

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

Crispin H.T. Fletcher-Louis, University of Nottingham

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 mythology 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.

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: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 3 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High,
and covered the earth as a mist.

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), pp. 34-41; O. Rickenbacher, *Weisheitsmerkmale bei Ben Sira* (OBO 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), pp. 112-120.

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,
and 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,

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.

19 Come to me, you who desire me,
and eat your fill of my fruits.

(Day 6) 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.

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* (Deut 33:4).

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.

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. 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, verses 7-11 are concerned with Israel's special relationship with Israel, verses 12-17 describe Wisdom in terms of vegetative fecundity, in verses 19-22 Wisdom invites her hearers to a banquet and verses 25-33 sapientialize the imagery of Genesis 2-3. Thematic and literary connections between the various parts of this chapter abound as several studies have shown.⁴

² The Greek has 'ὁ ἐκφαίνων ὡς φῶς παιδείαν'. This is a misreading of the Hebrew, which perhaps read *המשפיעה כנאר מוסר*, under the influence of v. 32b.

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

⁴ See in particular the studies of J. Marböck, *Weisheit*, pp. 34-80; M. Gilbert, 'L'Éloge de la Sagesse (Siracide 24)', *Revue théologique de Louvain* 5 (1974) pp. 326-48; Skehan, 'Structures' & G.T.

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 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 verses 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 verse 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 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

Sheppard, *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct: A study in the sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 21-71.

⁵ Gilbert, 'L'Éloge de la Sagesse', p. 345.

⁶ Skehan, 'Structures' and J.T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (SBLMS 28; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 45-50.

⁷ There is no parallel to the paradisaic imagery of Sirach 24:12-19, 23-33, nor the particularization of 24:7-8, 10-12.

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

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.

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 verse 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 verse 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 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

Sirach 50 in Modern Scholarship

Most discussion of Sirach in the modern period has regarded Sirach 24 as the centre and highpoint 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 prologue of book (chapter 1). But there has been an overemphasis on Sirach 24 at the expense of far more significant themes in the second half of the book which reach their climax in the hymn

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

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 Sirach 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 Sirach 45:6-22 and 50:1-13 relative to 24:13-17 is a puzzling example of blatant error and his comments about the whole of chs. 44-50 suggest he has avoided facing the plain meaning of these most important chapters of Sirach out of a prejudicial opinion of matters cultic.

in praise of the fathers in chapter 44-50 and *the* climactic hymn in praise of the high priest Simon in Sirach 50.

Robert Hayward has led the way in Sirach scholarship in an exploration of the importance of the structural and thematic correspondences between chapter 24 and chapter 50. This can be seen particularly clearly in the way in which the characterization of Wisdom in terms of arboreal fecundity in chapter 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 the reader is told that Wisdom ministered in Israel's tabernacle. This is a somewhat puzzling statement given that the language used (ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐλειτούργησα) must describe a human ministering to God, not God ministering (in the guise of Wisdom) to Israel. When Sirach writes chapter 24:10 he has an eye towards chapter 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 chapter 24 Sirach 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 verse 7 the high priest is

As the rainbow which appears in the cloud
כקשת נראתה בענן / 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
כמראה הקשת אשר יהיה בענן ביום הגשם
ὡς ὄρασις τόξου ὅταν ᾗ ἐν τῇ νεφέλῃ ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὑετοῦ¹²

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

¹² This intertextuality is anticipated in the previous chapter by specific reference to Ezekiel's vision of the Glory (ὄρασις 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 (כדמות הקשת בתוך הענן)" to which the congregation respond, "was the appearance of the priest (מראה כהן)" (as he comes forth from the sanctuary in perfect peace).

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 recapitulates that of the fathers’ themselves (44:1-2, 19; 45:2; 45:7; 45:23; 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, is gathered up into the grammar of Israel’s theological discourse. How is this possible, given that there is no indication that Sirach has surrendered his monotheistic commitments?¹³

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 chapters 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 at Qumran, who believed the Temple service should follow a lunar calendar. Given his views on the afterlife (10:11; 17:28; 30:4; 38:21) our

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* (JSJSup 63; Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 112-128.

