24:31 I said,
“I will water my garden and drench my flower-beds.”
And lo, my canal became a river, and my river a sea.
24:32 I will again make instruction shine forth as the dawn,
and I will make it clear from far away.
24:33 I will again pour out teaching as prophecy,
and leave it to all future generations.

2. The Greek has “ὁ ἐκφαίνων ὡς φῶς παιδείαν”. This is a misreading of the Hebrew, which perhaps read הַמְשִׁיעַ כִּי אֶרֶץ מוֹסֵר, under the influence of v. 32b.

a. *The Chapter's Context in Sirach's Literary Structure*

It is widely thought that Sirach 24:3–23 is a twenty-two line poem of which there are other examples in the same work (1:11–30; 6:18–37; 51:13–30).³ There is also general agreement that the chapter has an introduction (vv. 1–2) followed by six stanzas, along the lines laid out above (vv. 3–6, 7–11, 12–17, 19–23, 24–30, 31–33). But it is otherwise not clear whether there is any carefully worked out internal structure. Verses 3–6 pertain to matters of creation on the macrocosmic scale, vv. 7–11 are concerned with Israel's special relationship with Israel, vv. 12–17 describe Wisdom in terms of vegetative fecundity, in vv. 19–22 Wisdom invites her hearers to a banquet and vv. 25–33 sapientialize the imagery of Gen 2–3. Thematic and literary connections between the various parts of this chapter abound as several studies have shown.⁴

However, the reader searches in vain for any clear logic within a chapter which is otherwise so clearly set apart from its surrounding literary context. M. Gilbert [72] has suggested that the hymn of vv. 3–23 moves through a creation and salvation–historical sequence; beginning with creation and “universal origins” (vv. 3–6), the narrative moves to “the election of Israel” (vv. 7–8) and on to “the centralization of the cult” (vv. 10–12).⁵ But this does not explain the transition from Wisdom taking up residence in Zion (vv. 8–10) to her growing like a cedar, cypress, palm tree and the like in vv. 12–17, nor does it account for vv. 24–33. Certain points disrupt a strictly salvation–historical sequence. The claim for Wisdom's pre-existence (v. 9) should surely come at the beginning of the passage, and what does the cloud of Israel's Exodus wanderings in v. 4 have to do with Israel's role in “universal origins”?

There are some general and some close parallels between the hymn of Wisdom's self-praise and Proverbs 8 where Wisdom is also personified as a pre-existent female figure who accompanies God during his creation of the cosmos. These have been examined in detail by P. W. Skehan and J. T. Sanders.⁶ However, “the differences are considerable” as J. Marböck has

3. E.g. P. W. Skehan, “Structures in Poems on Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24,” *CBQ* 41 (1979), 365–379 (375).

4. See in particular the studies of J. Marböck, *Weisheit*, 34–80; M. Gilbert, “L'Éloge de la Sagesse (Siracide 24),” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 5 (1974), 326–48; Skehan, “Structures” & G.T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct: A study in the sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 21–71.

5. Gilbert, “L'Éloge de la Sagesse,” 345.

6. Skehan, “Structures” and J. T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (SBLMS 28; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 45–50.

noted, particularly given that much of Sirach 24 simply has no parallel in Proverbs 8.⁷

In one of the fullest in-depth analyses of the chapter G. T. Sheppard makes a virtue of the hymn's apparent lack of structure as an example of a deliberately anthological style:

... the writer depends on familiar traditions and themes from the OT, which he takes up synthetically. The complexity in his use of motifs is due in part to the author's holistic view of the sacred traditions. He is not merely citing texts, but constructing an intricate mosaic of themes.⁸

Thus Sheppard ably shows the impact of the language of Genesis 1:2 and 2:6, coupled with Proverbs 8:22ff, on vv. 3–4; the pattern of the desert wandering for the people of God and their seeking a home in vv. 5–11; the influence of Jer 10:12–16; 51:15–19 (cf. Deut 32:9) upon v. 8; the use of vegetative imagery used throughout the OT for the righteous in vv. 13–17; the Priestly language of the Temple cult's incense and oil in vv. 15 and a whole array of more allusive echoes to scriptural texts (to some of which we shall come presently).

The obvious weakness of this approach is that it fails to provide any clear structure to the text. Now, of course, it may be that there is no such structure and we should not hope to find one. In Proverbs 8 itself there is no clearly worked out structure. But in keeping with the way in which Sirach has generally improved upon the disorganization of the wisdom material in Proverbs, we might well expect more of a structure than the "anthological" reading allows, particularly since it is in this chapter that the author's true theological colours shine through most strongly. [73]

One of the assumptions that has hampered the proper appreciation of the use of Scripture in this chapter has been the view that the author is primarily interested in the Deuteronomic vision of Torah. Certainly in v. 23 there is an explicit citation of Deuteronomy 33:4 and it is possible to see parts of the hymn, for example the theme of rest and inheritance for Wisdom in vv. 7–12, as particularly Deuteronomic.⁹ But it is very hard to make sense of the hymn if, with v. 23, we assume that its heart is the identification of Wisdom with Torah understood as a written and specifically Deuteronomic text. If the identification of Wisdom with the written Torah is the heart

7. Marböck, *Weisheit*, 55. There is no parallel to the paradisaal imagery of Sir 24:12–19, 23–33, nor the particularization of 24:7–8, 10–12.

8. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 44.

9. See, for example, Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel*, 62, 95–6; Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 39–43.

of this passage then it is not entirely clear why the author turns from the expanse of creation in vv. 3–6 to the people of God, their Tabernacle and Temple in vv. 7–10. If the author wants to stress the identification of Wisdom with Torah qua written text, rather than Torah qua people and sacred place, then he should surely have moved from creation to Sinai and focused on the giving of the covenant as a book.

There is too much in this text which points to a more priestly, than a Deuteronomic tradition as several more recent commentators, to whom we now turn, have intuited.¹⁰

b. Sirach 50 in Modern Scholarship

Most discussion of Sirach in the modern period has regarded Sir 24 as the centre and high point of the work. There is no doubt that it acts as a climax to the first half of the Wisdom collection with some important points of contact with the book's prologue (ch. 1). But there has been an overemphasis on Sir 24 at the expense of far more significant themes in the second half of the book which reach their climax in the hymn in praise of the fathers in chs. 44–50 and *the* climactic hymn in praise of the high priest, Simon, in Sir 50.

Robert Hayward has led the way in Sirach scholarship in an exploration of the importance of the structural and thematic correspondences between ch. 24 and ch. 50. This can be seen particularly clearly in the way in which the characterization of Wisdom in terms of arboreal fecundity in ch. 24:12–17 is mirrored in the account of Simon in the very same terms in 50:8–12.¹¹ The effect of this parallelism is to suggest that the high priest is himself an embodiment of divine Wisdom. In 24:10[74] the reader is told

10. Sheppard begins to move away from the concentration of older scholarship upon the Deuteronomic influence. However, his treatment of the priestly and cultic themes shows unease, to say the least. Commenting on the intratextuality between Sir 24:2–22 and 50:1–21 (*Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 55) he says that the “flora comparisons are found repeated exactly, almost element for element, in the eulogy to Aaron the High Priest (Sir 45:6–22) and, to lesser degree, in that of Simeon II, Aaron’s post-exilic successor to the priestly office (50:1–13). [However,] the primary focus, though on the priests, is not on the ritual of the cult. According to the preface (44:1–15) the pious heroes in Sir 44–50 are epitomized predominantly for their sagacity.” This assessment of Sir 45:6–22 and 50:1–13 relative to 24:13–17 is a straightforward decision to ignore the text’s priestly focus and his comments about the whole of chs. 44–50 suggest he has avoided the plain meaning of these most important chapters of Sirach out of his own negative view of the cult.

11. C. T. R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-biblical Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1996), 52, 78.

that Wisdom ministered in Israel's Tabernacle. This is a somewhat puzzling statement given that the language used (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐλειτουρηῖσα) must describe a human ministering to God, not God ministering (in the guise of Wisdom) to Israel. When Sirach writes ch. 24:10 he has an eye towards ch. 50 where, so to speak, Wisdom is "incarnate" in Israel's high priest. It is as Israel's high priest that Wisdom ministered before God in the Tabernacle, just as she does now in the Jerusalem Temple.

But Sirach 50 has its own literary and conceptual problems. Two issues deserve particular mention: (a) the absence of obvious literary integrity and (b) the author's inclusion of the priesthood in the grammar of a fully theological discourse.

(a) Even more so than is the case with ch. 24, Ben Sira 50 lacks a clear literary or conceptual structure (or so it seems). A movement from Simon's civil duties (50:1–6), his appearance from the sanctuary (vv. 5–7) to his embodiment of the beauty of nature (vv. 8–12) and an account of his duties as high priest at the end of the hymn is clear enough. But why are these topics treated as they are and what, if any, is the literary connection between them? The subtle, and quite deliberate, intratextuality between Sirach 24 and 50 suggests there is more here than meets the eye.

(b) Sirach thinks that the high priest embodies divine Wisdom as Hayward has shown. He also thinks that Simon embodies God's Glory. In v. 7 the high priest is

As the rainbow which appears in the cloud

כְּקַשְׁתַּ בְּקֶשֶׁת נִרְאָה בַּעֲנַן
ὡς τόξον φωτίζον ἐν νεφέλαις δόξης

This is a reference to the "likeness of the Glory of the LORD" in Ezekiel 1:28, which is also

As the bow in a cloud on a rainy day

כַּמִּרְאָה הַקֶּשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּעֲנַן בְּיוֹם הַגֶּשֶׁם

ὡς ὄρασις τόξου ὅταν ᾗ ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὑέτου¹²

These two claims—that Simon the high priest embodies both Wisdom and the Glory of God—are then reflected in the form which the chapter takes—a hymn in praise of Simon. The praise of Simon is the climax of the praise of the fathers begun in 44:1, just as Simon's instantiation of God's Glory connects him also to the glory of the fathers themselves (44:1–2,

12. This intertextuality is anticipated in the previous chapter by specific reference to Ezekiel's vision of the Glory (ὄρασιν δόξης) in 49:8. This identification of the high priest with the Kavod is echoed in the later musaph prayer for Yom Kippur: "as the likeness of the blow in the midst of clouds (כְּרִמּוֹת הַקֶּשֶׁת בְּתוֹךְ הַעֲנַן)" to which the congregation respond, "was the appearance of the priest (מִרְאָה כְּהֵן)".

19; 45:2; 45:7; 45:23, 26; 46:2; 47:6; 48:4). The *form*—praise—reflects the *content*—a highly exalted theological anthropology in which the nation's pre-eminent representative, the high priest, receives praise as one who uniquely manifests' divine Wisdom and the Glory of God. How is this possible, given that there is no indication that Sirach has surrendered his monotheistic commitments?¹³[75]

c. Gese, Hayward and the Priestly Theology of Creation in Sirach 24

↻ 50

Three contributions to the study of Sirach are of particular significance in pointing us towards a proper understanding of chs. 24 and 50. In the last twenty five years there has been a sea-change in Sirach scholarship: where, before, his theology was deemed Deuteronomic, it is now generally reckoned to have a strong priestly orientation.¹⁴ The priestly orientation is evident throughout, though it comes to particular prominence in the crescendo of praise in the closing chapters where the priesthood, its values and construction of sacred space, guides the work to its climactic vision of Simon, a figurehead who fulfills both royal (50:2–4 cf. 48:17; 49:11–12) and traditionally priestly duties.¹⁵

As is well known, the priesthood at the beginning of the second century was no monolithic body and shortly after the composition of his Wisdom collection Ben Sira's world was to be torn apart by clerical infighting. Judging by his comments in 43:2–8 on the respective roles of the sun and the moon, Ben Sira had no sympathy for those Jews, some of whom would later gather

13. See 7:27–31 for his use of the Shema. This problem is tackled by M. Barker, "The High Priest and the Worship of Jesus," in C. C. Newman, J. R. Davila and G. S. Lewis (eds.), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism. Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (JSJS 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 93–111 & Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, "The Worship of Divine Humanity and the Worship of Jesus," in C. C. Newman, J. R. Davila and G. Lewis (eds.), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism. Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (JSJSupp 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 121–28.

14. See esp. Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 188–211; Helge Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter. Eine Untersuchung zum Berufsbild des vor-makkabäischen Sofer unter Berücksichtigung seines Verhältnisses zu Priester-, Propheten- und Weisheitslehrertum* (WUNT 2.6. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1980); Saul M. Olyan, "Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood," *HTR* 80 (1987), 261–86; B.G. Wright, "'Fear the Lord and Honor the Priest': Ben Sira as Defender of the Jerusalem Priesthood," in P.C. Beentjes (ed.), *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 189–222.

15. For the priesthood in the closing chapters see esp. 45:6–25; 46:16; 47:2, 8–10, 13; 49:12.

at Qumran, who believed the Temple service should follow a solar calendar. Given his views on the afterlife (10:11; 17:28; 30:4; 38:21) our author is often judged to be proto-Sadducean, but it is hard to know whether in his day there were any who followed a (later) Pharisaic view on such matters. Was our author himself a priest? We do not know and we should not assume that his sympathy for a hierocratic state means he must himself be of priestly lineage.

One observation does, however, help to define more narrowly our author's position in relation to the broader stream of late third and early second century priestly tradition. Saul M. Olyan has noted how close in several respects our author is to the P strand of the Pentateuch.¹⁶ As in P (Exod 6:16–25, contrast Ps 99:6), in Sirach 45:1–25 Moses is highly exalted but unlike his brother he is not himself a priest.¹⁷ In chapter 45 “Ben Sira alludes to P passage after P passage in order to tell his tale, ignoring for all intents and purposes other Pentateuchal narrative”.¹⁸ Such is Sirach's obsession with P material in his forty-fifth chapter that Olyan asks “does[76] this not imply that in the second century BCE, a “pure” P tradition is being taught in the Aaronid schools which presumably existed to train young priests?”¹⁹ Two other studies, those of Harmut Gese and C. T. R. Hayward, also point to the importance of P material for Sirach.

Harmut Gese thinks that the opening lines of the hymn in Sirach 24:3–6 follow the order of creation in Genesis 1:1–11, the P creation account. He takes as his starting point the use of Genesis 1:2 behind the hovering mist in Sirach 24:3b, which we have already noted. He goes on:

... behind the following parallel lines (v. 4), with its statement about the world-transcending dwelling place, there stands the report of the creation of the light (Gen. 1:3–5), which was already understood in Genesis 1 as also “intellectual light.” Corresponding to the dwelling in the heights that transcend the world (the firmament is not mentioned until later) is the epiphany on the throne above the columns that uphold the clouds, where the “consuming fire” is to be found. Then, following the account in Genesis 1:6–8, there is the description of the delimiting of the cosmos by the firmament and the abyss, which wisdom accomplishes alone by walking through them (v. 5). Finally there is the establishment of the lordship of wisdom within the world, on

16. Olyan, “Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood”.

17. *Ibid.*, 267–8.

18. *Ibid.*, 270. Sir 45:18–19 picks up Num 16:1–17:15; Sir 45:20–22 recalls Num 18:20; Sir 45:24 recalls Num 25:12–13 etc ...

19. *Ibid.*, 272.

land and sea and among all peoples (v. 6). On the basis of Genesis 1, wisdom is thus described as the one who carries out the work of creation and *expressis verbis*, as the Logos of creation.²⁰

Gese's comments are brief, undeveloped and, though intuitively attractive, not entirely convincing as an explanation of the determinative subtext of these verses of the hymn, which probably explains why his contribution has received little attention in subsequent discussion.²¹ It is certainly true that the twofold division between heaven and the depth of the abyss in v. 5 is reminiscent of the separation of the upper and lower waters in Gen 1:6–8 and Wisdom's holding sway over the waves of the sea and all the earth might have in mind Gen 1:9–10.²² However, it is not entirely clear that we must find in Sir 24:4 any thought for the creation of light in Genesis 1:3–5.

