

Journey of Wisdom from Proverbs 8 to Sirach 24: A Characteristic Trait of Hebrew Wisdom

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1. Introduction

This paper unfolds how the nature and function of Hebrew wisdom change from the period of the ancient Israel to the time of the ancient Greece. In particular, I will concentrate on the nature of wisdom in Proverbs 8, which betrays a divine character in creation. Yet, Sirach 24 identifies wisdom with the Law. My initial question is what has brought these different understandings of the wisdom. This question raises more fundamental issues regarding the characteristics of Hebrew wisdom: What did the wise in ancient Israel mean by wisdom? Why did Ben Sira, during the Hellenistic period, identify the wisdom of creation with the law of Moses? What made this coalescence possible? This is why I attempt to explore the journey of wisdom from Proverbs 8 to Sirach 24. The main task of this paper is to elucidate the radical trait of the Hebrew wisdom: what kind of character of the wisdom did accommodate various phases of Hebrew Yahwism through the vicissitudes of history?

Wisdom in general is universal. Every culture and religion do mention about wisdom. However, they are usually concerned with mundane life, how to maintain the present order according to its rhythms.²⁾ The book of Proverbs also conveys the in-

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structions regarding proper behavior in daily settings. Yet, Israelite wisdom emphasizes piety, a right relationship with God.³⁾ Both dimensions of vertical and horizontal way of living are under consideration. One of the major differences of the wisdom books of Israel from neighboring cultures is a constant reflection on wisdom itself (ex. Prov 8; Job 28; Sir 24).⁴⁾ While some scholars have discussed that the wisdom in the book of Proverbs was international,⁵⁾ other scholars like Richard J. Clifford claim that being “international” does not mean that Hebrew wisdom is entirely pagan in her origin. Original character of the Israelite wisdom should be investigated.⁶⁾ According to Michael V. Fox, Israelite topic on wisdom itself is scarcely concerned by the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature.⁷⁾

Proverbs 8 calls our attention in this regard. There are various aspects of wisdom itself: call of the Lady wisdom at the crossroads and gates (vs. 1-3); right and true words of her mouth (vs. 6-9, 20); the value of wisdom more precious than any jewels (vs. 10-11, 19); fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom

2) Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 34.

3) According to von Rad, the “fear of the Lord” is the epistemological basis of ancient Israel. A proper faith in Yahweh directly connects to right relation to the objects of human perception: Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 155.

4) Richard J. Clifford, “Introduction to Wisdom Literature,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. V (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 11-12.

5) Glendon E. Bryce, *A Legacy of Wisdom: The Egyptian Contribution to the Wisdom of Israel* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University, 1979), 97-112; Christa Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 13-14. cf. E. I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenword, 1969).

6) Clifford pays attention to Yahweh Monotheism that makes Israelite wisdom different in kind from the Ancient Near Eastern culture. Yahweh who is all-wise and all-just has to answer all the problems in the world: Richard J. Clifford, “Introduction to Wisdom Literature,” 16.

7) Michael V. Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9”, *JBL* 116 (1997), 613.

(v. 13); rulers' principle to govern (vs. 15-16); preexistence of the wisdom (vs. 22-26); divine attributes in creation (vs. 27-30); dwelling in the world and human race (v. 31); prophetic voice of wisdom (vs. 32-36). On the other hand, Sirach 24 focuses on a specific quality of wisdom: identification of wisdom with the law (vs. 23-33).⁸⁾ Yet, it is evident that Sirach 24:9 directly cites Proverbs 8:22 that alludes the preexistence of wisdom before creation. Also, Sirach 24:19-23 invites people to a banquet along with Proverbs 8:32-36. Above all, Sirach 24 keeps the same number of thirty-five lines as Proverbs 8.⁹⁾ It indicates that Ben Sira's integration of wisdom with law was not an inventive idea but a product of wisdom tradition.