¹⁴ See esp. Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Cult* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 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), pp. 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), pp. 189-222.

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

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 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 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?' Two other studies, those of Hartmut Gese and C.T.R. Hayward, also point to the importance of P material for Sirach.

Hartmut 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 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.¹⁹

Gese's comments are brief, undeveloped and, though intuitively attractive, not entirely convincing as a explanation of the determinative subtext of these verses of the hymn, which probably explains why his contribution has received little attention in

¹⁶ 'Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood'.

¹⁷ 'Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood,' pp. 267-8.

¹⁸ 'Ben Sira's Relationship to the Priesthood,' p. 270. Sirach 45:18-19 picks up Num. 16:1-17:15; Sirach 45:20-22 recalls Num. 18:20; Sirach 45:24 recalls Num. 25:12-13 etc ...

¹⁹ 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), pp. 23-57 (32-3).

subsequent discussion.²⁰ It is certainly true that the twofold division between heaven and the depth of the abyss in verse 5 is reminiscent of the separation of the upper and lower waters in Genesis 1:6-8 and Wisdom's holding sway over the waves of the *sea* and all the *earth* might have in mind Genesis 1:9-10.²¹ However, it is not entirely clear that we must find in Sirach 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 Genesis 1:1-2:4a. In the Greek Sirach 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.

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 'kosmos', as it is described in the Septuagint of Genesis 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 (συνετέλεσεν) 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 Sirach 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 Exodus 25-40. In order to rightly understand the complex literary and 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.

Genesis 1 & Exodus 25-31: P's 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 25-31.²² Each speech begins 'The LORD spoke to Moses' (Exod. 25:1; 30:11, 16, 22, 34; 31:11,

²⁰ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation. The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 264-272 shows a similar appreciation of the role of the Genesis 1 creation account in the hymn.

²¹ For Genesis 1:6-8 and Sirach 24:5 see Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, p. 268.

²² P.J. Kearney, 'Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Exodus 25-40', *ZAW* 89 (1977), pp. 375-387.

12) and introduces 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 Genesis 1:9-11. The seventh speech (31:12-17) stresses the importance of the Sabbath for Israel, just as Genesis 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 to this Aaron's responsibility for the tending of the Tabernacle lampstand in the evening and morning, at the boundary between day and night, is equivalent (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 Exodus 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.²³ 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 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 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 Sirach 50:5-7 as one such text where the high priest is identified with the sun, the moon and the stars.²⁴

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

²³ 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), pp. 501-11; J.D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil. The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 82-87.

²⁴ '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 *Enoch* 22:8-10. See also, e.g., *T. Levi* 14:1-3; 18:4; 4QTL^{Levi} frag. 9; 4QTL^{Levi} 8 iii 4-6; Josephus *Ant.* 3:184, 187.

²⁵ 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).

Creation (Genesis 1:1-2:2)*Day 1*

heavens and the earth
creation of light: evening and morning

Day 2

separation of upper and lower waters

Day 3

separation of dry land and sea (1:9-10)
vegetation (1:11-12)

Day 4

sun, moon and stars

Day 5

living creatures in the upper and lower realms

Day 6

land creatures & humankind (God's Image)

Day 7

Sabbath

Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31)*Speech 1 (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)

Speech 2 (Exod. 30:11-16)

(census and half shekel)

Speech 3 (Exod. 30:17-21)

bronze laver (the 'sea')

Speech 4 (Exod. 30:22-33)

sacred anointing oil: myrrh, calamus,
cinnamon, cassia
anointing of cultic appurtenances and
priests

Speech 5 (Exod. 30:34-38)

sacred incense: stacte, onycha, galbanum,
frankincense.

Speech 6 (Exod. 31:1-11)

Bezalel filled with God's spirit.