Turning to Sirach 50, Robert Hayward has highlighted the way in which the final verses of the hymn in praise of Simon echo the Priestly account creation in Gen 1:1–2:4a. In the Greek, Sir 50:19 says the sacrificial service is brought to a close with the people praying for mercy

Until the order of the LORD was completed (ἕως συντελεσθῆ κόσμος κυρίου), and they perfectly completed (τελείωσαν) His service.[77]

The Greek translator—Ben Sira's own grandson—has chosen to relate the “order (κόσμος)” of the liturgy to the order of heaven and earth, the (“κόσμος”), as it is described in the Septuagint of Gen 2:1–2a where the Priestly account of creation ends with the words:

And the heavens and the earth were completed (συντετέλεσθησαν), and all their order (κόσμος), and God completed (συντέλεσεν) on the seventh day the works which he made.

That Sirach has drawn on Genesis 1 should not surprise us given its canonical status in the second century B.C. (cf. already Sir 16:24–17:13). However, Genesis 1 itself is not an isolated literary unit in the Pentateuch but is closely bound literarily and conceptually to the instructions for the Tabernacle in Exod 25–40. In order to understand the complex literary and

20. H. Gese, *Essays in Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 196. Cf. *Ibid.*, “Wisdom, Son of Man, and the Origins of Christology: The Consistent Development of Biblical Theology,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 3 (1981), 23–57 (32–3).

21. Though Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation. The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 264–272 shows a similar appreciation of the role of the Genesis 1 creation account in the hymn.

22. For Gen 1:6–8 and Sir 24:5 see Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 268.

conceptual structure of Sirach 24 and 50 it is first necessary to appreciate the way in which, in the Priestly material in the Pentateuch, creation and Tabernacle are bound to one another.

d. Genesis 1 & Exodus 25–31: Ps View of Creation and Tabernacle

In a ground breaking article P. J. Kearney showed the potential significance of the fact that to the seven days of creation in Genesis 1 there correspond seven speeches by God addressed to Moses giving instructions for the building of the Tabernacle in Exodus 25–31.²³ Each speech begins “The LORD spoke to Moses” (Exod 25:1; 30:11, 16, 22, 34; 31:11, 12) and includes material which he argued corresponds to the relevant day of creation.

In several instances the correspondences are obvious. In the third speech (Exod 30:16–21) Moses is told to make the bronze laver. In the Solomonic Temple this is called simply the “sea” and in P it matches the creation of the sea on the third day of creation in Gen 1:9–11. The seventh speech (Exod 31:12–17) stresses the importance of the Sabbath for Israel, just as Gen 2:2–3 tells us how God rested on the seventh day. On the first day of creation God creates light which separates the day and night (Gen 1:3–5). Kearney argued that this is equivalent to Aaron’s responsibility for the tending of the Tabernacle lampstand in the evening and morning, at the boundary between day and night (27:20–21; 30:7–8). Accordingly, the Temple is viewed as a microcosm of creation in which Aaron acts in *imitatio Dei*.

The relationship between the second, fourth, fifth and sixth days of creation and the respective speeches in Exod 25–31 are harder to see, although the basic thrust of Kearney’s hypothesis has been taken up by a number of commentators who have discerned more to support his case.²⁴

For example, on the fourth day God creates the sun, the moon and the stars and in the fourth speech, Moses is told to make the[78] holy anointing oil with which he is to anoint the sanctuary, its appurtenances and personnel, the priests. Moshe Weinfeld has argued that the common view of later, post-biblical, literature that various parts of the Temple and

23. P. J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Exodus 25–40,” *ZAW* 89 (1977), 375–387.

24. E.g. M. Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord, The Problem of the Sitz-im-Leben of Gen. 1:1-2:3,” in A. Caquot and M. Delcor (eds.), *Mélanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles* (AOAT 212; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), 501–11; J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil. The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 82–87.

especially the priests can represent the heavenly bodies, is testimony to the naturalness of the parallelism between the fourth day of creation and function of the anointing oil in the fourth speech. Indeed, he specifically cites Sir 50:5–7 as one such text where the high priest is identified with the sun, the moon and the stars.²⁵

The extent of the correspondences between the two heptads in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and Exod 25–31 is not yet clear. This is not the place for a full examination of the details.²⁶ For the purposes of our study of Sirach it is enough that we know that Gen 1 and Exod 25–31 are two panels of a whole, and that we have in our mind how the seven parts correspond to each other:

<i>Creation (Genesis 1:1–2:2)</i>	<i>Tabernacle (Exodus 25–31)</i>
Day 1 heavens and the earth creation of light: evening and morning	<i>Speech 1</i> (Exod 25:1–30:10) Tabernacle structure (= heavens and earth) tending of menorah, Tamid sacrifice & incense offering (evening and morning) (27:20–21; 30:1–9)
Day 2 separation of upper and lower waters	<i>Speech 2</i> (Exod 30:11–16) (census and half shekel)
Day 3 separation of dry land and sea (1:9–10) vegetation (1:11–12)	<i>Speech 3</i> (Exod 30:17–21) bronze laver (the “sea”)
Day 4 sun, moon and stars	<i>Speech 4</i> (Exod 30:22–33) sacred anointing oil: myrrh, calamus, cinnamon, cassia anointing of cultic appurtenances and priests
Day 5 living creatures in the upper and lower realms	<i>Speech 5</i> (Exod 30:34–38) sacred incense: stacte, onycha, galbanum, frankincense.

25. Weinfeld, “Sabbath,” 507. Though not cited by Weinfeld one of the clearest witnesses to the association of the sacred anointing oil with the heavenly bodies is 2 *En.* 22:8–10. See also, e.g., *T. Lev* 14:1–3; 18:4; 4QTL^{vi} frag. 9; 4QTL^{vii} 8 iii 4–6; Josephus *Ant.* 3:184, 187.

26. Much more could be said in support of Kearney’s thesis. In general, scholars have not followed through his basic insight, in part because they have not allowed for the kind of theological anthropology which the intratextuality entails (and which is fundamental for Ben Sira’s witness to it).

<i>Day 6</i> land creatures & human-kind (God's Image)	<i>Speech 6</i> (Exod 31:1–11) Bezalel filled with God's spirit.
<i>Day 7</i> Sabbath	<i>Speech 7</i> (Exod 31:12–17) Sabbath.

The existence of this intratextuality between different parts of the Pentateuch is unsurprising on several counts. Although separated by over seventy chapters Gen 1 and Exod 25–31, 35–40 are penned by the same Priestly author (P). It has long been known that the language at the end of the P creation account (Gen 2:1–3) corresponds to portions of Exod 39–40 (Exod [79] 39:32a; 39:43; 40:33) which describe the erection of the Tabernacle in fulfillment of the instructions in chs. 25–31 (see below).

Conceptually, the intratextuality between creation and Tabernacle is a prime example of the fundamental assumption of cultic life in the ancient Near East that temples are built in the image of the cosmos as it is revealed by the god(s) for whom they are a home. For P the relationship between creation and Tabernacle works in two directions. On the one hand the cosmos is a macro-temple and the account of its creation is liturgical in genre and, on the other, the Tabernacle (and Jerusalem Temple for which it stands) is a microcosm of the world. The idea is widely represented both in other strands of the Hebrew Bible and in post-biblical tradition, and it has now received much discussion in the secondary literature.²⁷

Returning to Sirach, in addition to the observations of Gese, Hayward and Weinfeld that suggest the author had a peculiar interest in P's cosmology, we are encouraged to make a fresh examination of chs. 24 and 50 because in 24:15 there is an exact description of the ingredients used for the sacred anointing oil and incense as they are prescribed in the fourth and fifth speeches to Moses in Exod 30:22–33 and 34–38 (cf. Sir 50:9).

The primary aim of the rest of this essay is to show that the intratextuality between Genesis 1 and Exodus 25–40 provides the literary and conceptual frame upon which the intricate tapestry of biblical allusions in Sir 24 and 50 is woven. The author of these two chapters knows and understands P's theology of creation and Tabernacle intimately—perhaps far better than we ever will—and he has reflected upon it deeply giving it his own distinctive sapiential “spin” and, at the same time, actualizing the vision of the wilderness Tabernacle in the Temple state of his own day.

27. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Structure of P,” *CBQ* 38 (1976), 275–292; Levenson, *Creation*; Hayward, *Jewish Temple*; M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven. The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991)..

We will now work our way through chs. 24 and 50 in turn showing the author's use of the Genesis 1–Exodus 25–31 literary whole.

e. Sirach 24 and the Priestly Theology of Creation and Tabernacle

On any reading, Sirach 24 can be roughly divided into two sections: a hymn to Wisdom in vv. 3–23 for which the identification of Wisdom with Torah in v. 23 acts as a concluding, climactic summary, and the further praise of Wisdom in vv. 25–33.²⁸ This second block of material utilizes the imagery of Genesis 2: the four rivers of paradise — Pishon, Tigris, Euphrates, Gihon — are claimed for the Jerusalem Temple centred Torah (vv. 25–27) and Adam, the gardener and guardian of the world's irrigation system (cf. Genesis 2:15), is a type of the sage himself (vv. 29–31). Whilst this second, briefer, portion of Sirach 24 draws on Genesis 2, the longer more substantial first part of the chapter is indebted throughout to Genesis 1 and the P theology of creation and Tabernacle: Sir 24:25–33 is to Sir 24:3–23, as Genesis 2 is to Genesis 1.[80]

f. 24:1–2: Wisdom's Praise in the presence of God's "host".

The first indication that ch. 24 is interested in the P creation account comes in the introductory verses which set Wisdom's self-praise "in the midst of her people" and in the presence of God's "hosts."²⁹ The former phrase must refer to the human community who will also be in view in the statement that Wisdom opens her mouth "in the assembly (ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ) of the Most High". This anticipates 24:7–11 where Wisdom takes up residence in Israel's cultic community.

The reference to God's "host" recalls the angelic community (or the ancient Near Eastern divine council). However, Sirach is remarkably uninterested in the angelic realm.³⁰ In the OT a reference to God's host could refer to the sun, the moon and the stars (e.g. Deut 4:19; 17:3). Even though Sirach 24 shows an interest in the cosmos, there is no explicit mention of the sun, moon and stars that would lead us to

28. Verse 34 is a duplication of 33:18 and is perhaps out of place in ch. 24 (P. W. Skehan and A. A. DiLella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (ABC 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 330).

29. The Greek δυνάμεως will have translated מְבָרָא, or מְבָרָא, or מְבָרָא (cf. MT and LXX of Pss 103 [LXX 102]:21; 148:2; Joel 2:11, and Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 216).

30. Only the Greek translator has an angel in 48:21 where the Hebrew text has God himself. Two other verses (43:26; 45:2) have a muted interest in angelology.

suppose the reference to God's host has specifically those heavenly bodies in mind.

In its literary context—as a heading for the hymn of praise which follows—the expression “his hosts” accords very well with the somewhat idiosyncratic use of the Hebrew צבא in Genesis 2:1 where “heaven and earth and *all their host* (צבא)” refers to every part of creation, not just the sun, the moon and the stars, that had been created in the preceding chapter. So, I suggest, verses 1–2 anticipate the theme at the heart of all that follows: Wisdom's praise is set in a cultic community which is, simultaneously, a cosmic community. The praise of Wisdom is both in the midst of God's people and before the whole of creation because in Israel's cult creation's praises are voiced by the people. In the light of our reading of the verses which follow it will be clear that this thought is already in the author's mind in the introductory verses.

g. 24:3: Wisdom's Role in the First Day of Creation (Part A)

Verse 3 is the first of two verses which pick up the account of the creation of Day 1 in Gen 1:2–5. In Sirach 24:3 Wisdom comes forth from the mouth of God and covers the earth like a mist. The first of these expressions recalls God's creation by means of His spoken word throughout Gen 1 (vv. 3, 6, 9 etc ...).³¹ It is also generally recognized that Wisdom's covering the earth like a mist is an allusion to the divine spirit sweeping over the face of the waters in Gen 1:2. Although it is not immediately obvious how our author has moved from *spirit* or *wind* over *waters* to a *mist* over the *earth*, discussion of ancient Jewish interpretations of the biblical creation accounts has clarified Sirach's hermeneutical method at this point.

Sirach's language is the result of a conflation of the image of the spirit of God in Gen 1:2 and the mysterious רוח which in Gen 2:6 rises from the earth to water the[81] whole face of the ground. In the targums this רוח is taken to be a cloud (עננה in Onqelos and the Palestinian Targum) and G. T. Sheppard has demonstrated that Sir 24:3 creatively harmonizes the first stages of creation in the two accounts, Gen 1 and 2–3, by choosing language that provides the essence of both.³²

So whilst the hymn opens with an eye on both Gen 1 and the creation story in Gen 2–3, the attention, in particular, is directed to the beginnings

31. Sirach anticipates the later identification of Wisdom with the Logos in Wis 9:1–2; 18:15; John 1:1–5, cf. Sir 43:26 and Heb 1:3.

32. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct*, 22–27. Cf. generally Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 216; Gilbert, “L'Éloge de la Sagesse,” 341–3.

of those two creation accounts, which in the former case means the conditions before the first “day” of creation. In what follows it is clear that Gen 1 is uppermost in the author’s mind, but this is not the last time that Gen 2–3 will be introduced into Gen 1.

h. 24:4: Wisdom’s Role in the First Day of Creation (Part B)

On the first day of creation God makes light which separates day from night. Of this light there is no explicit mention in Sir 24.³³ Where Gese saw a reference to the creation of light in the image of Wisdom’s dwelling in the highest heavens—the place of the “intellectual light” of the first day of creation—Gen 1:3–5 is more vividly present when we take seriously the fact that Genesis 1 was to be read in close conjunction with the Priestly material in Exodus.

Wisdom’s dwelling in a “pillar of cloud” is clearly a reference to the cloud that leads the people of God through their wilderness wanderings towards the promised land (e.g. Exod 13:21; 14:19; Num 14:14; Neh 9:12, 19).³⁴ The language of Sir 24:4 is identical to these and related texts where the pillar of cloud descends with the LORD’s theophany at the tent of meeting (Exod 33:9–10; Num 12:5; Deut 31:15, cf. Ps 99:7).

Since verses 3–6 are a well-defined unit dealing with the cosmic scope of creation in its most fundamental elements (earth, heaven, abyss, sea, land) the presence of this defining feature of Israel’s salvation history and cultic life seems out of place; it would have been better after v. 8. Closer examination of the Exodus tradition explains its presence at this point in our hymn as a deliberate evocation of the first day of creation; the creation of light and the separation, thereby, of day and night (Gen 1:3–5). In Exod 13:21–22 (cf. Num 14:14):

The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light (להאיר להם), so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.[82]

33. The Latin text adds such a reference in v. 3 when it says “*ego in caelis feci, ut orientur lumen indeficiens*” (“I made that in the heavens there should be a light that never fails”). Although this is a clearly secondary reading, I wonder whether the *unfailing* light of the heavens does not have in mind the *perpetual* light of the Tamid menorah.

34. See esp. Sheppard (*Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct*, 32) who relates the Exodus imagery to the searching for rest and inheritance in the promised land in vv. 7–11.

Similarly, in Nehemiah 9:19 we are told that God, in his great mercies

did not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud that led them in the way did not leave them *by day*, nor the pillar of fire *by night* that gave them light (להאיר ליהם, φωτίζειν αὐτοῖς) on the way by which they should go (cf. 9:12).

When the people reached Sinai and the Tabernacle was erected, the cloud of fire took up residence in Israel's cult. Its movement from that time on determined whether the people moved forward or remained where they were:

For the cloud of the LORD was on the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night (Exod 40:38, cf. Num 9:15–23).

There are at least six such biblical texts where the (pillar of) cloud is related verbally and functionally to the binary opposition between day and night which, of course, is created by God on the first day of creation according to Genesis 1.³⁵ Hence, Wisdom's identification with the pillar of cloud would very well evoke the first day of creation and the separation of day and night. Given that, as we shall see, the rest of the hymn follows Genesis (and Exodus 25–31) rather closely, this intertextuality must be deliberate at this point.