What we must ask is whether the integration of wisdom and law was appropriate? If it is valid, what does this confluence signify about the nature and function of Hebrew wisdom? What can we learn about the wisdom tradition that witnesses a significant change of wisdom from Proverbs 8 to Sirach 24? I will address these questions by taking the necessary steps in the following sections. First, I will review how the texts of Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24 have been interpreted by scholars. By doing so, the general features of wisdom in biblical tradition will stand out. Second, I will compare the two texts by utilizing structural analysis and rhetorical criticism. The similar and disparate points of wisdom will surface. Third, I will discuss historical and cultural impacts on the literary tradition of Hebrew wisdom. The theological role of the sage, Ben Sira, will be focused. Fourth, paradoxical characteristic of Hebrew wisdom

8) Of course, Ben Sira also mentions other features of wisdom in the chapter: relationship of the Lady Wisdom with Israel (vs. 3-12); benefits of wisdom (vs. 13-22). Yet, those descriptions only contribute to the idea of wisdom as the law (v. 23)

9) Richard J. Clifford, *The Wisdom Literature*, 123; Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 331.

will be considered. Both transcendental and immanent traits of wisdom will emerge. Finally, I will conclude with summary of this paper and prospective remarks on future studies.

2. Previous Studies on Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24

It is interesting to find that the wisdom is personified in both books. The Lady Wisdom (חכמה) speaks in the first pronoun in Prov. 8:12 and Sir 24:3, respectively. In fact, wisdom in personification is one of the popular literary devices in the book of Proverbs.¹⁰⁾ Scholars' efforts have been put into expounding the identification of the wisdom in Proverbs 8.¹¹⁾ One of the most common answers is to regard the personified wisdom as a metaphor for a sage or teachers.¹²⁾ It appears that the speeches of Lady Wisdom are echoed in the parental instructions in Proverbs 1-8 and in individual proverbs throughout Proverbs 10-31.¹³⁾ Second, a group of scholars suggests that the Woman Wisdom is a manifes-

10) 1:20-33; 3:13-20; 4:5-9; 7:4-5; 8:1-22, 22-30; 9:1-6. Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 8-63; Phyllis Tribble, "Wisdom Builds a Poem: The Architecture of Proverbs 1:20-33," *JBL* 94 (1975), 509-518.

11) Michael V. Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9", 613-633; Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 48; Roland E. Murphy, "The Personification of Wisdom," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in honour of J. A. Emerton*. eds. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H.G.M. Williamson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 222-233.

12) Abigail Ramos Teh, "Images of Personified Wisdom," *Landas* 22.1 (2008), 113. Jewish scholars generally agree that the personified wisdom in Proverbs 8 as a traditional teacher by emphasizing verses 12-21 which includes typical doctrine of the fear of Yahweh and retribution theory. Shimon Bakon, "Two Hymns to Wisdom: Proverbs 8 and Job 28," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 36.4 (2008), 224-225.

13) Claudia Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), 191-208.

tation of female deities. Observing the Ancient Near Eastern myths, they assume that the literary motif came from adaptations of goddesses from Egyptian Ma'at or Mesopotamian Ishtar.¹⁴⁾ Third, it is discussed that the Lady Wisdom is introduced as a literary contrast of *אִשָּׁה זָרָה* (strange woman) or *נְכַרְיָה* (pagan woman). Abigail Teh claims that the 'personified wisdom' in the book of Proverbs serve as a foil to the strange woman or another man's wife.¹⁵⁾ Also, Norman C. Habel explains the 'two women' as a symbolic comparison between the ways of life and death, which is the theological lesson of the book.¹⁶⁾ Yet, the divine Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31 is unparalleled, allowing no contrasts or comparisons. Fourth, von Rad defines the wisdom personified as the primeval order itself, or as the order-mystery or as the order-producing force. According to him, wisdom has been created by God as the principle of cosmos.¹⁷⁾ However, Fox criticizes that we hear neither the voice of the primeval order nor God's words in the speeches of Wisdom.¹⁸⁾ Instead, Fox identifies the Wisdom as a "universal" like Platonic *ἰδέα*. "As a universal, it exists in both the supernal realm (universal, atemporal, extra-mundane) and the human (time-bound, worldly, belonging to particular peoples, realized in specific words)."¹⁹⁾ Both transcendental and immanent features of wisdom are considered. Finally, Bruce K. Waltke attempts to explain the wisdom as "a historical figure, the symbol of Israelite prophetess."²⁰⁾ His discussion is limited to the wisdom's speech in Proverbs 1:20-33.