Speech 7 (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 Genesis 1 and Exodus 25-31, 35-40 are penned by the same Priestly author (P). It has long been known that there are correspondences between the language at the end of the P creation account (Genesis 2:1-3) and the portions of Exodus 39-40 (Exod. 39:32a; 39:43; 40:33) which describe the erection of the Tabernacle in fulfillment of the instructions in chapters 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 extensive discussion in the secondary literature.²⁶

²⁶ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'The Structure of P', *CBQ* 38 (1976), pp. 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).

Returning to Sirach, in addition to the observations of Gese, Hayward and Weinfeld which all point to a peculiar interest in P's cosmology, we are encouraged to make a fresh examination of chapters 24 and 50 given that in 24:15 (cf. 50:9) 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 Exodus 30:22-33 and 34-38. The main burden 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 Sirach 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.

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

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 verses 3-23 for which the identification of Wisdom with Torah in verse 23 acts as a concluding, climactic summary, and the further praise of Wisdom in verses 25-33.²⁷ 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: Sirach 24:25-33 is to Sirach 24:3-23 what Genesis 2 is to Genesis 1.

24:1-2: Wisdom's Praise in the presence of God's 'host'.

The first indication that chapter 24 is interested in the P creation account comes in the introductory verses which sets Wisdom's self-praise 'in the midst of her people' and in the presence of God's 'hosts'.²⁸ The latter 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.

²⁷ Verse 34 is a duplication of 33:18 and is perhaps out of place in chapter 24 (P.W. Skehan and A.A. DiLella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (ABC 39; New York: Doubleday, 1987), p. 330).

²⁸ The Greek δυνάμειος will have translated צבא , or צבאו , or חילו (cf. MT and LXX of Pss. 103 [102]:21; 148:2; Joel 2:11, and Smend *Die Weisheit*, 216).

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.²⁹ 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). Specifically *these* cosmic realities are nowhere explicitly present in the context where, however, Wisdom *does* offer a self-praise with reference to many *other* parts of the cosmos.

In its literary context – 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 (צבאם)' refers to every part of creation, not just the sun, the moon and the stars, which is summarized in the preceding chapter. In this case verses 1-2 anticipate the theme at the heart of the chapter which 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.

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 first day's creation described in Genesis 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 recall's God's creation by means of His spoken word throughout Genesis 1 (vv. 3, 6, 9 etc..).³⁰ It is also generally recognized that Wisdom's covering the earth like a mist is an allusion to the Spirit sweeping over the face of the waters in Genesis 1:2. Though how our author has moved from *Spirit* or *wind* over *waters* to a *mist* over the *earth* is not immediately obvious, 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 Genesis 1:2 and the mysterious אר which in Genesis 2:6 rises from the earth to water the whole face of the ground. In the targums this אר is taken to be a cloud (עננה in Onqelos and the Palestinian Targum) and G.T. Sheppard has demonstrated that Sirach 24:3 creatively harmonizes the first stages of creation in the two accounts, Genesis 1 and 2-3, by choosing language that provides the essence of both.³¹

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ Sirach anticipates the later identification of Wisdom with the Logos in Wis 9:1-2; 18:15; John 1:1-5; Hebrews 1:3 (cf. Sirach 43:26).

³¹ *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct*, pp. 22-27. Cf. generally Smend, *Die Weisheit*, p. 216; Gilbert, 'L'Éloge de la Sagesse', pp. 341-3.

So whilst the hymn opens with an eye on both Genesis 1 and the creation story in Genesis 2-3, the attention, in particular, is directed to the *beginnings* 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 Genesis 1 is uppermost in the author's mind, but this is not the first time that Genesis 2-3 will be introduced into Genesis 1.