Now at this point our author need only be reading Genesis 1 in relation to the wider Exodus tradition. He need not necessarily have an awareness of the complex intratextuality between Gen 1 and Exod 25–40. But since, in what follows, he shows such an awareness it is possible that here also he has an eye towards the synchronicity between creation and cult. Whilst commentators have concentrated on the “pillar of cloud” as a wilderness guide, its presence as a theophanic cloud in the tent of meeting (Exod 33:9–10; Num 14:14; Deut 31:15) invites further reflection.

The tent of meeting is a peculiar and temporary means of communication between God and his people through Moses. It is superseded by the Tabernacle and then the Temple, for which the Tabernacle and its service is a model. The theophanic presence of God in the cloud at the tent of meeting is extended and ultimately replaced by the glorious cloud which fills the Tabernacle at the climax of its construction in Exod 40:36–40. In Exodus 40 the cloud's appearance in the Tabernacle immediately follows a detailed fulfillment of all the instructions set out in the first speech to Moses in Exod 25:1–30:10—the setting up of the Tabernacle structure, the appurtenances of the inner sanctuary (ark of the covenant with mercy seat, table of shewbread, lampstand and golden altar of incense) and the

35. See Exod 13:21–22; 40:38; Num 14:14; Deut 1:33; Neh 9:12, 16, 19; Isa 4:5, cf. Num 10:34.

altar of burnt offering (40:16–29).³⁶ In Exod 29:42b–45, at the centre of the instructions for the offering of the Tamid sacrifice, incense offering and the tending of the menorah (29:38–42a & 30:1–9), God promises that it is at the place (and time) of the Tamid[83] burnt offering that he will meet with the people and dwell with them. So, in Exod 40:34–35, when God’s Glory fills the Tabernacle it is a direct consequence of the offering of the first Tamid sacrifice (40:25, 27, 29) and filling of the tent of meeting with a theophanic cloud of incense. Since the cloud of God’s presence is a response to the offering of Tamid it is not surprising that it is a *perpetual* guide to the people (40:36) and that its defining characteristic is its double mode of operation *during the day and the night* (40:38).

It is likely, then, that both in Exod 40 itself, and in the daily performance of the Tamid incense offering, that there is an intimate connection between the creation of what would be, in effect, a pillar of incense cloud, in the evening and morning and God’s theophanic cloud which marks the division between the day and the night. That is to say that the daily offering of incense in the morning and evening, which accompanies the tending of the lampstand and marks the divisions between day and night, was a well-established evocation and re-enactment of the separation of day and night consequent upon the creation of light on the first day of creation. As a priest steeped in the Priestly theology of Temple and creation, Sirach knew this very well and his placing of Wisdom’s throne in the pillar of cloud in the second verse of his Wisdom hymn deliberately signals, not just the first act of creation in Genesis, but also the symmetry between cult and creation, which will become his preoccupation in the second through fourth stanzas of his Wisdom hymn.

24:5: The Separation of the Waters (Day 2)

On the second day of creation (Gen 1:6–8) God separates the upper waters from the lower waters, a division which is the principal focus of Wisdom’s claim to have “circled the round of heaven (γῦρον οὐρανοῦ ἐκύκλωσα) alone and walked in the depth of the abyss” in v. 5. Although the *language* is not that of Gen 1:6–8, the reference to the second day of creation is clear, as Gese has seen.³⁷

36. 40:18–19 fulfills 26:1–37; 40:20 fulfills 25:13–22; 40:21–23 fulfills 26:31–37; 40:24 fulfills 26:35; 40:25 fulfills 25:37–39 & 27:20–21; 40:26 fulfills 30:1–6; 40:27 fulfills 30:7–9; 40:28–29 fulfills 27:1–8; 29:38–42.

37. Gese, *Essays*, 196.

The language is similar to that in Job 26:10 (“He has carved a circle —אֶת־פְּתַי. *πρόσταγμα ἐγύρωσεν*—on the face of the waters,” cf. also Job 22:14 & Isaiah 40:22), but is closest to Prov 8:27–28:

27 When he established the heavens, I was there,
 when he carved a circle (בְּהוֹקֵן חוּג) on the face
 of the deep (בְּהוֹרֵת, τὸν οὐρανόν),
 28 when he made firm the skies above,
 when he established the fountains of the deep,

Clearly, in Proverbs God’s carving a circle is a part of his establishing the upper and the lower realms; the heaven(s) or skies above—what Genesis 1:8 has God call “heaven”—and the deep below. The drawing of the circle on the face of the deep probably intends some kind of architectural act of restriction, limitation and deliberate design similar to God’s creating of a *dome* in the midst of the waters in Gen 1:6. Indeed these two verses of Prov 8 are set within a creation narrative[84] which at this point corresponds closely to the second and third days of creation in Genesis 1. In the following verse (Prov 8:29) Proverbs describes how God

... assigned to the *sea* its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, ... (and) marked out the foundations of the *earth*,

which obviously corresponds to Gen 6:9–10 (describing the first action of creation on Day 3).

Why, if our author is following the order of creation prescribed by Gen 1, does he draw, in v. 5a, upon language apparently influenced by Prov 8? This could simply be one point at which the Prov 8 Wisdom hymn has left its mark on Sirach’s reworking of the model which he inherited from the Genesis 1 text. But there are grounds for thinking his choice of the phrase “circle of heaven” was made in order to subtly call to mind a quite specific image.

The Greek of v. 5a is similar to that used in another Sirach passage. In 43:12a the Greek text describes how the rainbow

encircles the heaven in an ark of glory (ἐγυρωσεν οὐρανὸν ἐν κυκλώσει δόξης).³⁸

In the first instance, this parallel to 24:5a is important because the description of the rainbow in ch. 43:11–12 is part of an account of the *firmament* (43:1) and all its host, the sun moon and stars (43:2–12). 43:1–12 as a whole

38. For the comparison between Sir 24:5a and 43:12a see Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 217, 405; Skehan & DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 332.

poetically describes the second and the fourth days of creation which confirms the impression that with the use of similar language in 24:5a Sirach describes the second day of creation.

Besides Proverbs 8, two other biblical rainbows are probably in mind. The language of “glory” calls to mind Ezekiel 1:26–28 where God’s Glory is like a rainbow in the clouds. Sirach knows the passage well and will use it in 50:7. In Ezekiel the rainbow is a sign of the divine warrior’s victory over the flood, upon which he is enthroned (1:24, 26—the blue lapis lazuli symbolizing the waters—cf. Ps 29:10). Ezekiel’s rainbow has a similar cosmogonic function to that in Gen 9:13–16 where the rainbow is a sign of God’s covenant with Noah that he will never again flood the earth. The flood story is, of course, an important element in the Priestly construction of primeval history, linking creation and Tabernacle with a story of the return to chaos and the salvific role of the ark as a proto-Temple/Tabernacle, as J. Blenkinsopp has shown.³⁹ According to Genesis 1 the second act of creation is the separation of the upper waters from the lower waters. This separation is partially undone at the flood, leading to a return towards the pre-creation chaos. At the flood the rains came down and the floods came up, which is to say that the upper and lower waters began to return to their pre-creation state.⁴⁰[85]

So in Sirach 24:5 the language has been carefully chosen not just to set Wisdom in the second day of the Priestly creation account, but also to allude to the wider set of biblical texts which are related to Gen 1:6–8. Wisdom is like the rainbow which symbolizes, just as the firmament actualizes, the permanent separation of the waters above from the waters below.

j. 24:6: The Separation of Sea and Earth (Day 3 Act 3)

In v. 6 Wisdom says “I held sway (ἡγησάμην) over the waves of *the sea* and all *the earth* and over every people and nation”.⁴¹ In the first place, this is a clear reference to the creation of gathered-together waters, the “sea,” and

39. Blenkinsopp, “The Structure of P”.

40. The way in which the flood story is related to the primal boundary set up on the second day of creation can be seen in the language of Gen 7:11 where “all the fountains of the great deep” opened up to let the flood begin. The only other occurrence of the phrase “fountains of the deep (עִינֹת הַדְּרוֹם)” is in Prov 8:27–28 a text which, as we have seen, is cognate to Gen 1:6–9 and which Sirach uses for his second day of creation in Sir 24:5.

41. Here we read, with the majority of commentators, the Syriac, the Latin and a minority of the Greek witnesses, ἡγησάμην rather than the majority Greek reading ἐκτησάμην.

the dry land, the “earth” on the third day of creation (Gen 1:9–10). But the precise choice of language is also an indication that whoever composed our Wisdom hymn is well aware of both the canonical, and history of religions, contexts of the separation of land and sea in Gen 1:9–10.

In Genesis itself separation is an act of divine fiat (“let it be ...”). Other biblical texts describe the separation of land and sea as the creation of a boundary by which the chaotic sea is constrained. In Jeremiah 5:22 God says “I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail, though they roar, they cannot pass over it” and in Job 38:8 he is the one “who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb”. Sirach acknowledges that the separation of land and sea required such creative force when he says that Wisdom “held sway” or “ruled” over the sea and all the earth”.

In Genesis 1:9–10 there is no reference to the nations and peoples, which Sirach supplies in 24:6b.⁴² However, this is a fitting gloss to Gen 1:9–10 given that throughout the long history of the *Chaoskampf* the divine warrior’s power over the forces of nature is simultaneously his power over the nations that oppose him and his chosen people. The language of the divine warrior’s conflict with, and victory over, the sea monster is regularly applied to the same victory over earthly rulers and peoples who oppose his purposes and people (see, e.g., Isa 17:12–14; 30:7; 51:9–11; Hab 3:8–10, 15; Jer 51:34; Pss 64:8 [LXX]; 87:4; Ezek 29:3–5; 32:2–8; Dan 7). One only needs to read Dan 7 to be reminded that this socio-political function of the *Chaoskampf* constellation was alive and well at the dawn of the second century B.C.

k. 24:7–11: Creation Completed in Israel & Her Sanctuary

So the first four verses of Wisdom’s hymn do, indeed, flow according to the logic of creation as prescribed by Genesis 1, as Gese suggested. It is normally thought that, whilst vv. 3–6 of the hymn retell the creation of the cosmos, in v. 7,[86] and all that follows, the focus shifts from creation to salvation history.⁴³ However, with the claim in v. 4 that Wisdom inhabits the pillar of cloud, which was destined to take up residence in Israel’s central cult

42. It is sometimes claimed that “over every people and nation” comes from Prov 8:15–16 where Wisdom claims that “by me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just; by me rulers rule, and nobles, all who govern rightly” (Skehan, “Structures,” 377; Skehan & DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 332–333). But the two images are rather different. In Proverbs, kings and rulers govern according to the standards, values and discernment of Wisdom. In Sirach, Wisdom herself has power over the people such rulers represent.

43. See, for instance, the analysis in Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel*, 44–47.

(Exod 40:38; Num 9:15–23) we have already seen that our author is reading Genesis 1 through material in Exodus, particularly that in Exod 25–40.

In verses 7–11 the hymn makes plain the historical and literary movement from Genesis 1 to the end of Exodus. For the redactor of the Pentateuch, God creates the world in seven days, but to ensure that creation remains stable and that it can be brought to completion, God takes up residence in a particular people and in a particular sacred space. He chooses the Israelites from amongst the nations and gives them instructions to build a sanctuary “with intelligence and knowledge in every kind of craft” (Exod 31:2). As an appropriate abode for the Creator of the world this Tabernacle, as any in the ancient Near East, mirrors and actualizes that of creation. It must be constructed with “intelligence and knowledge” because it is by means of such wisdom that God has ordered his creation (cf. Ps 104:24). This becomes his dwelling until he finally takes up residence in the Jerusalem Temple.

This is the story of creation and Tabernacle/Temple building in brief. It is retold in sapiential form in Sir 24: for “God the Creator” Sirach substitutes “Wisdom”. Wisdom’s career begins as Creator. It is creation that gives her identity, but she like God the Creator needs to be given concrete expression in the cosmos. Her striving for cosmogonic order also requires a particular time and place—a cultic instantiation. And so she looks for a place to rest (v. 7) “among all these I sought rest (ἀνάπαυσιν)”⁴⁴ (v. 7). She seeks the same rest that God achieved on the seventh day of creation. The logic of the first three days of creation in which she has thus far participated drives her on in search of an ending.

But that rest is not achieved as was God’s; simply in the completion of the initial creation (Gen 2:2–3). Sirach does not proceed simply to recount Wisdom’s participation in the creation of the sun, moon and stars and the creatures that populate his world in Gen 1:11–31. Rather, our author accelerates the narrative of creation and salvation–history, leaping to Israel’s recapitulation of creation at Mount Sinai and Zion. This is the burden of 24:8–11: God tells Wisdom to take up her dwelling in his chosen people, since there she will find her rest and thus bring creation to completion. Wisdom’s Creator “rested” (κατέπαυσεν) her tent (v. 8) and, again, in Zion’s Temple he later “rested” (κατέπαυσεν) her (v. 11). The grandson’s choice of the verb καταπαύω to describe Wisdom’s rest is identical to that

44. The translation “resting place” (so e.g. NRSV) obscures the reference to Gen 2:2–3.

of the Greek translation of Gen 2:2–3 where we are told that God “ceased (κατέπαυσε(ν)) from (all) his works”.⁴⁵

Verses 7–11 function as a strategic marker in the intertextual subplot. These verses signal that the author knows that Genesis 1 is intimately related to Exodus 25–31, 33–40. Just as God’s ultimate rest was achieved in the Tabernacle, so is Wisdom’s.^[87] As Wisdom searches for the seventh day of creation she finds it in the wilderness Tabernacle and at Sinai.

But does this mean that the author is unconcerned with days four, five and six of creation? Does he pass from the third to the seventh days, satisfied that his readers will have been given enough to appreciate the profundity of his sapientization of Israel’s Temple mythology? No he does not. Rather, he has placed vv. 7–11 at this point to signal the importance of relating creation to the sanctuary and, therefore, of reading Genesis 1 in combination with Exod 25–31, 34–40. These verses are preparatory for what follows where he returns to the sequence of creation he had laid down at the beginning of the poem.

l. 24:12–17: Vegetative Abundance (Day 3 Act 4)

In 24:12–17 Sirach indulges in a lavish comparison of Wisdom with the botanic glories of creation. These verses continue the description of creation set out in Gen 1 and correspond to the fourth act of creation when “the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it” (in Gen 1:11–13).

Beyond the obvious sense of Wisdom’s beauty and natural glory which these verses portray, G. T. Sheppard has seen that they are symbolic of the trees of paradise:⁴⁶

Even as Sir. 24:3b offers a word play on the dark cloud, which in Gen. 2:6 provided the first nourishment to a parched earth, Wisdom in Jerusalem thrives luxuriously like the first garden (Gen. 2:9; cf. Ezek 31:2b–9, esp. v. 9) ... The city of Jerusalem has been painted as a wonderland of Wisdom, a restoration of the garden of Eden.⁴⁷

45. The connection is spotted by Perdue (*Wisdom and Creation*, 270). Note the way the LXX uses the same verb in the seventh speech to Moses in Exod 31:17–18.

46. Sheppard has convincingly demonstrated the relevance of a variety of Old Testament texts in Psalmody, prophecy and historiography where Israel is planted and grows (*Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct*, 53–4, 56: see esp. Hos 14:4ff; 58:11; Jer 17:5; Pss 1; 3; 92:12; Song of Songs 4–6).

47. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct*, 52. Cf. also Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 270–1.

That Wisdom might in these verses be comparing herself to the Tree of Life should not surprise us since already that identification was made in Proverbs (Prov 3:18, cf. 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). It is certainly true that Sir 24:12–17 is reminiscent of “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” in Gen 2:9 and this would be a fitting anticipation of the imagery of Gen 2–3 in vv. 25–33.