14) Richard J. Clifford, "Introduction to Wisdom Literature," 13.

15) Abigail Ramos Teh, "Images of Personified Wisdom," 122.

16) Norman C. Habel, "Symbolism in Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," *Interpretation* 26 (1972), 156-157.

17) Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 153-157.

18) Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," 627.

19) Fox, "Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9," 629-630.

20) Bruce K. Waltke, "Lady Wisdom as Mediatrix: An Exposition of Proverbs 1:20-33," *Presbyterion* 14 (1988), 13.

Observing the whole picture of the personified wisdom in Proverbs 1-9, Waltke finally defines the Woman Wisdom as “a one-of-a-kind heavenly mediatrix” who mediates God’s wisdom to humanity.²¹⁾ When it comes to Proverbs 8, he pays attention to both the divine and human roles of wisdom in historic (vv. 12-21) and primordial (vv. 22-31) times.²²⁾ However, the detailed characteristics of wisdom in the text are not explored.

To the contrary, interpreters of the book of Ben Sira are not interested in defining the personified wisdom in Sirach 24 since the wisdom is evidently declared as the law (Sir 24:23). Instead, they have debated on the relationship between wisdom and law. O. Kaiser contends that wisdom is a moral foundation upon which the obedience to the law is carried out.²³⁾ Wisdom is instrumental enabling people to live in the humble submission to the revealed will of God, which is the law of Moses.²⁴⁾ On the other hand, E. G. Buckmann does not relate wisdom with pious way of obedience to the law. He judges that Ben Sira never refers specifically to the God of Israel and the commandment of Moses.²⁵⁾ Wisdom is introduced for the purpose of eudaemonism rather than legal imperative. Yet, Martin Hengel points out Ben Sira’s use of wisdom as exclusive gift of God to Israel.²⁶⁾ The pious relationship of wisdom with the law of Moses needs to be scrutinized.

21) Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 1-15* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 86.

22) Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 399.

23) O. Kaiser, “Die Begründung der Sittlichkeit im Buche Jesus Sirach,” *ZThK* 55 (1958) 56-58.

24) Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul: A Tradition Historical Enquiry into the Relation of Law, Wisdom, and Ethics* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1985), 10.

25) E. G. Bauckmann, “Proverbien,” *ZAW* 72 (1960) 49, requoted from Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul*, 10.

26) Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul*, 11.

Eventually, scholars pay attention to equal relationship between the wisdom and law.²⁷⁾ Beronika Bachmann recently states that “Torah and Wisdom are placed on the same level by Jesus Ben Sira.”²⁸⁾ According to her, we find a short formula of the same claim in Baruch 3:36-4:3 in which the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is proclaimed as the law. However, her identification of wisdom with the law has been concluded without sufficient investigation within the book of Ben Sira itself. Regarding the equation of the two, a question about the identity of the law in Sirach 24:23 needs to be addressed. Some scholars like JiSeong Kwon discusses that the law cannot be identified with the Pentateuch since we cannot see any relevant issues in the Mosaic covenant or Deuteronomic laws in the Book of Ben Sira.²⁹⁾ Still other scholars affirm that Ben Sira alludes the law of Moses in Sirach 24:23 because he picks up the theme of the Torah as wisdom which appears same in the book of Deuteronomy 4, 30 and 32.³⁰⁾ In order to search for Ben Sira’s law, A. Jordan

27) G. Sauer, *Jesus Sirach, Ben Sira* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 184; J. Marböck, *Weisheit im Wandel: Untersuchung zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 78; Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul*, 16-19; F. V. Reiterer, “Review of Recent Research on the Book of Ben Sira,” in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research*. ed. Pancratius C. Beentjes (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 48.