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 Sirach 24.³² 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 – Genesis 1:3-5 is more vividly present when we take seriously the fact that Genesis 1 was to be read in close conjunction with 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. Exodus 13:21; 14:19; Numbers 14:14; Nehemiah 9:12, 19).³³ The language of Sirach 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 verse 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 verse 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 (Genesis 1:3-5). In Exodus 13:21-22:

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 (cf. Num 14:14).

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

³² The Latin text adds such a reference in v. 3 when it says 'ego in caelis feci, ut oriretur lumen indeficiens' ('I made that in the heavens there should be a light that never fails'). Although this is a clearly secondary reading, one wonders whether the unfailing light of the heavens does not have in mind the *perpetual* light of the Tamid menorah.

³³ See esp. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct*, p. 32 who relates the Exodus imagery to the searching for rest and inheritance in the promised land in vv. 7-11.

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 (אֶל־לַיְלָה, 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* (Exodus 40:38, cf. Numbers 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 1.³⁴ 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 Genesis 1 and Exodus 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 (Exodus 33:9-10; Numbers 14:14; Deuteronomy 31:15) calls for further reflection.

The tent of meeting is a peculiar and temporary means of communication between God and his people through Moses. It is superceded 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 Exodus 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 Exodus 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 altar of burnt offering (40:16-29).³⁵ In 29:42b-45, at the centre of the instructions for the offering of the Tamid sacrifice, incense offering

³⁴ See Exodus 13:21-22; 40:38; Numbers 14:14; Deuteronomy 1:33; Nehemiah 9:12, 16, 19, Isaiah 4:5, cf. Numbers 10:34.

³⁵ 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.

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 burnt offering that he will meet with the people and dwell with them. So, in 40:34-35, when God's Glory does fill 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 Exodus 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 reenactment 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 (Genesis 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 verse 5. Although the *language* is not that of Genesis 1:6-8, the reference to the second day of creation is clear, as Gese has seen.³⁶

The language is similar to that in Job 26:10 ('He has carved a circle (גָּחַ קָח, πρόσταγμα ἐγύρωσεν) on the face of the waters', (cf. also Job 22:14 & Isaiah 40:22), but is closest to Proverbs 8:27-28:

²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he carved a circle (גָּחַ קָח) on the face of the deep (סוּחַת, τὸν οὐρανόν),

²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,

³⁶ Gese, *Essays*, p. 196.

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 architectural act of restriction, limitation and deliberate design similar to God's creating of a dome in the midst of the waters in Genesis 1:6. Indeed these two verses of Proverbs 8 are set within a creation narrative 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 Genesis 6:9-10.

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

The Greek of verse 5a is very 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 (ἐγύρωσεν οὐρανὸν ἐν κυκλώσει δόξης)³⁷

In the first instance this parallel to 24:5a is important because the description of the rainbow in chapter 43:11-12 has been included in 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 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.

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 very 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 Genesis 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

³⁷ For the comparison between 24:5a and 42:12a see Smend, *Die Weisheit*, pp. 217, 405; Skehan & DiLella *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, p. 332.

ark as a proto-temple/tabernacle, as J. Blenkinsopp has shown.³⁸ 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 chaos.³⁹

So in Sirach 24:5 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 Genesis 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.

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

In verse 6 Wisdom says 'I held sway (ἡγησάμην) over the waves of *the sea* and all *the earth* and over every people and nation'.⁴⁰ In the first place, this is a clear reference to the creation of gathered together waters, the 'sea', and the dry land, the 'earth' on the third day of creation (Genesis 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 the history of religions context of the separation of land and sea in Genesis 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.⁴¹ This is a fitting gloss to Genesis 1:9-10 given that throughout the

³⁸ 'The Structure of P'.

³⁹ 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 Genesis 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 (עֵינֹת הַחַיִּים)' is in Prov. 8:27-28 a text which, as we have seen, is cognate to Genesis 1:6-9 and which Sirach uses for his second day of creation in Sirach 24:5.