In drawing on Genesis 2, Sirach is probably consciously interpreting Gen 1:11–13 in the light of the longer description of paradise in Genesis 2. We have seen how in 24:3b the author harmonizes the two creation accounts in Gen 1 and 2–3. In a near contemporary text to this account of creation, the book of Jubilees makes a similar harmonization with respect to the third day of creation. In retelling the days of creation, *Jub.* 2:7 expands Gen 1:11–12 as follows:

On that day he created for them all the seas—each with the places where they collected—all the rivers, and the places where the waters collected in the mountains[88] and on the whole earth; all the reservoirs, all the dew of the earth; the seed that is sown—with each of its kinds—all that sprouts, the fruit trees, the forests, and the garden of Eden (which is) in Eden for enjoyment and for food.⁴⁸

There is no mention of the garden of Eden in Genesis 1, but, quite legitimately, *Jubilees* regards the language of Gen 1:11–12 as so close to that of Gen 2:9, 16–17 that it assumes the former was actually referring in summary fashion to the latter. We find the same hermeneutic in later pseudepigrapha, the rabbis and targumim.⁴⁹ Before *Jubilees* Sirach had already made the same harmonization between Genesis 1 and 2.

So, *Wisdom's display of arboreal luxury expands the statement that the earth put forth “vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it” in Gen 1:11–12 under the inspiration of the paradisaical language of Gen 2.* Sirach thus picks up the creation sequence where he left it in v. 6 with the creation of sea and dry land on the third day. The third day is now complete.

48. Translation follows James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees: Text and Translation* (CSCO 510–11; Scriptores Aethiopicci 87–88; Leuven: Peeters, 1989), vol. 2, 9–10.

49. *2 En.* 30:1; *Gen. Rab.* 15:3; Palestinian Targum to Gen 2:8. See James C. VanderKam, “Genesis 1 and Jubilees 2,” *DSD* (1994), 300–321 (311–12). The tradition which places paradise in the third heaven (*2 En.* 8:1–3; *Apoc. Mos.* 37:5; 40:1; *Apoc. Abr.* 21) is perhaps a reflex of an older reading of Gen 1 in combination with Gen 2 such that paradise is created on the third day.

m. 24:15: The Sacred Oil and the Sacred Incense (Days 4 & 5)

The hymn does not continue to describe the creation of the sun, moon and stars of day four, nor that of the creatures of the sea and the birds of the air on day five. Instead, it switches to those parts of the Tabernacle construction which correspond to these two days. Verse 15a–b describes the ingredients used in the sacred oil (Exod 30:23–24) and v. 15c–d the ingredients of the holy incense (Exod 30:34, 36). The language corresponds precisely to that of the fourth and fifth parts of God’s speech to Moses in Exod 25:10–31:17:⁵⁰

Sirach 24

Exodus 30

15a As cinnamon (κιννάμωμον) and camel’s thorn (ἀσπάλαθος ἄρωμάτων) I gave forth perfume, 15b and as choice myrrh (σμύρνα ἐκλεκτή) I spread my fragrance (εὐωδίαν),

15c as galbanum (χαλβάνη), onycha (ὄνυξ), and stacte (στακτή), 15d and as the smoke of frankincense (λίβανου) in the tent (ἐν σκηνῇ)

22 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: 23 Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh (σμύρνης ἐκλεκτής) five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon (κινναμώμου εὐώδους) half as much, that is, two hundred fifty, and two hundred fifty of aromatic cane (καλάμου εὐώδους),

34 The LORD said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte (στακτήν), and onycha (ὄνυχα), and galbanum (χαλβάνην), sweet spices with pure frankincense (λίβανον) (an equal part of each),

36 ... in the tent of meeting (ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ μαρτυρίου)[89]

The significance for our study of Sirach’s reference to the sacred oil and incense at this point in his retelling of creation cannot be underestimated. Given that he has, thus far, followed closely the order of creation in Gen 1:1–13 the fact that he has now moved to those parts of the Tabernacle which correspond to the fourth and fifth days of creation as good as “proves” his intimate knowledge of the intratextuality between Gen 1 and Exod 25–31.

Thus in two brief bicola which allude to familiar aspects of Israel’s ritual life the author has advanced the sequence of creation by two days. And in doing so he has further bound together creation and the sanctuary’s

50. Sir 24:15b picks up not just Exod 30:34, but also the phrase ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ μαρτυρίου of Exod 34:36 in the closing expression “like the odour of incense in the tent (ἐν σκηνῇ)”.

liturgy. The sacred anointing oil corresponds somehow—it is not clear to us now—to God’s creation of the heavenly bodies. The sacred incense which is composed of the fragrant essences of the natural world corresponds to God’s creation and multiplication of the creatures of the sea and birds of the air.

o. 24:19–22: Wisdom’s Banquet and the Completion of Creation
(Days 6 & 7)

Wisdom’s account of her activities has now proceeded through the first five days of the Priestly account of creation. What happens in the rest of the hymn? Are we given an equivalent to the sixth day of creation in Gen 1:24–31 or the sixth speech to Moses in Exod 31:1–11? In the former, God creates the cattle, creeping things, wild animals and humanity in his image and in the latter Bezalel and Oholiab are given responsibility for the craftsmanship of the Tabernacle and all its appurtenances. On the seventh day God rests and in the seventh speech to Moses (Exod 31:12–17) Moses is to instruct the people regarding the Sabbath. We have already seen how the achievement of Sabbath has been dealt with in summary form in 24:7–8, 11. It may be that, with that behind him, the author did not feel the need to reiterate the point in its proper place in the heptadic subplot. It is difficult to see how any of vv. 19–22 could possibly correspond to Exod 31:1–11. As for the creation of Adam in God’s image, that has received no mention thus far and needs one if creation according to the Genesis 1 model is to be completed.⁵¹

In general, any explicit reference to the sixth and seventh days of creation now becomes opaque. This, we will see, is probably a deliberate literary strategy on the author’s part: he wants us to read on to find the completion of creation in the account of Israel’s heroes and in Israel’s sanctuary in ch. 50. He deliberately leaves loose ends to this hymn, because the it is only the first of a two part recital. Or, to put it in the hymn’s own terms, in vv. 18–22 Wisdom sends out invitations to her banquet. The invitations are not the banquet itself and it is only when the reader actually comes to the banquet—Israel’s sacrificial service in ch. 50—that creation is completed.

Having said that, on close examination, there are several points at which the closing stanza (24:19–22) alludes to themes at the end of the Genesis 1 creation story in combination with elements of the Genesis 2–3 creation account.⁵² There are [90] in fact *three* ways in which the closing

51. Though, of course, this has been dealt with earlier in Sirach, at 17:3–4.

52. Prov 8:32–9:6 has perhaps inspired some of Sir 24:19–22 (see Skehan, “Structures,” 378–9; Gilbert, “L’Éloge de la Sagesse,” 335). Those verses of Proverbs are Wisdom’s summons to listen to her instruction and to come to her banquet.

stanza of the hymn acts as an invitation to return to the pre-lapsarian Edenic lifestyle that Adam had in Gen 1:26–2:25.

(1) *Wisdom's Banquet and the Offer of Immortality.* In v. 19b Wisdom invites mortals to “eat your fill of my produce”. In context this must imply the banquet is composed of the bounties of creation just described in the previous stanza. And because there is described there the bounty of the paradise of Gen 2, Wisdom invites her hearers to partake of the fruit of paradise and the Tree of Life. She therefore invites her hearers to return to the garden, from whence, since the fall, they have been banished.

Now, access to the bounty of paradise has one obvious consequence: the power of ill health, disease, famine, toil in farming, and ultimately death are absent. These maladies are all a consequence of banishment from the garden (Gen 3:16–19). In many and various ways Sirach believes that the wise life produces longevity and health (see 1:12, 20; 3:6; 30:22). Conversely the foolish and wicked life “shortens one's days” (30:24). In Genesis 3:22 eating of the Tree of Life bestows immortality. So, there is at least a hint that here, in Sirach 24:19–22, coming to Wisdom's banquet will mean the transcendence of death. This is perhaps the force of v. 21 “those who eat of me will hunger still, and those who drink of me will thirst still”. The promise of immortality may also be heard in the contrast between Wisdom's banquet and the sweetness of honey. In the ancient world and in the Judaism of this period honey was the food of the gods (or, the angels) and, therefore, of incorruptibility.⁵³

(2) *Wisdom's Banquet and the Freedom from Shame.* This sense of a return to Eden is developed in the final verse. He who obeys Wisdom will not be ashamed (οὐκ αἰσχυνθήεται) (v. 22b). In Genesis 3 the serpent had issued a similar invitation, inviting the woman to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When the woman saw the tree she realized it was not only a “delight to the eyes” but that “it was to be desired to make one wise” (Gen 3:6). She, and Adam, ate of the tree's fruits. They immediately realize that they are naked and they cover themselves with fig leaves for a loincloth (3:7). Previously they “were both naked, and were not ashamed (καὶ οὐκ ἤσχύνοντο)” (2:25), but after eating of this fruit they hide from God in shame (3:8–11).

53. E.g. Plato *Symp.* 203b; Homer *Od.* 5:93; *Sib. Or.* 3:746; 5:282; *Hist. Rech.* 7:3 and see esp. *Jos. Asen.* 16:14–16 where eating honey from the “bees of the paradise of delight (i.e. Eden)” bestows immortality, incorruptibility such that the flesh and bones are given the vitality of “flowers of life” and “cedars of the paradise of delight”.

The hostess Wisdom also urges her hearers to partake of fruit which will make them wise, but her sustenance will have none of the dire consequences of that offered by the serpent.⁵⁴ Does this mean that Wisdom will cover the sage of any nakedness he might otherwise experience? In 6:29–31 the reader has already been told that for those who obey Wisdom “her collar will become a glorious robe. Her yoke is a golden ornament, and her bonds a purple cord” and that the wise man “will wear her like a glorious robe, and put her on like a splendid crown”. As the[91] commentators have noted this clothing sounds like that of Israel’s high priest.⁵⁵ Both 6:29–31 and 24:22b anticipate the description of the high priest Simon, the true Adam, whose glorious garments are those of boasting not shame in ch. 50.

(3) *Wisdom’s Banquet and the Overcoming of the Curse upon Toil?* This summons to return to the life of Eden before the fall is developed in the second half of v. 22. There, Wisdom reassures her guests with the words: “those working in me (ἐν ἐμοί) will not sin (οὐκ ἁμαρτήσουσιν)”. What could this possibly mean? Sirach is not averse to using the language of “working” (ἐργάζομαι) for wise conduct (cf. 27:9), but working *in* Wisdom is odd. It will only be possible to make sense of this language when we have studied the rest of Sirach and its development of ch. 24. In particular, 24:22b looks forward to the Temple liturgy described in ch. 50.

For the moment it is worth considering one possible implication of the language. This may be yet another instance of Wisdom’s invitation for a return to Eden. In Genesis 3:17–19 one of the consequences of man’s rebellion against God is that his work shall be “in toil .. all the days of (his) life” and “by the sweat of (his) face (he) shall eat bread”. Now this does not amount to man’s labour outside the garden being a sin, as such. But it is certainly under a curse and Wisdom may be wishing to reassure her hearers that a return to the garden need not be for only a temporary feasting upon its fruits; she enables a return to the garden which will bring permanent release from the burdensome toil of the sinful life after the fall.

54. For this reading of Sir 24:22a see already M. Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 58.

55. Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, 50–51; Skehan & DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 194–5.

p. Sirach 24:17–22 and Echoes of the Six and Seventh Days of Creation

Rather than simply an allusion to the pre-lapsarian conditions of freedom from the curse on work, the statement that it is possible to work in Wisdom without sinning is best understood as a comment on the Sabbath. Since the Wisdom hymn has hitherto followed the sevenfold order of Genesis 1 and Exodus 25–31 we would expect the hymn to climax with a reference to the Sabbath (Gen 2:2–4 par. Exod 31:12–17). The implication of the statement that one can work in Wisdom without sinning seems to imply Israel's understanding of Sabbath as a time when to work is a sin. But why not simply affirm the Sabbath vision? Why has Sirach introduced this obscure notion of working without sinning? Again, we will need to wait for a proper examination of Sirach 50 before we can make sense of Wisdom's claim in 24:19–22.

Besides a reference here to the Sabbatical climax of creation, the aspects of these verses which invite humanity to return to Eden may also contribute to the completion of the creation described in Genesis 1. To have the followers of Wisdom partaking of the Tree of Life that she offers, without the shame felt by Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit, is to have the image of God restored to its proper place. If, as we have seen in 24:4 and 12–17, Sirach reads Genesis 1 in close conjunction with Genesis 2–3 then it is likely that he would see the restoration of Adam and Eve to their pre-lapsarian life as described in Genesis 2 as synonymous with the (re)creation of humanity in God's image in Gen 1:26–30.[92]

Sirach would be encouraged to make such a move by the fact that the sense of the bounteous provision of food in Genesis 2 is similar to God's provision in Gen 1:29: "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food." God does not invite humanity to a banquet as such, as does Wisdom, but the imagery is nonetheless similar.⁵⁶

q. 24:17–22 and Sacrificial Imagery.

Whilst the sense that in vv. 18–22 creation as prescribed by Genesis 1 has been brought to a completion is muted, there are other elements of this strophe which point in another, tangential, direction. Leo Perdue has recently commented that given the possible allusion to Prov 9:1–6 the images in the

56. For the creation story in Gen 2–3 introduced into the sixth day of creation in Gen 1, see also 2 *En.* 30:15–32:1.

fourth strophe “reflect those of a sacred meal of communion with God and humans”.⁵⁷ Given the strongly cultic interests throughout Sirach, and within our hymn thus far, this is a possibility which merits further exploration.

In v. 17 Wisdom had spoken of herself in terms of the vine and its fruits and these, we might assume, will be part of the spread she will lay on for her guests.⁵⁸ The only other species bearing edible fruits in the third stanza is the “olive tree” (v. 14). Wine and olive oil are two of the essential ingredients of the Israelite sacrificial meal. Indeed, it is striking that in the previous section our author has avoided any mention of foodstuffs *not* consumed in the Temple, such as figs, dates, pomegranates, citrus and other fruits. Furthermore, whilst Wisdom *contrasts* her meal with the sweetness of honey, this foodstuff is in fact banned from the Israelite cult (Lev 2:11), although it is otherwise widely used in the sacred meals of the ancient Near East where it is part of the gods’ stable diet. These are all important hints at the kind of meal those who accept Wisdom’s invitation will receive.

Finally, we should consider the language in v. 20a. There Wisdom proclaims that “the memory/memorial of me is sweeter than honey (τὸ γὰρ μνημόσυνόν μου ὑπὲρ τὸ μέλι γλυκύ)”. The word μνημόσυνόν is frequently given a subjective sense of the act of human remembering and the phrase is variously translated “You will remember me...”,⁵⁹ “Denn meiner zu gedenken ...”,⁶⁰ “Denken an die Weisheit”.⁶¹ The result of this translation is that the meal imagery is given a primarily metaphorical meaning: the meal is not a literal one, but one achieved by reflection upon Wisdom and the kind of instruction compiled by Ben Sira.[93]

However, this cannot be the meaning of the Greek: the neuter τὸ μνημόσυνον normally has an objective, static semantic character: “remembrance,” “memorial” and in this sense “memory”. That is, it does not normally carry the active sense which commentators intuitively feel should be present (“remembering”). The word is a favourite of the Greek translator of Ben Sira’s work,⁶² and, with but one possible exception (41:1), it always

57. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 271.

58. Since the “blood” of the grape (cf. Sir 39:26; 50:15 LXX) could symbolize the blood of the creature (Gen 49:11; 1 Macc 6:34), it is just possible that in that verse the author had in mind the cattle and wild animals of Gen 1:24–25.

59. Skehan & DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 328.

60. Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 42.

61. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel*, 76, who follows M. Z. Segal, *Sefær Ben Sira’ haššalem* (Jerusalem: Mosad Byaliðk [Hebrew] 1959), 149 in appealing to Sirach 41:1 for this translation.

62. It variously translates זכר *and* זכרון in 10:17; 38:23; 41:1; 44:9; 45:1, 9, 11; 46:11; 49:13 and לזכור in the expression εἰς μνημόσυνον in 50:16.

carries the sense of a memorial; something that might result from an act of remembering or something set up for a remembrance (10:17; 23:26; 35:6; 38:11, 23; 39:9; 44:9; 45:1; 45:9, 11, 16; 46:11; 49:1, 13; 50:16).⁶³

It is generally recognized that the description of the adulterous woman at the close of the previous chapter (23:22–27) is set up as an antithetical parallel to the praise of Wisdom in ch. 24. One of the points of contact between what is said of the adulterous woman and lady Wisdom is that there is a difference between the former's accursed *memory* (“τὸ μνημόσυνον αὐτῆς” 23:26) and the blessed memory of Wisdom (23:20). The τὸ μνημόσυνον of the adulterer is clearly an objective, not an active, reality, with the sense, from the previous verse (23:25), that the accursed memory is constituted by a failure to bear children. This strongly suggests that, also, in 24:20 τὸ μνημόσυνόν is a concrete external reality—Wisdom's memorial.