28) Veronika Bachmann, “Jesus Ben Sira 24: On Wisdom, Who Has Found an Earthly Dwelling Place,” *European Judaism* 54.1 (2021), 95.

29) JiSeong Kwon, “Re-Examining Torah in the Wisdom of Ben Sira: Was Hellenistic Wisdom Torahised?” in *The Early Reception of the Torah*, eds. Kristin De Troyer, Barbara Schmitz, Joshua Alfaro, and Maximilian Häberlein (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 100. 93-119; Fox also rejects the identification of the two since wisdom’s portrayal does not fit the concept of Torah in the sens of God’s verbal revelation to Israel: Fox, “Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,” 626.

30) G. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 62, 67. Sheppard particularly interprets that Deut. 30 delivers the idea of the book of Torah is no longer in heaven but given to Israel, which demonstrates the concept of Ben Sira in Sirach 24.

Schmidt has delved into the significance of the Torah for Jews who lived in the Hellenistic culture. According to him, reflection on the Torah was a means by which the Jewish people learn about wisdom's involvement with in the unfolding of Israel's history, as well as about her ongoing presence amid people, particularly in the cultus.³¹⁾ Schmidt highlights the function of the law, rather than its identity, in contributing to the maintenance of the contemporary socio-political order. In order to illuminate the relationship of the law and wisdom, a detailed study on the identity of the law in Sirach 24:23 is inevitable.

A brief survey of the previous scholarly works on Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24 has introduced four general features of Hebrew wisdom. First, personified wisdom as Lady, Teacher, Prophetess or Way to life is commonly employed for didactic purpose. Second, the wisdom itself denies unequivocal identification due to her multifaceted characters. Third, wisdom tradition, however, plays a significant role in revealing the distinctive nature of Yahweh as Creator. Fourth, wisdom ends up with the law of Moses in the second temple Judaism. These findings present us with two tasks to tackle for retrieving the characteristic traits of Hebrew wisdom. First, various features of wisdom in Proverbs 8 and their theological significance need to be excavated. Second, the identity of the law in Sirach 24:23 requires a further study on the literary wisdom tradition and cultural context of the book of Ben Sira. These two tasks, I will delve into in the sections below.

31) A. Jordan Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 272.

3. Interpretation on Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24

3.1. Proverbs 8:1-36³²⁾

The structure of Proverbs 8 differs from scholars.³³⁾ Waltke interprets Proverbs 8 as a complete unit composed of seven sub-sections with five verses each to form the Wisdom's introduction, lesson, and conclusions: Introduction (vs. 1-5, 6-10), Lesson (vs. 12-16, 17-21, 22-26, 27-31), Conclusion (vs. 32-36).³⁴⁾ Yet, the section of Proverbs 8:22-31 introduces independent material so abruptly that it disrupts the smooth flow of the text as a whole.³⁵⁾ I attempt to divide the text into three parts: vs. 1-21, 22-31, 32-36. As we see below, vs. 1-21 and vs. 32-36 are corresponding to each other in Wisdom's call and her benefits. The preexistence of Wisdom in vs. 22-31 is placed at the center. We can find a consistent appearance of the name of YHWH in each section (A 8:13; B 8:22; A' 8:35).

1-21	Wisdom's Call and the Blessings	A
22-31	Wisdom's Preexistence and Prevalence	B
32-36	Wisdom's Call and the Blessings	A'

32) A part of the discussion in this section comes from the previous article of mine: Keun Jo Ahn, "A Rhetorical and Theological Study on the Personified Woman Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs," *JOTS* 27.1 (2021), 131-165.