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ It is sometimes claimed that 'over every people and nation' comes from Proverbs 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', p. 377; Skehan & DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, pp. 332-333). But the two images are rather different. In Proverbs kings and rulers govern *according to*

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; Ps. 87:4; Ezek. 29:3-5; 32:2-8). One only needs to read Daniel 7:2-14 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.

24:7-11: Creation Completed in Israel & Her Sanctuary

So the first four verses of Wisdom's hymn do, indeed, seem to flow according to the logic of creation as prescribed by Genesis 1, as Gese suggested. It is normally thought that, whilst verses 3-6 of the hymn retell the creation of the cosmos, in verse 7, and all that follows, the focus decisively shifts from creation to salvation history.⁴² 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 (Exodus 40:38; Numbers 9:15-23) we have already seen that our author is reading Genesis 1 through material in Exodus, particularly that in Exodus 25-40.

In vv. 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 for his creation to remain stable and for it to be brought to completion God has to take up residence in a particular people and 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' (Exodus 31:2). As an appropriate abode for the creator of the world this tabernacle, as any in the ancient Near East, must mirror and actualize 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. Psalm 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 Sirach 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)⁴³' (v.

the standards, values and discernment of Wisdom. In Sirach Wisdom has power *over* the people such rulers represent.

⁴² See, for example the analysis in Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel*, pp. 44-47.

⁴³ The translation 'resting place' (so e.g. NRSV) obscures the reference to Genesis 2:2-3.

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 (Genesis 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 Genesis 1:11-31. Rather he 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 of the Greek translation of Genesis 2:2-3 where we are told that God 'ceased (κατάπαυσε(ν)) from (all) his works'.⁴⁴

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. 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 verses 7-11 at this point to signal the importance of relating creation to the sanctuary and, therefore, of reading Genesis 1 in combination with Exodus 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.

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 Genesis 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' according to Genesis 1:11-13.

⁴⁴The connection is spotted by Perdue (*Wisdom and Creation*, p. 270). Note the way the LXX uses the same verb in the seventh speech to Moses in Exodus 31:17-18.

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:⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶

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

In drawing on Genesis 2 Sirach is probably consciously interpreting Genesis 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 Genesis 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 *Jubilees* 2:7 expands Genesis 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 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.⁴⁷

There is no mention of the garden of Eden in Genesis 1, but, quite legitimately, *Jubilees* regards the language of Genesis 1:11-12 as so close to that of Genesis 2:9, 16-17 that it assumes the former was actually referring in summary fashion to the later. We find the same hermeneutic in later pseudepigrapha, the rabbis and targumim.⁴⁸ Before *Jubilees* Sirach had already made the same harmonization between Genesis 1 and 2.

⁴⁵ 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*, pp. 53-4, 56: see esp. Hos. 14:4ff; 58:11; Jer. 17:5; Pss 1; 3; 92:12; Song of Songs 4-6).

⁴⁶ *Wisdom as a hermeneutical construct*, p. 52. Cf. also Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, pp. 270-1.

⁴⁷ Translation follows James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees: Text and Translation* (CSCO 510-11; *Scriptores Aethiopici* 87-88; Leuven: Peeters, 1989), vol. 2, pp. 9-10.

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

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 Genesis 1:11-12 under the inspiration of the paradisaic language of Genesis 2. Sirach thus picks up the creation sequence where he left it in verse 6 with the creation of sea and dry land on the third day. The third day is now complete.

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 describe the ingredients used in the sacred oil (Exodus 30:23-24) and 15c-d the ingredients of the holy incense (Exodus 30:34, 36). The language corresponds precisely to that of the fourth and fifth parts of God's speech to Moses in Exodus 25:10-31:17:⁴⁹

Sirach 24

15a As cinnamon (κιννάμωμον) and camel's thorn (ἀσπάλαθος ἀρωμάτων)

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)

Exodus 30

²²The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

²³Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh (σμύρνης ἐκλεκτής) five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon (κινναμόμου εὐώδους) half as much, that is, two hundred fifty, and two hundred fifty of aromatic cane (καλάμου εὐώδους),

³⁴The 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)

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 Genesis 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

⁴⁹ Sirach 24:15b picks up not just Exodus 30:34, but also the phrase ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ μαρτυρίου of Exodus 34:36 in the closing expression 'like the odor of incense in the tent (ἐν σκηνῇ)'.

creation as good as 'proves' his intimate knowledge of the intratextuality between Genesis 1 and Exodus 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 liturgy. The sacred anointing oil corresponds somehow - it is not clear - 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.