While commentators have struggled to see how the primary sense of τὸ μνημόσυνον could make sense in this context, the thoroughly cultic setting of what has preceded now gives that meaning clarity of purpose in our context: *the memorial of Wisdom is the Israelite cult, since Wisdom's actions in creation (and history) are recorded, rehearsed, and ingrained upon the people's corporate memory, through the structure and drama of the cult.* This is how we are to understand Wisdom taking up residence in the Tabernacle and the Temple state of vv. 8–11. So Wisdom invites us to a meal which is designed to call to mind all that Wisdom has been. In the context of the hymn thus far, this will be a meal which celebrates the work of creation.

Conclusion to Chapter 24

Given the constraints of this paper the rest of ch. 24 need not detain us. In as much as it is concerned with primeval history it draws only upon Genesis 2. And the fact that it is concerned principally with Genesis 2 confirms our contention that the author of this chapter is working systematically through the early chapters of Genesis, beginning with Gen 1.

Sirach 24:1–22 is throughout, a carefully crafted sapiential meditation on the Priestly account of creation, which means, therefore, that it is indebted not simply to Gen 1:1–2:4, but also to the correspondences between the seven-day creation therein and the (P) instructions to Moses for the building of the Tabernacle. But there are signs that this is not a self-contained literary unit. Neither creation, the macro-temple, nor the Temple,

63. It is by no means certain that in 41:1 τὸ μνημόσυνόν should be taken as an act of thinking about death (so NRSV). That translation makes an interpretative judgement, and it could equally well be translated “remembrance” or “memory”.

the microcosm, are really complete. There has been no mention, for example, of the sun, moon and the stars and it is unclear where[94] humanity as God's true image is to be found. Key aspects of the temple-as-microcosm theme, such as the bronze laver's representation of the sea, have not been mentioned. For these we have to read on.

In the mean time, one corollary of our reading of ch. 24 should be highlighted. Until now, commentators have been uncertain as to whether or not Wisdom is in fact a Creator (or co-creator) in Sir 24. There can be no doubt now that, however the passage's author would want to nuance the relationship between Wisdom and the one Creator God, her life story imitates in precise detail that of the Creator. At the same time she is also, quite clearly, a creature (v. 9) who is closely identified with the created order (vv. 13-17).

According to Ben Sira's view of the world "all things come in pairs, one opposite the other, and he has made nothing incomplete" (42:24, cf. 33:15). This would be a fitting comment on the Priestly vision of creation and Tabernacle. It is also a fitting introduction to Sir 50 where we find a finely polished mirror reflecting both the images of Sir 24:3-23 and of those of the Priestly vision of creation and cult.

2. Sirach 50

Sirach 50 has been marginalized in the study of Sirach and it is only recently that its treasures have begun to be unearthed. With the priestly intratextuality between creation and Tabernacle and the rehearsal of this theme in ch. 24 in mind, we are now in a position to decipher the wonders of its literary code.

Whereas for ch. 24 only extant the Greek and other secondary versions (Syriac, Latin) are extant, we are blessed to have a Hebrew text of ch. 50 (the Geniza ms. B). However, this is not entirely a boon since the relationship between that Hebrew and the Greek (and other versions) is far from straightforward. The Hebrew is certainly corrupt at several points, the order of two important verses (2 and 3) is different in the Greek and Hebrew, one verse (v. 15) is completely missing from the Geniza text, the Greek translator may well have had a slightly different Hebrew text before him and, in any case, it differs substantially from the Hebrew in many instances.⁶⁴ Despite

64. For a thorough discussion of the versions and their relationship see Smend's commentary (*Die Weisheit*), and for more recent reflections on the relationship between the Greek and the Hebrew see B. G. Wright, *No Small Difference. Sirach's Relationship to Its Hebrew Parent Text* (SCS 26; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1989).

these differences both the extant Hebrew and the Greek are clearly organized along the lines of the Priestly creation–Tabernacle heptadic structure. This is more pronounced in the Greek text. That, however, may simple be because, whereas we have a Greek version of ch. 24 that stands between the biblical P and Sirach ch. 50, the lack of a Hebrew text of ch. 24 means we perhaps miss some of the meaning and structural significance of the Hebrew of ch. 50.

A full demonstration of our thesis would require a careful examination of both the Hebrew and the Greek texts in their own right. Given the constraints of this essay we limit ourselves to a hastier trek through the text’s landscape drawing on the details of[95] the two versions where they clearly signpost our desired journey.⁶⁵ Accordingly, here is an English translation of the main body of the chapter (vv. 1–21 and the last verse of ch. 49) which attempts to do justice to the salient features of both the Greek and the Hebrew:⁶⁶

49:16 Shem and Seth and Enosh (שׁוֹנִי) were cared for (נִפְקָדוּ),
 but above every living thing is the beauty (תְּפִאֲהָה) of Adam.⁶⁷
 50:1 Greatest of his brothers and the beauty (תְּפִאֲהָה) of his people
 was the priest, Simeon ben Johanan,⁶⁸

Day 2 who in his life undergirded (ὑπέρραψεν) the house
 /in whose generation the house was cared for (נִפְקָדוּ),
 and in his days made firm (ἐστερέωσεν) the sanctuary.

2 And by him was laid the foundation of the
 height (ὕψος) of the double (waters?),
 the high analemma (ὑψηλὸν ἀνάλημμα)
 of the temple enclosure.

Day 3 In whose generation the water–pool (תְּבִיאָה, ἀποδοχεῖον ὑδάτων)
 was dug (חָדַדוּ)/reduced (ἤλαττώθη),
 a bulwark against the sea in its multitude (Heb.)/
 bronze, as the sea in circumference (Gk.).

4 Who took care for his people to preserve them

65. Other issues, such as the historical context of the passage and the use of language and imagery from particular festivals is ably covered in the secondary literature (see esp. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 38–84).

66. The text follows the Greek in vv. 1b–2b, not the Hebrew, which differs substantially.

67. The “beauty” (תְּפִאֲהָה) of Adam here, and of Simon in the next verse, is missing in the Greek.

68. The Greek reads “Simon son of Onias was the high priest”.

- from robbery (Gk. ἀπὸ πτώσεως),
and made his city strong against
the enemy (מִצָּר, Gk. “in siege”).
- Day 4 5 How glorified he was as he gazed forth from tent (בְּהַשְׁגִּיחוּ מִתֵּן לֵ) /in the procession (ἐν περιστροφῇ) of the sanctuary,
and as he went forth from the house of the curtain.
- 6 As a star of light (Gk. “morning star”) from among the clouds,
and the full moon in the days of festival
- 7 As the sun shining resplendently on the palace of the king,
and as a bow which appears (Gk. “shining”)
in the cloud (Gk. “clouds of Glory”).
- 8 As blossom on branches on festival days
(Gk. “flower of roses of first fruits”)
and as a lily by streams (Gk. “a spring”) of waters.
As a shoot of Lebanon on summer days.
- Day 5 9 And as fire of incense (מִבְּנֵי־לֵבָנוֹן, λίβανος)
upon the offering (Gk. “on the censer”),
as a golden vessel, wholly mixed/beaten (ὄλοσφύρητον),
which is overlaid (Gk. κεκοσμημένον, “ornamented”)
on delightful (Gk. “precious”) stones.
- 10 As a luxuriant olive full of berries,
and as a Cypress exalted in the clouds (Gk.)
(Heb. “as an oil tree laden with branches”).
- Day 6 11 When he wrapped himself (בַּעֲטוּתוֹ)
in the garment of Glory (בְּגָדֵי כְבוֹד, στολὴν δόξης),[96]
as he clothed himself with garments of beauty (בְּגָדֵי הַפְּאִרָה)
/perfection of boasting (συντέλειαν καυχήματος),
When he went up to the altar there was majesty,
And he made glorious (הֵרָר, ἔδοξασεν)
the court of the sanctuary.
- 12 When he received the portions
from his brothers’ (Heb., Gk. “the priests”) hands,
as he stood over the arranged pieces
(Gk. “he was standing by the hearth of the altar”),
around him was the crown (עֲטֻרָה) of his
sons (Heb., Gk. “his brothers”),
As shoot(s) of cedar trees in Lebanon,
and as willows of the brook (Gk. “as trunks
of palm trees”) they surrounded him.
- 13 All the sons of Aaron in their glory (בְּכְבוֹדָם)

and the fire offerings of the LORD in their hands (בִּידָם)
before the whole congregation of Israel.

- 14 Until he finished ministering at the altar (עַד כְּלֹחֵת לְשֵׁרֶת מִזְבֵּחַ),
Gk. “and the perfection [συντέλειαν] ...”
And set in order (וַיִּסְדֵּר, κοσμήσαι)
the arrangements (מַעֲרָכוֹת) of the Most High.
- 15 (missing in the Heb.) He stretched out his hand to the libation cup,
And poured out of the blood of the grape,
At the foundations of the altar he poured out
A sweet-smelling savour to the Most High, the King of all.
- 16 Then the sons of Aaron, the priests, sounded forth
on trumpets of turned metal-work:
So they sounded and made heard the glorious noise,
To make remembrance (לְהִזְכִּיר, εἰς μνημόσυνον) before the Most High.
- 17 All flesh (Heb. כָּל בָּשָׂר, Gk. “all the people”) hastened together
and fell on their faces, to the ground,
To worship before Most High,
before the Holy One of Israel
(Gk. “their LORD, the almighty, God Most High”).
- 18 And the singers gave their voice
and at the sound they set in order his lamp (וַיִּסְדְּרוּ)
/Sweet (ἔγλυκάνθη) was the melody (μέλος)
(made) with the greatest sound.
- 19 And all the people of the earth (כָּל עַם הָאָרֶץ) gave a ringing shout
in prayer before the Merciful One,
Until the cosmos of the LORD was completed
(ἕως συντελεσθῆ κόσμος κυρίου)
and they completed (ἔτελείωσαν) his service/
Until he finished ministering
at the altar (עַד כְּלֹחֵת לְשֵׁרֶת מִזְבֵּחַ).
- 20 Then he went down and raised his hands
Over all the congregation of Israel,
And the blessing of the LORD was on his lips
And in the Name of the LORD he beautified himself
(וַיִּבְשֵׁם יְיָ חַתְפָּאָר) /he boasted (καυχήσασθαι)
- 21 and they fell down in worship again a second time,
To receive a blessing from him (מִפְּנֵי)
from the Most High (παρὰ ὑψίστου).

a. The Praise of Simon and the Praise of Wisdom

Hayward has highlighted the way the vegetative portrayal of Wisdom in ch. 24 is picked up in the portrayal of the high priest Simon in the central verses of the main body of ch. 50. But he has only scratched the surface of a much more complex set of parallels between the two chapters.

The first indication that Ben Sira wishes us to read ch. 50 as a mirror image of ch. 24 lies in the Hebrew of the very first line. In the Hebrew the praise of Simon begins^[97] by acclaiming Simon as “the beauty (תפארת) of his people.” Simon’s beauty picks up the beauty of Adam in the last verse of the previous chapter.⁶⁹ This not only makes the high priest the true, or second, Adam, it also emphasizes a word with which the Hebrew of ch. 24 had probably begun. In Sir 24:1–2 Wisdom twice proclaims that she will boast (καυχήσεται). It is probable that behind the Greek there stood the root פא.ר.⁷⁰ Wisdom praises herself, according to 24:1–2, in the midst of a cultic assembly and the whole panoply of the creation which manifests something of her own divine presence. Similarly, Simon is praised among his brothers and his people (50:1a, cf. vv. 12–21) at whose head he stands as the supreme representative of the order of the cosmos which they all enact.

Although in P the high priest recapitulates God’s original creation of light in the tending of the menorah, and although in Sir 24:3–4 Wisdom variously fulfills the responsibilities for the first day of creation, the retelling of creation in Sirach 50 passes over both Gen 1:1–5 and Exod 25:1–30:10, and all the possible cosmogonic material associated with the first seventh of the creative process. In fact the canonical order of creation over the first two days is, at first, only hesitantly followed in the Hebrew text. In the Greek it begins in earnest with the creation of the upper and lower realms on the second day.

*b. 50:1b–2b: Simon Recapitulates God’s Creation of the Firmament
(Day 2)*

After introducing the high priest Simon, both the Greek and Hebrew then speak of his upkeep and strengthening of the Temple (Gk. vv. 1b–2b; Heb. vv. 1c, 3?⁷¹). Already in the Hebrew Bible the Temple is thought to span the

69. See Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 44–47.

70. Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 216; Skehan, “Structures,” 374. The Syriac has התקיר and התהלל which Smend thinks translated an original התפאר and התהלל.

71. The order of the Hebrew of vv. 2–3 is the reverse of that in the Greek. This means that the second mention of the Temple building works comes after the description of

vertical distance of the cosmos. Psalm 78:69 says God “built his sanctuary like the high heavens, in⁷² the earth, which he has founded forever”. This is a brief statement of a widely assumed fact: that the Temple, as the cosmic mountain, covers the expanse between the upper and the lower realms.⁷³

In the priestly cosmogony this vertical distance is the work of God on the second day of creation made possible by the separation of the upper and lower waters and the creation of a firmament betwixt the two. The grammar of ancient temple symbolism demands that the Temple should somehow correspond to this firmament and the[98] distance it creates. This, indeed, is what we find in late biblical psalmody. In the opening verse of Psalm 150 there is a call to

Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary
 (שִׁבְחֵהוּ, ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ);
 praise him in his mighty firmament
 (שִׁבְחֵהוּ, ἐν στερεώματι δυνάμεως)!

In what follows there is no suggestion that this praise is to be offered in an utterly supernal world and, so, the we are perhaps meant to conclude that, as the place of praise, the sanctuary “is” (in some sense) the firmament, the שִׁבְחֵהוּ of Genesis 1:6–8. This understanding of the Temple is probably in view in the original Hebrew of Ben Sira 50:1b and it was certainly the way Ben Sira’s grandson understood Simon’s work on the Temple.⁷⁴

In numerous respects the Greek speaks for this identification. Twice we are told of the “height” (ὑψός/ὑψηλόν) of the Temple and yet Simon is also responsible for laying *foundations* (ἐθεμελιώθη). The vertical orientation and attention to the upper and lower limits of the cosmos is as obvious here as it was for Wisdom’s traversing the heaven above and the abyss below in 24:5. Simon, we are told, ὑπέρραψεν the house. The word ὑποράπτω

the water pool. This may be because in the Hebrew v. 3 is meant to function as an equivalent of the creation of the dry land, from which the sea is separated in Gen 1:9–10.

72. Following the LXX and Syriac against the MT (יָרַמַם) (cf. Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House. Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings* (JSOTS 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 335–7).

73. For Mesopotamian parallels see B. Janowski, “Tempel und Schöpfung. Schöpfungstheologische Aspekte der priesterschriftlichen Heiligtumskonzeption,” in *Schöpfung und Neuschöpfung* (JBTh 5; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990), 37–70 (39–41); Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House*, 335–7.

74. See Adam S. van der Woude, “Zion as Primeval Stone in Zechariah 3 and 4,” in W. Claassen (eds.), *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F.C. Fensham* (JSOTS 48; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 237–248 (243) for the “stone of division” in Zech 4:10 as a description of Zion as that which separates the upper and the lower.

means to “stitch *underneath*”.⁷⁵ Simon did not simply “repair” the Temple (so NRSV), he maintained its demarcation of the lowest cosmic boundary.

The Septuagint translated שׁרַר as τὸ στερέωμα as Ben Sirā’s grandson probably knew when he chose to say that Simon made firm (ἔστερέωσε) the sanctuary in v. 1. The verb, in fact, is used several times in the Greek Bible to describe God’s stretching out of the heavens and the earth (Pss 32:6; 135:6; 92:1; Isa 42:5; 44:24; 45:12).