33) Five sections: vss. 1-3, 4-11, 12-21, 22-31, 32-36 (Leo G. Perdue, *Proverbs* [Louisville: John Knox Press, 2000], 138); Four sections: 1-5, 6-21, 22-31, 32-36 (Raymond C. van Leeuwen, *The Book of Proverbs* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997], 88-96); Three sections: 1-3, 4-31, 32-36 (Jung Woo Kim, *Proverbs*, [Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of of Korean, 2007], 281-282).

34) Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs 1-15*, 392-393.

35) R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 120.

3.1.1. Section A (8:1-21)

- a 1-3 Wisdom's call at crossroads and gates
- b 4-5 Learn prudence and intelligence
- c 6-9 Reasons to hear Wisdom
- d 10-11 Value of Wisdom
- e 12 "I, Wisdom" (אני־חכמה)
- X 13 The Fear of the Lord**
- e' 14 "I, Understanding" (אני־בִּינה)
- d' 15-16 Function of Wisdom
- c' 17-19 Reasons to love Wisdom
- b' 20 Walk in righteousness and justice
- a' 21 Blessings of those who respond Wisdom

The beginning and end show an envelope structure: a call of wisdom and the result of responding to it (a-a'). Furthermore, focusing on verse 13 (x) reveals a chiastic structure in the entire passage. The way of wisdom is prudence and righteousness (b-b'). Truth as well as wealth are given to those who hear and love wisdom (c-c'). Value of wisdom is invaluable. Even it functions as ruling principles of kings and rulers (d-d'). Verses 12 and 14 convey "I-statement" (e-e') emphasizing the central verse 13.

This first section of chapter 8 displays traditional teachings of wisdom in Israel: truthful mouth (6), wisdom better than jewels (10-11, 19), "the fear of Yahweh" as hatred of evil (13). principle of righteous rule (15), reward of wealth and prosperity (18, 21). One specific character of wisdom in this section throughout is personal and experiential: wisdom's call at crossroads and gates (1-3); learning and hearing wisdom (4-9); taking wisdom instead of jewels (10-11, 19); king's rule by wisdom (15-16); loving and walking in wisdom (17-21). Above all, one can live by wisdom, "the fear of Yahweh," by rejecting evils such as pride, arrogance and perverted speech (13). This wisdom is practical and applicable in everyday life. However, the following section B presents a different aspect of wisdom.

3.1.2. Section B (8:22-31)

We have a mythical hymn of wisdom in this section. Wisdom had existed before God created the cosmos (22). Here the wisdom goes beyond time and space (23-29). The wisdom even emerges as a master artisan or designer of God's creation (30³⁶). That is why she rejoices in the created world and finds pleasure in the human race (31). Due to the supernatural features of wisdom, she seems not to be personal and experiential anymore. Yet, the envelope structure of this section manifests some contact points of wisdom with the physical world.

22	Introduction: Beginning of God's work	<u>A' Preexistence of wisdom</u>
a	23 Ages ago	B Eternity -> time
b	24 Being brought forth first	
b'	25 Being brought forth first	
a'	26 Before creation	
c	27 Heavens; Boundary ³⁷	B' Infinity -> space
d	28 Clouds and fountains	
c'	29 Sea and Earth: Boundary	
e	30 Master designer ³⁸ and His delight	B'' Fullness -> blessing ³⁹
31	Conclusion: Rejoicing in the world	<u>A' Immanence of wisdom</u>

36) The translation of אֲמוֹן (*Amon*; master worker or artisan) in verse 30aα differs from scholars: וְאִדְּרִי אֲצִלְי אֲמוֹן. "Then I was beside him, like a master worker" (NRSV) cf. "wisdom, the fashioner of all things" (Wisdom of Solomon 7:22); "There I was with him, as artisan" (Murphy, *Proverbs*, 47) "little child" (Perdue, *Proverbs*, 145); "I was beside him, the Creator" (Jung Woo Kim, "A Study on Translating the Nature of the Wisdom and Its Role in Creation in Proverbs 8:22-31," *JBTR* 47 (2020), 25-26, 29. Kim explains אֲמוֹן as apposition to God (אֲצִלְי of אֲמוֹן) functioning accusative of state (B. K. Waltke & M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 171).