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 Genesis 1:24-31 or the sixth speech to Moses in Exodus 31:1-11? In the former God creates the cattle, creeping things, wild animals and humanity in his image and in the later 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 (Exodus 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 verses 19-22 could possibly correspond to Exodus 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.⁵⁰

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 sanctuary in chapter 50. He deliberately leaves loose ends to this hymn, because the hymn is only the first of a two part recital. Or, to put it in the hymn's own terms, in verses 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 chapter 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

⁵⁰ Though, of course, this has been dealt with earlier in Sirach, at 17:3-4.

combination with elements of the Genesis 2-3 creation account.⁵¹ There are in fact four ways in which the closing stanza of the hymn acts as an invitation to return to the prelapsarian Edenic lifestyle that Adam had in Genesis 1:26-2:25.

(a) Wisdom's Banquet and the Offer of Immortality

In verse 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 Genesis 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, 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. In many and various ways Sirach believes that the wise life produces longevity and the healthy life (see 1:12, 20; 3:6; 30:22). Conversely the foolish and wicked life 'shortens ones 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 24:19-22 coming to Wisdom's banquet will mean the transcendence of death. This is perhaps the force of verse 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.⁵²

(b) 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 αἰσχυνθήσεται.) (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' (Genesis 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 loin cloth (3:7). Previously they 'were both naked, and

⁵¹ Prov. 8:32-9:6 has perhaps inspired some of Sirach 24:19-22 (see Skehan, 'Structures', pp. 378-9; Gilbert, 'L'Éloge de la Sagesse', p. 335). Those verses of Proverbs are Wisdom's summons to listen to her instruction and to come to her banquet.

⁵² Plato *Symposium* 203b; Homer *Odyssey* 5:93; *Sib. Or.* 3:746; 5:282; *Hist. Rech* 7:3 and see esp. *Joseph and Aseneth* 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'.

were not ashamed (καὶ οὐκ ἠσχύνοντο) (2:25), but after eating of this fruit they hide from God in shame (3:8-11).

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.⁵³ 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 commentators have noted this clothing sounds like that of Israel's high priest.⁵⁴ 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 chapter 50.

(c) 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 verse 22. There Wisdom reassures her guests with the words: 'those working in me (ἐν ἐμοί) will not sin (οὐχ 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 rather odd. It will only be possible to make sense of this language when we have studied the rest of Sirach and its development of chapter 24. In particular, 24:22b looks forward to the temple liturgy described in chapter 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.

(d) 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

⁵³ For this reading of Sirach 24:22a see already M. Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), p. 58.

⁵⁴ Stadelmann, *Ben Sira als Schriftgelehrter*, pp. 50-51; Skehan & DiLella, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, pp. 194-5.

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 (Genesis 2:2-4 *par.* Exodus 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.

Besides a reference here to the Sabbatical climax of creation those 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 chapter 1:26-30.

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 Genesis 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.⁵⁵

24:17-22 and Sacrificial Imagery.

Whilst the sense that in verses 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 Proverbs 9:1-6 the images in the fourth strophe 'reflect those of a sacred meal of communion with God and humans'.⁵⁶ Given the strongly cultic interests throughout Sirach, and within our hymn thus far, this is a possibility which merits further exploration.

⁵⁵ For the creation story in Genesis 2-3 introduced into the sixth day of creation in Genesis 1 see also 2 *Enoch* 30:15-32:1.

⁵⁶ Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, p. 271.