That the creation of both the upper and the lower heavens is in the translator’s mind might explain the otherwise puzzling presence of the word διπλῆς (some mss. διπλοῦν) after ὕψος (“... the height of the double ...”):⁷⁶ the construction ascribed to Simon has the double aspect of creation described in Gen 1:6–8 which has been alluded to already in 24:5. In this case the noun qualified by the adjective διπλῆς is deliberately unexpressed because the reader is meant to think of the two waters of Gen 1:6–7—the waters above and the waters below—the old Canaanite “double deep” echoed in Ps 42:7.⁷⁷ Otherwise the Greek is, frankly, “senseless.”⁷⁸

Lastly, there is one other highly suggestive word which the Greek uses at this point. According to Sir 50:2b the Greek says that Simon was responsible for the high ἀνάλημμα of the Temple enclosure. What is an ἀνάλημμα? This is normally translated “fortification,” “retaining walls” or “underwork” and, therefore, given a[99] purely architectural sense. Certainly, this meaning is attested elsewhere and such a sense fits both the context here and that of its one other occurrence in the Septuagint—the account of Hezekiah’s fortifications in 2 Chr 32:5.⁷⁹

Whilst some architectural construction is undoubtedly in view the choice of word here might, also, be a deliberate attempt to connect the design of the Temple to the firmament or the construction of the Temple as a model of the cosmos. The word ἀνάλημμα is used in Josephus’ version of Berossos’ account of the building of the so-called hanging gardens of Babylon.⁸⁰

75. LSJ 1893. It is otherwise used of the repairing of the soles of shoes.

76. Some (e.g. Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 480 who is followed by J. Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach* (Septuaginta 12/2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), 357) correct to ἀὐλῆς, for which there is no manuscript attestation.

77. The feminine διπλῆς will therefore have the ἀβύσσων of 24:5 in mind.

78. So Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 480.

79. Cf., e.g. Dionysius Halicarnassus *Ant.* 3:69:1; 4:59:1; Diodorus Siculus *Hist.* 17:71:4; 20:36:2.

80. There are historical problems in this tradition which have been resolved by Stephanie Dalley, “Nineveh, Babylon and the Hanging Gardens: Cuneiform and Classical Sources Reconciled,” *Iraq* 56 (1994), 45–58. Although there are doubts about the

Within this palace he erected high stone terraces (ἀνάλημματα λίθινα ὑψηλά) and achieving the appearance of *the image of the mountains* (ὁμοιοτάτην τοῖς ὄρεσι), planting all manner of trees, he (i.e. Nebuchadnezzar) constructed and furnished the so-called hanging garden.⁸¹

In this text ἀνάλημμα may be simply a civil engineering term. However, its context is important. The ἀνάλημματα are constructed to make a model, an image, of the mountains. This Greek description of palace building corresponds exactly to the accounts in Akkadian texts themselves, according to which royal palaces and temple complexes included models of the cosmic mountains; mountains which were believed to span the distance from the firmament above to the abyss below, upon which their was a garden paradise and from which life-giving streams of water flowed to the rest of creation.⁸²

By at least the first century B.C. an ἀνάλημμα has attained a certain technical sense as a model or map of the cosmos, particularly the firmament. The first century B.C. Roman author Vitruvius describes at some length the construction, with a compass and rule, of the geometric pattern of the celestial events for any city on a given latitude by which the movements of the sun in the firmament may be followed for the keeping of time by, for example, a sun dial.⁸³ Such a geometric pattern he calls an *analemma*, acknowledging the genius of the orient in the development of such technology, whilst borrowing what is obviously an older Greek word in his Latin work dedicated to Emperor Octavian. His discussion of sundials and clocks in Book 9 is indebted to the Chaldeans in general and Berossos in [100] particular (see esp. 9:6; 9:8:1). A prominent feature of his discussion of the cosmos in this section is also the division of the firmament into twelve sections for the twelve signs of the Zodiac. There is clearly a semantic transition between the use of the word ἀνάλημμα in Berossos (as cited by Josephus) and Vitruvius' *analemma*, but both agree that the word, in its oriental context, pertained to the mapping or modeling of the cosmos.

reliability of Josephus' version of Berossos (see Dalley's article, 55) these do not pertain to the part of his account with which we are concerned here.

81. Extant in Josephus *Ant.* 10:226 = *C. Ap.* 1:141.

82. See, in particular, the recent discussion by L. E. Stager, "Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden," *Eretz-Israel* 26 (1999), 183–194 and cf. E. Lipiński, "Garden of Abundance, Image of Lebanon," *ZAW* 85 (1973), 358–59.

83. Vitruvius *On Architecture* 9:1:1; 9:7:1; 9:8:1; 9:8:8; 9:9:1. (For a recent translation with diagrammatic commentary see I. D. Rowland, T. N. Howe and M. J. Dewar, *Vitruvius: Ten Books on Architecture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999)). For later authors using the word in the same way see LSJ Supp. *ad loc.*

That the Greek of Sir 50:2 has chosen a word which can refer not only to fortifications but also to a model of the firmament, would fit well with 24:5, the parallel to 50:1cd–2b, where the Greek translator says that Wisdom has “compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss”.⁸⁴ The language in the first half of that verse is already architectural and would very well describe the act of making one of Vitruvius’ *analemmas*. This would also fit with other indications from literature of the period that visions of the ideal temple (Ezek 40–48; 11QT 3–13, 30–45), with its carefully designed geometry, were designed to correspond to the firmament, and its meteorological and astrological configuration.⁸⁵ With the twelve gates of the Temple (Ezek 48:30–35; 11QT 39:11–42:17) we should compare those texts in the Enoch tradition which give twelve gates, three at each compass direction, for the winds and diverse weathers (1 Enoch 33–36; 76).⁸⁶ Margaret Barker has argued that the measurements of the future Temple in the Temple Scroll create dimensions which allow a measurement of the sun’s exact position of rising (and setting) at the two equinoxes and summer and winter solstice.⁸⁷

c. 50:3–4: Simon’s Creation of the Land the Sea (Day 3)

In both the Hebrew and the Greek, vv. 3–4 (Heb. vv. 2, 4) are a straightforward recapitulation of Gen 1:9–10; Exod 30:17–21 and Sir 24:6 all of which relate the third act of creation: the making of the sea. Simon makes a “water-pool (תּוֹבָאֵן)” or a “reservoir (ἀποδοχείον)” which is explicitly identified with the sea (יָם, ὡς εἰς θαλάσσης). This man-made reservoir is to the sea over which Wisdom holds sway in ch. 24 (24:6a), what the laver of Exod 30:17–21 is to the sea of Gen 1:9–10. Indeed, whilst some Greek texts say in v. 3b that this was a cistern (λάκκος) others make explicit the connection with the bronze laver of the Tabernacle—“You shall make a bronze (χαλκοῦν) basin with a bronze (χαλκῆν) stand for washing,”

84. For the importance of astronomical and sundial technology in the priestly circles of the Second Temple period see now U. Gleßner and M. Albani, “An Astronomical Measuring Instrument From Qumran,” in D. W. Parry and E. Ulrich (eds.), *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Technological Innovations, New Texts, and Reformulated Issues* (STDJ 30; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 407–442, and the literature cited therein.

85. See Ben Zion Wacholder, *The Dawn of Qumran* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1983), 35–40.

86. M. Barker, “The Temple Measurements and the Solar Calendar,” in G. J. Brooke (eds.), *Temple Scroll Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 62–66 (65).

87. *Ibid.*

(Exod 18:18, cf. 1 Chr 18:8)—when they say that Simon’s water-pool was also bronze (χαλκός).[101]

The Greek further makes the connection with the third day of creation through its use of the expression ἄποδοχείον ὑδάτων.⁸⁸ This has already been used in 39:17b where the creation of the sea and the land by the divine word in Genesis 1 is interpreted in terms of the God’s parting of the Red Sea in Exod 15:8:

... the waters stood in a heap, and the reservoirs of the waters
(ἄποδοχεία ὑδάτων, Heb. תַּבִּיאוֹת) at the word of his mouth.

We have seen how in Sir 24:6 the separation of land and sea is viewed as one part of a larger *Chaoskampf* complex. In both the Hebrew and Greek of 50:3 the divine warrior’s expression of power is reflected in Simon’s action. All extant Greek texts of v. 3a say that in Simon’s day the reservoir of the waters ἠλαττώθη, “was reduced, lowered”. This is universally emended to ἐλατομήθη “cut out, hew” which would be the expected translation of the Hebrew בָּרַב.⁸⁹ Though this emendation seems at first sight obvious it may not, however, be entirely warranted or necessary. Whilst our translator uses the verb ἐλαττώω in fifteen other instances (16:23; 18:6; 19:23; 22:3; 23:10; 31:27, 30; 32:24; 39:18; 41:2; 42:21; 47:23) he never once uses the verb λατομέω. The odd claim—in the midst of a recital of his other glorious deeds—that Simon “reduced” the reservoir may actually be meant as a deliberate evocation of God’s fourth creative act in Genesis. In Genesis 1:9 God says, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” This is clearly an act by which the water’s coverage of the earth *is reduced*.⁹⁰ Over the language of Gen 1:9 the translator would have heard passages such as Job 38:8–11 where God imprisons the sea, just as Marduk had imprisoned Tiamat’s helpers (*Enuma Elish* 4:110–120), and Ps 33[2]:7 where God “gathered the waters of the sea as a heap (כַּנֶּה)” (or, LXX “as a bottle (ὡς ἄσκόν)”).

Although the Hebrew verb בָּרַב, “dig,” in his *Vorlage* might have suggested the verb λατομέω, in other respects the Hebrew warrants a translation which evokes the authority of the divine warrior. The second half of the Hebrew Geniza manuscript B of this verse says the water-pool was a אֲשִׁיחַ בַּם בַּהֲמוֹנוֹ. The second word is rightly emended by the commentators

88. Some MSS have ἄποδοχεία ὑδάτων which Hayward (*Jewish Temple*, 75, 77) rightly compares with the ὑποδοχείων of *Let. Arist.* 89. But given the Greek translator’s fondness for ἄποδοχείον (1:17, 39:17) it is certainly the more likely original.

89. E.g. Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 480 and Ziegler, *Sapientia Iesu Filii Sirach*, *ad loc.*

90. Cf. 4 Ezra 6:42 where the waters on the third day are gathered together to a seventh part of their coverage of the earth

to recover a reference to the sea “ים.”⁹¹ The half-verse is then translated “the reservoir in its immensity like the sea (בים),”⁹² or “the pool with a vastness like the sea’s”⁹³

But this translation overlooks the force of the language. An אשיה is, strictly speaking, not a reservoir, but a foundation, or a bulwark, a defense against an enemy (Jer 50:15; cf. Ezra 4:12; 5:16; 6:3). This suggests defense against a hostile, chaotic sea, as does the word הַיָּם which is many times used for the roaring of the [102] seas (Isa 17:12; Jer 10:13; 51:16, 42; Ps 65:8; cf. Isa 51:15; Jer 6:23; 31:35; 50:42).⁹⁴ Indeed, this sense of the word אשיה accords perfectly with its use in the Aramaic *Targum of Job* at Qumran (11QtgJob 30:3) where God’s account of the creation of the earth in Job 38:6–8 is rendered

Or upon what are its foundations (אשיה) held? Or who placed its boundary stone (אבן חזיתה) when the stars of the morning shone together? ... Did you hold back the sea (ימא) with doors when it broke forth from the bosom of the abyss.⁹⁵

The form אושים is used consistently in the *Hodayot* of foundations built to withstand the elemental onslaught of chaos or the divine warrior (1QH^a 11:13, 30, 35 [3:13, 30, 35]; 7:4, 9 [15:4, 9]). The Hebrew may best be read, therefore, אשיה בים בהמונו—with the simple recovery of its missing *yod*—and translated: “a bulwark *against* the sea in its tumult”⁹⁶

In those biblical texts which refer to the roar of the sea the point is frequently made that this tumult is like that of the nations, the enemies of God’s people. We have already seen how 24:6 reflects the regular combination of the divine warrior’s victory over the forces of chaos with his defeat of the enemies of his people. This too is spelt out in ch. 50 where the very next verse describes Simon’s fortification of Jerusalem against the attacks of the enemy (cf. Josephus *Ant.* 12:138–144). Whilst the water-pool symbolizes

91. Wright, *No Small Difference*, 305 n. 218; Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 44.

92. Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 42. .

93. Skehan & DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 456.

94. The Greek reference to the circumference, “περίμετρον,” of Simon’s water pool may then reflect the sensitivity of the translator to the bounded nature of the creative process already stated in the Hebrew אשיה and otherwise present in such older passages as Job 26:10: “He has described a circle on the face of the waters” and Prov 8:27 “... he drew a circle on the face of the deep”.

95. Is the אבן חזיתה, literally a “cutting stone” (F. García Martínez, E. J. C. Tigchelaar and A. S. Van Der Woude, *Qumran Cave 11* [DJD], 23; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998], 150), the stone which divides between the upper and lower waters (cf. Zech 4:10)?

96. For Sirach’s familiarity with these aspects of the *Chaoskampf* see 39:17, 28–29, 31; 43:23–26

the sea, the rest of the city is like the dry land against which the power of the enemy, whether the nations or the watery chaos and flood, cannot venture.

That Simon should act as the Creator fulfilling the role of the divine warrior's restraint of the chaotic waters should not surprise us. In this, as in other respects, the high priest Simon is taking over the older responsibilities of Israel's king.⁹⁷ Already in the Hebrew text of Sir 45:7–8 Aaron has been described as the divine warrior—the “horned wild ox” of Num 23:22 & 24:8—dressed in the “Glory and strength” of the LORD (Pss 29:1 & 97:6).⁹⁸ As I have argued elsewhere, in the [103] near contemporary book of Daniel it is the eschatological high priest—the cloud riding “one like a son of man”—who is the Baal-like beneficiary of the judgement of the Ancient of Days over the beasts who arise from the *Chaosmeer*.⁹⁹

d. 50:5–7: Simon Embodies the Sun, the Moon and the Stars (Day 4)

With the Priestly order of creation now firmly established, an account of Simon's duties in accordance with the order of events in Genesis 1 proceeds apace in the following verses.¹⁰⁰ Verses 6–7 are obviously a fulfillment of the creation of the sun, the moon and the stars on the fourth day of creation (Gen 1:14–19). We have seen how in ch. 24 the creation of the fourth day is only partly fulfilled and where we expected some relationship between Wisdom and the sun, moon and stars we were told instead of the anointing oil. Within the service in the Temple that lacuna is now filled.

In Sir 24:1–6 Wisdom acts as (co-)Creator, but thereafter she is identified with created reality itself. A similar (“incarnational”?) shift from

97. For Israel's king as divine warrior see esp. Ps 89:26 [Eng. v. 25] and Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle Vol. I. Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2* (VTSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 102–108; N. Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition* (UBL 13; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996), 127–194, 301–2 & “Degrees of Divinity: some mythical and ritual aspects of West Semitic kingship,” *UF* 31 (1999) 853–887. For the responsibilities and privileges of kingship taken up by the priesthood in Sir 50 see Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 51.

98. See Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 66–67; C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (STDJ 42; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 81–83.

99. See my “The High Priest as Divine Mediator in the Hebrew Bible: Dan 7:13 as a Test Case,” in *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 161–193, where I also lay out some of the evidence that Aaron's identity as the divine warrior is fundamental to material in Exod 28–29.

100. The creation of vegetation (Gen 1:10–12) is only slightly out of order, coming after the sun, moon, and stars in 50:8, 10, 12.

activity as Creator to identification with creation takes place with the transition from ch. 50 vv. 1–4 to v. 5ff. In verses 1–4 Simon in effect separates the upper and lower waters and re-enacts the division of sea and land in his “civil” duties, the transition in v. 5 to his activity in the cult marks a change in his stance from that of Creator to his becoming one with creation.