37) Both verses 27 and 29 introduce the verb חָקַק which means to make a limitation, resulting in space out of infinity.

38) אֲמוֹן (*Amon*) as master worker or artisan.

Wisdom existed before the world and yet she has enjoyed being within the world (A-A'). Wisdom is transcendental in terms of time and space but immanent in terms of fullness of the earth (B-B'-B"). This section B does not just celebrate an independent myth of a kind of goddess Wisdom.⁴⁰⁾ Instead, wisdom entertains both godly and bodily dimensions.⁴¹⁾ The eternal and infinite wisdom from ages ago now becomes available in daily life of the physical world.

What does the author of this mythical hymn mean by wisdom? What characteristics of wisdom does this hymn signify? The answer lies in verse 31.

מְשַׁחֶקֶת בְּתֵבֵל אֶרְצוֹ וְשַׁעֲשֵׂי אֶחָבָי אָדָם
Rejoicing in the world of His land
and my delight was with the sons of man [my translation]

I believe that the ancient Israelite sage utilized the Ancient Near Eastern literary material such as the Egyptian creation myth, “Heliopolitan Cosmogony.”⁴²⁾ However, the sage of the Proverbs adapted old mythological resources for their purpose due to the sensitiveness of Israelite monolatry.⁴³⁾ The essence of this song is to emphasize the journey of wisdom from “preexistence” (22; A) to “immanence” (31; A'). The Lady Wisdom is not deified

39) Claus Westermann, *Blessings in the Bible and the Life of the Church* (Philadelphia; Westminster, 1978), 37.
40) R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1965), 39, 69-71.
41) וָאֵהִיָּה שְׂעֵשִׂים יוֹם יוֹם (30aβ): “I was daily His delight.” This verse reminds us with the scene in Gen 1:31: “God saw everything that he had made...it was very good.” The “daily delight” indicates the satisfaction of God with the physical world of its beauty and fullness. The goodness of the world derives from the wisdom by which the Creator has made the Cosmos.
42) M. P. Horne, *Proverbs-Ecclesiastes* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 126.
43) Scott, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 71

but personified among “the sons of man” in the world that God created. Still, the personal and experiential wisdom of Israel is maintained. The author of this hymn celebrates the beauty and goodness of wisdom of the created world including humans. Wisdom is the principle of creation that is prevalent all over the world. Yet, this wisdom comes from before creation. The divine wisdom is incarnated. The wisdom is perceived and embodied among the people as the following section reveals.

3.1.3. Section C (8:32-36)

Now, section C distinctly instructs the young (“my children”; 32) on how to encounter the wisdom. All they have to do is to watch and wait everyday at her gates to listen to her (34). The place they meet her shifts from the public place of crossroads (section A) to the private setting of her house door. The relationship develops into a more intimate dialogue and friendship.⁴⁴⁾ This close communication eventually leads human life to eudemonics.

32 Listen, Happy those who..(אשרי)	A
33a Hear and be wise	B
33b Do not neglect it	C
34 Happy...who listens (אשרי)	A'
35 Life and Lord's favor	B'
36 Who misses me to love death	C'

The exclamation of ‘Ashrei’ (אֲשֶׁרִי) in verses 32 and 34 builds a parallel structure. Those who listen and keep the ways of wisdom are blessed. In particular, verse 34 portrays the passionate desire and love between a couple.⁴⁵⁾ It corresponds to

44) cf. סֹדֶר יְהוָה לִירָאָיו וּבְרִיתוֹ לְהוֹרִיעֵם (The **friendship** of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them: NRSV)

3.2. Sirach 24:1-34

Ben Sira also explores the spread of wisdom across different domains and highlights its paradoxical nature. The following chiasmic structure of Sirach 24 proves these points. Yet, it focuses on the identification of wisdom with the law of Moses.