Simon’s representation of the heavenly bodies begins in v. 5. There the Hebrew says that Simon “gazed forth from the tent (הַשְּׁנִיחַ מֵאֹהֶל)”. The background here is the ancient view of the procession of the heavenly bodies. We should hear, for example, allusion to Ps 19:4b–6 where God

4b ... has set a *tent* (לִּטְא) for the sun in the heavens,
 5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
 and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
 6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
 and its circuit to the end of them;
 and nothing is hid from its heat.

The movement of the high priest in the sanctuary thus corresponds to the rising of sun on its course through the firmament.

The Greek translator was well aware of this symbolism when he decided to paraphrase the Hebrew of v. 5 with the words “how glorified (was Simon) in the procession (ἐν περιστροφῇ) of the sanctuary”. Again English translations have not done justice to the language. By the second century B.C. the word *περιστροφή* was primarily used to refer to the procession of the heavenly bodies, the stars, the sun, as depicted in Ps 19:4–6, or of the cosmos itself.¹⁰¹ In addition to the Greek translator’s choice of the word *ἀνάλημμα* in v. 2b, this is another instance of technical[104] astronomical terminology attesting to the profound cosmological significance of the Temple. Whereas verse 2 describes Simon’s maintenance of the firmament—the *analemma*, in verse 5 he actualises the movement of the heavenly bodies—the *peristrophe*—within that firmament.¹⁰²

The addition of the rainbow to the sun, moon and stars of Gen 1:14–19 serves, as we have seen, the author’s desire to identify Simon with God’s own anthropomorphic Glory (as described in Ezek 1). And the combination of sun, moon, stars and rainbow was evidently firmly established in Ben Sira’s mind as 43:1–12 shows. But the presence of the rainbow in the Priestly vision of the fourth day’s creation is also evident in the Septuagint’s translation of

101. LSJ 1389.

102. Though the majority reading has *λαοῦ* in v. 5a some MSS have *νοῦ*. The latter fits the Hebrew. However, whether the procession is that of the people, i.e. the heavenly bodies, or the sanctuary itself, i.e. the firmament, reflects an ambiguity in the meaning of the word *περιστροφή* itself.

Exod 30:24 (in the fourth speech to Moses). There, in the instructions for the making of the anointing oil, for the Hebrew's קדחה ("cassia") the Greek has instead ἴρις. The context demands a reference to a plant, as an ingredient in the oil and, accordingly, ἴρις can be taken to refer to the flower of the same name (Iris). However, ἴρις is first and foremost the Greek word for the rainbow. The Septuagint, like the author of Ben Sira 50, perhaps thought that the rainbow belongs with the sun, moon and stars in the fourth day's creative activities.

Lastly, we should note that Simon's cosmic function here takes up that of the king in an earlier period. In 2 Sam 23:4 David says Israel's earthly ruler "is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land".¹⁰³

e. 50:9: Simon as the Sacred Incense (Day 5)

On the fifth day of creation God makes the creatures that swarm in the sea and the birds of the sky. Given that all creatures that swarm, whether birds, creatures of the earth or in the sea, are regarded as unclean in Leviticus (11:10, 29–31, 41–46), it is not altogether surprising that the account of Simon's ministry in the Temple makes no explicit reference to the creatures of the fifth day.

For the fifth day of creation Ben Sira returns instead to the subject of the fifth speech to Moses in Exod 30:34–38, the sacred incense, which he has already included in Wisdom's creation recital in 24:15. There Wisdom was compared to the ingredients of sacred incense, now Simon has the very same honour (50:9a cf. Jer 11:16; Pss 52:10; 92:12–14; Hos 14:6–7).¹⁰⁴[105]

The rest of v. 9 focuses on Simon's gold and jewel studded garments. For the Greek translator here too the thought is probably for the sacred

103. The linking of the procession of the sun through the firmament with the activity of the high priest in the Temple is perhaps also reflected in the *Temple Scroll's* identification of the central gate of the Eastern face of the Temple, through which the rising sun can be seen at the summer solstice, with the tribe of Levi (11QT 39:12; 40:14–15). This identification of Levi with the rising sun as it comes up on the Eastern horizon over the Mount of Olives is clearly assumed in *T. Naph.* 5:1–4

104. What role the vegetative language of vv. 8–10 has in the overall creation structure is not immediately clear. It obviously links Simon to Wisdom in ch. 24 where we have seen it fulfills the fourth act of creation in Gen 1:9–11. In ch. 24 the emphasis was on the *growth* of the different plants, here it is on their coming to *flower and fruition*. The thought is perhaps for the right manifestation of the life-force inherent in the two spheres of creation described on the fifth day. The vegetation of vv. 8 and 10 is the product of the water and moisture from below (v. 8b) which, with the help of the energy of the summer sun in the firmament above (especially v. 8c), is converted to olives (v. 10).

incense.¹⁰⁵ The Greek says that Simon is like a golden vessel wholly beaten (ὄλοσφύρητον). This is presumably his translation of the Hebrew of Exod 39:3 which says that for Aaron's garments sheets of gold were "hammered out (אֲרָרָה) (and cut into threads)". However, the word ὄλοσφύρητον is not used by the LXX at that point and it is perhaps chosen by Sirach because it has its own associations with the incense. The word ὄλοσφύρητον is a biblical *hapax legomenon*, and is only rarely attested elsewhere.¹⁰⁶ In metallurgical terms its meaning is "beaten solid," as opposed to a metal which is "cast" in a mold. The compound form is related to the verbs "φύρω" and "φύραω" both of which mean, essentially, the mixing together of something dry and something solid. The latter form is used in the LXX of the kneading of dough (e.g. Gen 18:6; Exod 29:2, 40; Lev2:4, 5). The sense then seems to be that metal that is ὄλοσφύρητον is "kneaded".

Now it can hardly be a coincidence that both the senses of "mixing" and "beating" that combine to make the action of kneading appear in the Priestly instructions for the making of the holy incense. In Exod 30:35–36 Moses is told to

make an incense blended as by the perfumer, mixed (LXX: μεμιγμένον, cf. Heb. מִמְּנֵהוּ), pure and holy; and you shall beat some of it into powder (תִּרְפֹּשׂ) ...

Where the Hebrew thought incense should be "salted," the Septuagint thought the principal idea here was that of mixing. The Hebrew verb רָפַשׂ is elsewhere used with precisely the same sense of the beating of solid substances—either to break them down (Job 14:19, cf. Isa 40:15; 45:8; Ps 18:42) or to make them firm like molten metal (Job 37:18, cf. רָפַשׂ, "sky")—which is inherent in the Greek word ὄλοσφύρητον. So, perhaps, the Greek translator says that Simon is like a golden vessel which is ὄλοσφύρητον because as such he has undergone the same method of manufacture as the sacred incense.

*f. 50:11–13 Simon the Image of God ruling over every living creature
(Day 6)*

Verses 11–13 are a relatively distinct literary unit. Whereas in vv. 5–10 Simon is imagined coming out of the sanctuary, in vv. 11–13 he is described serving at the altar surrounded by his fellow priests. There are several reasons to

105. The Hebrew is damaged at v. 9b.

106. LSJ 1218. It is perhaps the translator's own rendering of the verb רָפַשׂ in Exod 39:3.

think that Ben Sira wants us to imagine here the true image of God ruling over every living creature which he was given on the sixth day of creation.

In vv. 11a–b Simon puts on his priestly clothing. He wears the garment(s) of Glory. Given the identification of Simon with the Glory of God of Ezek 1:26–28 in v. 7, [106] v. 11a–b describes the investiture of the divine image.¹⁰⁷ The Hebrew of ch. 50 has already identified Simon with Adam by aligning each with the beauty (תפארת) of the other (49:16–50:1). Once again the Hebrew reminds the reader that the high priest’s garments are those of the pre-lapsarian Adam when it says he clothes himself with the “garments of beauty (תפארת)”.

The language in v. 11 harks back to 45:7–8 where similar language has been used of Aaron:¹⁰⁸

7 ... and he gave to him majesty (הודר) and he (Aaron) ministered to him in his (God’s) Glory (וישרתהו בכבודו) and He girded him with the horns of a wild ox (ויאזרהו בהרעפות ראם) and clothed him with bells

7 ... He blessed him with stateliness (ἐν εὐκοσμίᾳ), and girded him in a glorious robe (περιέζωσεν αὐτὸν περιστολῆν δόξης).

8 He clothed him with the perfect beauty (כליל תפארת) and beautified him (ויפארהו) with Glory and strength (ויכבוד ועוז), the breeches, tunic and mantle,

8 He clothed him in the perfection of boasting (συντέλειαν καυχήματος), and strengthened him with the vessels of might (σκεύεσιν ἰσχύος), the linen under-garments, the long robe, and the ephod.

The Hebrew of 45:8 ascribes to Aaron what Israel’s Psalmody gives to the LORD, the Creator (cf. Pss 29:1 & 97:6). Whilst 50:11 picks up this earlier vignette of the garments of glory and beauty (or “boasting”), it adds another biblical text to the picture. The Hebrew of 50:11—“when he wrapped himself (בעטתהו)” —recalls Ps 104:1–2 where the God who stretches out the heavens is “clothed with honour and majesty (הודר והדר), wrapped with light (עשה אור) as a garment”.¹⁰⁹ Dressed in God’s garments, the garments of Glory, Simon

107. The dressing of the statue of a god with its golden, jewel bedecked garments is probably in view here. On this see A. L. Oppenheim, “The Golden Garments of the Gods,” *ANES* 8 (1949), 172–193 and Fletcher-Louis, “The Worship of Divine Humanity”.

108. The divergences between the Greek and Hebrew at 45:7–8 are notoriously difficult. See Wright, *No Small Difference*, 171–3 and Hayward, *Jewish Temple*, 65–6 for discussion.

109. Cf. also Isa 59:17. The allusion to Ps 104:2 is picked up in some of the Greek manuscripts of Sir 50:11 where ἐν τῷ ἀναβάλλειν picks up the ἀναβαλλόμενος

is his veritable image. Unlike the post-lapsarian Adam he has no shame, because his nakedness is covered with “the perfection of boasting” (Gk., cf. 24:22a). He wears the garments which only true obedience to Wisdom can provide (6:29–31 & 24:22a).

In Genesis 1:28–30 God gives to Adam *dominion* over every living thing. At that time and then later (Gen 9:1–5) the true humanity is also given to eat of the whole of (the clean) creation; both vegetation and animals. In Sirach 50:12–13 the true Adam receives again sacrificial offerings at the LORD’s own table, the altar. Simon stands with the power of life and death over the same offerings, his fellow priests symbolizing “the crown” of his divine kingship (v. 12bc). Adam was commanded to *multiply* and *fill* creation as a manifestation of God’s own divine kingship (Gen 1:28, cf. Isa 6:3). The manifestation of the image in Israel’s chief priest means the cultic microcosm, the “court of the sanctuary,” is now *filled* with honour (הדר) or glory (δόξα) (v. 11d) and the Glory of the chief priest is now extended and *multiplied* to all his sons (v. 13a).[107]

While Gen 1:26–30 is thus clearly in view it is also likely that the sixth day of creation is being interpreted through Psalm 8, an OT passage which is regularly cited as a conceptual parallel to the view of mankind propounded in Genesis 1.¹¹⁰ Verses 4–8 [Eng. 3–7] of that hymn praising humanity is perhaps beneath the surface of much of our chapter and it certainly rises up to the surface of the Hebrew text in vv. 11–13. The relevant verses read:

- 3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars that you have established;
 4 What is man (אִישׁ) that you remember him (תִּזְכְּרֵנִי),
 the son of man (בֶּן אָדָם) that you care for him (תִּפְקְדֵנִי)?
 5 Yet you have made him a little lower than God,
 and crowned him (תַּעֲמִדֵנִי) with glory and honour (כְּבוֹד וְהָדָר)
 6 You have given him dominion over the
 works of your hands (מֵעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ);
 you have put all things under their feet,
 7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, ...

Just like the biblical psalmist, in v. 3 Ben Sira surveys the heavens—as they are manifest in the Temple and the moon and the stars as they appear from

of the LXX of Ps 104:2. The majority reading, ἐν τῷ ἀναλαμβάνειν, perhaps echoes Job 40:10 and Deut 1:41.

110. For Ps 8 in Sirach 49:16 and what follows see J. K. Aitken, “The Semantics of “Glorification” in Ben Sira – Traces of a Development in Post-Biblical Hebrew,” in T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde (eds.), *Sirach, Scrolls, and Sages. Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, and the mishnah*, held at Leiden University, 15–17 December 1977 (STDJ 33; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 1–24 (10).

the sanctuary in the person of Simon. In answer to the questions of v. 4 of the Psalm Ben Sira 49:16 says that both Seth, the Son of Adam, and Enosh were cared for (נִפְקָד) (along with the Israel's house which was also cared for during the days of Simon's leadership (נִפְקָד, 50:1). And in the nation's liturgy her liturgy there is a memorial (לְהוֹכִיר) to the Most High (v. 16); a memorial, that is, of humanity as we were originally created to be. But the clearest allusion to Psalm 8 comes in vv. 11–13 where Simon, wearing the garments of Glory (כְּבוֹד) gives honour (יְהַדֵּר) to the court of the sanctuary as he ascends the altar and is surrounded by his fellow priests—his crown (עֲטֹרָה)—in their glory (בְּכַבוֹדָם). When he has mounted the altar the Hebrew says that there “he stood over the arranged pieces (i.e. the sacrificial offerings)”. The language is odd, and the Greek has, understandably, changed it to “he was standing by the hearth of the altar”. The oddity is explained if the language is deliberately chosen so that the scene fulfills Ps 8:7: here we see the true Adam ruling over all God's works, with all things under his feet; all sheep, oxen and beasts of the field.

As far as the imaginative possibilities of the cultic realm allow, this is a vision of the sixth day of creation as God had always intended it. This is also the banquet to which Wisdom had invited her readers in 24:20–22. But is there the sabbatical rest of God?

g. 50:14–21: The Completion of Creation (Day 7 Part A)

Verses 14–21 are another distinct literary block, the details of which fulfill the vision for the seventh day of creation prescribed by the Pentateuch.[108]

Thus far we have concentrated on the intratextuality between the seven days of creation and the seven speeches to Moses in Exodus 25–31. It is well known that the relationship between creation and Tabernacle erection is also expressed through linguistic correspondences between the last verses of the creation account on the seventh day (Gen 2:1–3) and the last verses of the second block of Tabernacle material (Exod 35–40) where the instructions of chs. 25–31 are carried out:¹¹¹

111. See, for example, U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 476–77, 483; Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord,” 502ff; Levenson, *Creation*, 84–86; Janowski, “Tempel und Schöpfung,” 46–47.

[Exod 31:18 When God finished speaking (בכלהו לדבר) with Moses on Mount Sinai, ...]

Gen 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished (ויכלו, συνετελέσθησαν), and all their multitude (ὁ κόσμος αὐτῶν).

Exod 39:32a In this way all the work of the Tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished (כלה);

Gen 2:2 And on the seventh day God finished (ויכלו, συνετέλεσεν) the work (מלאכה, τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ) that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

Exod 40:33 He set up the court around the Tabernacle and the altar, ... So Moses finished the work (המלאכה ... כלו, συνετέλεσεν ... τὰ ἔργα).

The parallels between the conclusion to the creation account and the conclusion to the preparation of the Tabernacle mean that what Moses does for the former is in imitation of, or an extension of, God's work in creation.¹¹² The same point is made through the theme of blessing in the two parts of P's work:

Gen 1:28 God blessed them (man and woman) (בם אהו, ηὐλόγησεν αὐτούς), ...

Exod 39:43 [LXX v. 23] When Moses saw that they had done all the work (המלאכה כל, πάντα τὰ

Gen 2:3 So God blessed (הו, ηὐλόγησεν) the seventh day and hallowed it, ...

ἔργα) just as the LORD had commanded, he blessed them (בם אהו, ηὐλόγησεν αὐτούς).

Exodus 39:43 is the only act of blessing in the whole of Exodus 25–40 and it is comprehensively ambivalent: Moses blesses both the people and their works. Moses' blessing thus echoes God's blessing of both humanity and his works, especially the sabbath (cf. also Gen. 1:22).

Now, both the themes of creation–Tabernacle's completion and the divine blessing thereon constitute the heart of the seventh block of text in Sirach 50. The two parallel statements in Genesis 2:1–2 and Exodus 39:32 plus 40:33 are echoed in Sirach with two parallel statements (vv. 14, 19) followed by Simon's blessing of the people in the penultimate verse of the hymn:

112. The point was well known in Antiquity as Josephus *Ant.* 3:180–181 attests. There Moses is a divine man in his construction of the microcosmic Tabernacle.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>14 (Heb.) Until he finished ministering at the altar,
(עד כלותו לשרת מזבחה) ...
And set in order the arrangements of the Most High ...</p> <p>19 ... until he finished ministering at the altar (עד כלותו לשרת מזבחה) ...</p> | <p>14 (Gk.) And the perfection (συντέλειαν) of the service/servants at the altars,
To adorn (κοσμήσαι) the offering of the Most High, the Almighty ...
[109]</p> <p>19 ... until the cosmos of the LORD was completed (ἕως συντελεσθῆ κόσμος κυρίου)
and they completed (ἔτελείωσαν) his service.</p> |
|--|---|
- 20 Then he went down and raised his hands
over all the congregation of Israel,
And the Blessing of the LORD (בִּרְכַּת יְיָ, εὐλογία κυρίου) was on his
lips,
and in the Name of the LORD he beautified himself.

It is not just the Greek of 50:19 which picks up the LXX of Genesis 2:2 (so Hayward); the whole of this unit, in both the Greek and the Hebrew, is a highly self-conscious affirmation of the priestly vision for the completion of creation picking up Genesis 2:1–3, on the one hand, and Exodus 39:32; 39:43 and Exodus 40:33 on the other.

Just as Moses participates in God’s “being,” by virtue of his recapitulation of cosmic creativity and blessing, so also here Simon “is beautified/boasts” in the Name of the LORD, which of course he both utters and wears on his turban (Exod 29:36; 39:30). Simon’s “Blessing of the LORD” is probably the Aaronic blessing of Num 6:23–27 through which it is only the *people* of Israel who are blessed.¹¹³ But, at least for the Hebrew original of Ben Sira, the cultic community are *representative of all flesh* (v. 17 כל בשר) and *all the peoples of the earth* (v. 19 כל עם הארץ). And so Simon’s blessing is at once the blessing of Israel (Exod 39:43), the whole of humanity (Gen 1:28) and the rest of creation (Gen 1:22; 2:3; Exod 39:43).

One other detail of the Hebrew leaves us in no doubt about which portion of Scripture and what day of creation is in the author’s mind. The verbal root ערך, “to arrange, order” appears twice in this block of material. In v. 14b Simon “set in order the arrangements (מערכות)” of the Most High and in v. 18b at the sound of the trumpet the singers “set in order his

113. The account of Aaron’s descent from the altar and blessing of the people and the people’s singing for joy in Lev 9:22–24 is also in view throughout Sir 50:16–20 (cf. Smend, *Die Weisheit*, 488).

lamp (הַעֲרִיבֵי נְרֵי). The same root is used on six occasions in Exod 25–40 of which five all come in the closing verses of the account of the Tabernacle’s preparation (Exod 39:37; 40:4 twice; 40:23 twice, cf. 27:21). Sirach 50:18b picks up Exod 39:37 where “lamps of the arrangement (הַמְעַרְכָּה) and all its utensils” are brought by the Israelites to Moses” (cf. 27:21). The image in v. 18b is thus a metonymic one, capturing in a snapshot the closing stages of the Tabernacle’s construction.

In like manner, Simon’s ordering of the “arrangements (מְעַרְכוֹת) of the Most High” in v. 14b picks up God’s commandment to Moses in Exodus 40:4: “You shall bring in the table, and arrange (עֲרַכְהָ) its setting (עֲרִיבֵי); and you shall bring in the lampstand, and set up its lamps” which is promptly obeyed in Exod 40:23 when, having put the table in the tent of meeting, Moses “arranged (עֲרַךְ) upon it the order (עֲרִיךְ) of the bread before the LORD” (i.e. the Shewbread). The plural מְעַרְכוֹת may have in mind the arrangement of the table and the bread as two distinct acts of ordering. That Ben Sira is ultimately interested, in particular, in the order of the Shewbread is likely given that the word מְעַרְכָּה occurs nine times in the Hebrew Bible for the rows or stacks of twelve loaves in the sanctuary. Sometimes we [110] encounter the expression “לֶחֶם מְעַרְכוֹת” (Neh 10:34; 1 Chr 9:32, 1 Chr 23:29, cf. 2 Chr 13:11) and on one occasion the Shewbread is referred to as “מְעַרְכוֹת הַמִּיד” (2 Chr 2:3). But Ben Sira has chosen the absolute form used in 1 Chr 28:16, 2 Chr 29:18, Lev 24:6 “שֵׁשׁ מְעַרְכוֹת שֵׁשׁ הַמְעַרְכָּה” and Lev 24:7 (cf. Lev 24:8).

That Ben Sira 50:14b focuses, in particular, on the arrangement of the Shewbread is important because this is yet another indicator that we have here to do with the Sabbath. The removal and replacement of the Shewbread which Sirach here describes is an act which is specifically set for the Sabbath (Lev 24:8; 1 Chr 9:32; Philo *Spec. Leg.* 1:172; Josephus *Ant.* 3:255).

h. 50:14–21: Wisdom’s Banquet and Sabbatical Rest (Day 7 Part B)

We have seen how the closing verses of the retelling of the Genesis 1 creation account in ch. 24:3–22 pointed forward to a fulfillment of the seventh day of creation in Israel’s sanctuary. The details of Sir 50:14–21 make it abundantly clear that Simon’s officiation completes Wisdom’s cosmic banquet.

In Sirach 24:20 Wisdom called her banquet a memorial meal (τὸ μνημόστυνόν μου) and given the story of her life which she had just told we expected that memorial to be one which recounted the history of creation. That is precisely what we have now witnessed in ch. 50 and so it is fitting that Simon’s activities are concluded with a trumpet blast “for a memorial (לְהוֹדִיךָ, εἰς μνημόστυνον)” before the Most High in v. 16.

In the Greek of 24:20 Wisdom's memorial is sweeter than honey (τὸ ... μνημόσυνόν μου ὑπὲρ τὸ μέλι γλυκύ). So, too, the Greek of Sir 50 is brought to a liturgical crescendo: what v. 18 calls "the greatest sound," with a blast of the trumpets and the singers praising in a sweetened melody (ἐγλυκάνθη μέλος)" (v. 18b). Thus, the sanctuary's worship is an auditory ambrosiac and those who "possess" it (cf. 24:21b) will have entered the incorruptible, eternal, life of the cosmos in which they, along with their high priest (Gk. 50:20d), can "boast" without shame (cf. 24:22a).

In Sirach 24:22b Wisdom had promised "those who work in me will not sin". With Sirach 50:14–21 this is now fully intelligible. In these verses the seventh day of creation is completed in the cultic microcosm. Significantly, however, nowhere does the text speak of rest; neither for Simon, his people nor, for that matter, for God. In fact the activity here is the busiest it has been since the beginning of the chapter. Simon "sets in order the arrangements of the Most High" (v. 14b Heb.), he gives a cosmic adornment to God's offerings (v. 14b Gk.), he stretches out his hand to make a libation offering (v. 15ab Gk.), the priests blow their trumpets, all the people "hastened together and fell on their faces" (v. 17ab), not once, but twice (v. 21) and the singers praise with their voices (v. 18a). The final act of the drama is hardly restful: it seems more like a frenzy.

But then the point appears to be that, as Wisdom has already said of herself "those who work in the sanctuary do not sin," even when their work pertains to the seventh day of creation (24:22). This is God's rest which Philo says is "a working with absolute ease, without toil and without suffering" (*Cherubim* 87). The idea was, in fact, well known in the late Second Temple period as a famous passage in the Gospels attests (Matt 12:5: "have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath[111] the priests in the Temple break the Sabbath and are guiltless," cf. *Jubilees* 50:10–11).¹¹⁴ Those who work in the sanctuary, in the place, the time and the rhythm of primordial Wisdom, work in an effortless rest. And in their work, embodied supremely in the duties of their high priest, Wisdom finds her own rest for which she had been searching since the beginning of creation (24:7–11).

i. 50:14–21: The End and the Beginning of Creation

We noted at the start of our discussion of ch. 50 that there is no clear fulfillment of the first day of creation or of the first speech to Moses. Why is this

114. The idea is anticipated by Ezek 44:18 where, in the Edenic eschatological sanctuary, there is to be none of the sweat (זָהָב) which characterizes the cursed labour since humanity's expulsion from the Garden (Gen 3:19).

passed over? I am not entirely sure. However, the lacuna is partly filled by the contents of the seventh section of the chapter.

Besides the account in Exod 39–40 the one other reference to the arranging (עֲרַךְ) of the lampstand in Exod 25–40 is the important command that Aaron arrange (or “tend”) the lampstand in Exod 27:20–21. This is a key portion of the first speech to Moses linking the work of Aaron in the Tabernacle with the work of God in creating the light on the first day. We might have expected some reference to Simon’s tending the lampstand, or an equivalent action, in the very first verses of ch. 50. Instead it comes in the seventh portion of the chapter.

The reason is perhaps that the completion of the work of the sanctuary is not just a completion of creation, it is also its beginning. There are other aspects of Sir 50:14–21 which suggest the chapter looks forward to a new liturgical cycle in which the work of creation is begun anew. The Hebrew of vv. 14 and 19 describes the continuation of the cultic service “until (עַד)” Simon finished ministering at the altar, which in the Greek of v. 19 is put in terms of the people’s prayer “until (ἕως)” the cosmos of the LORD was completed. We are never told when, if at all, this cosmic ministrations is definitively completed. The reader, of course, knows that it goes on. It continues in both a weekly, seven day, and an annual cycle. The seven day cycle is in view in the setting in order of the arrangements for the table of the Shewbread in v. 14 which is to be done continually (הַמִּיד), every sabbath (בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת) as an eternal covenant (Lev 24:8). The blowing of the trumpets for a memorial in v. 16 probably has in mind the whole annual cycle of the Israel’s festivals. In Numbers 10:10 the blowing of trumpets is prescribed for all Israel’s “days of rejoicing, ... appointed festivals, and at the beginnings of the months”. The blowing of trumpets for a memorial is otherwise particularly associated with Rosh Hashanah (Lev 23:23–25; Num 29:16), at the turning of the year (Exod 34:22).

So, Ben Sira is, perhaps, partly silent about the first day of creation at the beginning of chapter 50 because he sees the end of creation within the cultic microcosm as itself a beginning; a moment within the liturgical enactment of the eternal return. Not that Sirach has utterly evacuated salvation–history of all meaning. He looks for the final ingathering of the tribes of Jacob, the fulfillment of the prophetic promises and the defeat of God’s enemies (36:1–22). In this sense, too, both the liturgy of the[112] Temple and continual work of the Creator in creation will only be complete when the ordered and glorified world which it reveals and makes possible is extended beyond Israel’s Temple to the whole of creation.

3. Conclusions

We are now in a position to draw out the main conclusions of our study.

Sirach 24 and 50 are two carefully crafted halves of a literary dyptich modeled on the canonical dialectic between creation and Tabernacle in the Priestly strand of the Pentateuch. It is as such that both chapters have a profound literary integrity which can only be appreciated through the hermeneutical key provided by a prior knowledge of the author's understanding of Scripture. According to this hermeneutic Israel's God's creation of the world is in a perfect, if complex, symmetrical relationship to the nation's construction of sacred space and time. Their sanctuary is a mini-cosmos; its maintenance, its liturgical drama and personnel are a copy of the universe in all its parts. As such Israel's worship brings creation towards its completion.

The entire fund of human wisdom, in every sphere of life which is covered in the rest of Ben Sira's wisdom collection, owes its origin to the divine person Wisdom who is at once both Creator and creature. Her life is the power behind, and the order within, the structure of the cosmos and yet she has taken up residence in the particular people Israel and its cult. Above all she is "incarnate" in her avatar, Israel's high priest. He, like her, embraces both sides of the Creator/creature "divide," at least, that is, within the framework of his office as high priest and *Ersatz* royal figurehead.¹¹⁵ Simon, the ideal high priest, imitates the Creator in following in all its essential details the order of creation. And yet, simultaneously, as a creature—as the true human being—he embodies the perfect order of creation, the sun, the moon and stars, and panoply of nature in all its beauty and creative energy.

The self-praise of Wisdom in the text of ch. 24 is actualized in Israel's "worship" of the high priest in ch. 50. Both Wisdom and the high priest are legitimately worshipped because their lives uniquely and irreducibly instantiate the life of the Creator God within the drama of Israel's microcosmically conceived cultic and civil life. Not only is Ben Sira's literary piece a hymn in praise of Simon on these grounds, he also thinks the people in the Temple do actually worship the high priest as the embodiment of Wisdom, the Kavod and the Creator. When they bow down a second time in v. 21 they do so before the high priest who manifests God's Name (v. 20).¹¹⁶

115. For a perceptive analysis of Sirach's emphasis on the office (rather than the person) see B. L. Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira's Hymn in Praise of the Fathers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 11–36, 47–52.

116. For the "worship" of the high priest in contemporary Jewish texts see Barker, "The High Priest and the Worship of Jesus" and Fletcher-Louis "Worship of the Divine

Just what this all means for the shape of Ben Sira's unashamedly *biblical* and *monotheistic* theology would require more critical reflection than is possible here.¹¹⁷[113]

Ben Sira is a work of inestimable value for both OT and post-biblical studies. The author's cultic cosmology and sacramental anthropology is witness to a long history of Priestly Temple and creation theology with a particular and sophisticated understanding of Genesis 1 and the Tabernacle material in Exodus. The intratextuality between Sirach 24 and 50 as good as "proves" the claim of Kearney, Weinfeld, Levenson and others that Genesis 1 and Exodus 25–40 belong together.

Ben Sira shows that the complex theology which the two portions of the Pentateuch attest is known intimately in a Jerusalem based school of scribal activity in the early second century B.C. By its very nature the reading of the Pentateuch which Ben Sira knows is one which requires a diligent transmission of the tradition from one generation of bible interpreters to the next. The relationship between the Hebrew original and the translation of Jesus Ben Sira's Greek-speaking grandson is itself a witness to the way in which the tradition of interpretation was guarded: the younger relative also knows the inner mysteries of the Priestly tradition, giving it his own clarity of expression and some new details. In this respect Olyan's conclusion that in the second century B.C. a "pure" P tradition is being taught in Aaronid schools for the training of priests has been partially confirmed by our analysis of his cosmology. Only "partially" confirmed, however, because whilst Ben Sira and his grandson know their P material intimately, they have a canonical consciousness interpreting P material in its larger literary context (Gen 2–3; Prov 8; Job 26). And so it must be doubted that they themselves would have admitted the existence of a distinct literary source which we call P.

The tradition can, therefore, be securely dated to the end of the second century B.C. The grandson probably wanted his readers to study his grandfather's work in depth, as he himself had done. Though an inner biblical interpretative paradigm, it does not appear to have been esoteric: Ben Sira was quite happy to publish a work that could be widely read and which would lend itself to translation and then transmission through the growing Jewish diaspora of the Hellenistic world. Did the tradition peter out? How well known was it outside priestly circles? These questions may be hard to answer with confidence. Elsewhere, I have argued that at least one Jew in the first century A.D.—the author of Col 1:15–20—knew rather well the basic

Humanity".

117. See Fletcher-Louis, "Worship of the Divine Humanity," for further reflection on these issues.

shape of the P-Sirach cosmology.¹¹⁸ But a thoroughgoing assessment of the place of this cosmology in the history of Second Temple Judaism(s) will have to wait for a longer study.

118. Fletcher-Louis, "Wisdom Christology and the Partings of the Ways Between Judaism and Christianity," in S. E. Porter & B. W. R. Pearson (eds.), *Proceedings of the Roehampton Jewish-Christian Relations Through the Centuries Conference February 1999* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 48–64.