- A 1-2 Wisdom praises Herself in the Divine Assembly
- B 3-8 Spatial transition from Cosmos to Israel
- C 9-12 Temporal presence from Eternity to Jerusalem
- D 13-17 Wisdom praises Herself as Delightful Trees
- E 18⁴⁸-22 Wisdom's call and blessings
- X 23 Wisdom identified with Torah**
- E' 24⁴⁹ Assurance of the salvation
- D' 25-27 Ben Sira praises Torah as Brimful Rivers
- C' 28 Unfathomable wisdom beyond time
- B' 29 Inscrutable wisdom beyond space
- A' 30-33⁵⁰ Ben Sira praises himself in the Academy

It begins and ends with praises (A-A'). The wisdom, after searching for her place even through the abyss and sea, has wondrously resided in Israel(B). Yet, the thought of wisdom cannot be fathomed by the sea nor by the abyss (B'). The wisdom ages ago has mysteriously taken root in Jerusalem (C). That is why those who live in an allocated time cannot comprehend wisdom fully (C'). Wisdom praises herself, and Ben Sira acclaims Torah, comparing them to pleasant trees and overflowing rivers, respectively (D-D'). As the woman wisdom in the Proverbs calls people to listen and love (ex. Prov 8:1-21,

48) v. 18 is absent in LXX.

49) v. 24 is absent in LXX; the issue of salvation of God (soteriology) in covenant relationship had been unfamiliar in the wisdom tradition and yet Ben Sira started to emphasize 'salvation' for those who fear God: "The spirit of those who fear the Lord will live, for their hope is in him who saves them." (Sir 34:14-15)

50) v. 34 seems to be misplaced from 33:18.

32-36), the mother wisdom invites people to their benefits (E). The voice of wisdom again makes sure of the grace given to those who trust in the Lord (E'). Finally, the identity of wisdom emerges as the law of Moses, Torah (X).

3.2.1. Wisdom and Law

The character of the multilateral wisdom recurs in the text of Ben Sira. The wisdom journeys through various regions of the heavens up high and the abyss way down (Sir 24:4-5). She has transferred from the transcendental dimension (Sir 24:9) to immanent site in Jerusalem among Israelites (Sir 24:10-12). The antithetical trait of accessible and inaccessible wisdom reiterates as well. On the one hand, those who come to the wisdom can enjoy her fruits and inheritance (Sir 24:18-22). On the other hand, nobody can grasp the wisdom completely since her counsel is beyond comprehension (Sir 24:28-29). Ben Sira who has received the heritage of the wisdom tradition conveys similar points as we have observed in Proverbs 8.

However, the central issue of Ben Sira in 24:23 shows a radical difference from his predecessor. Wisdom has ended up with the 'law of Moses'. She is not any more something enigmatic behind a veil of mystery. Surely enough, the origin of wisdom lies in the heavens (Sir 1:4; 24:2-4, 9) traversing every corner of the cosmos (Sir 24:5-7). Despite her transcendental character, wisdom has been finally manifested at Zion as the decree of Yahweh (24:8, 10-12). The function of wisdom turns out to maintain the covenantal relationship between God and his people of Israel. It is this tabernacling of wisdom that the Torah can be identified with the wisdom, Martin Hengel considers the wisdom in Sirach 24 as a kind of 'universal reason' that is equivalent to Stoic 'logos'.⁵¹⁾ To the contrary, Ben Sira in the text highlights a concrete wisdom which is condensed

to the law of Moses in Israel.

Scholars have discussed that Ben Sira does not refer to the law (νόμος) of Moses, the Pentateuch itself, but *torah*, which is general teaching in the form of wisdom instruction.⁵²⁾ They point out that Ben Sira nowhere cites commandment from the Pentateuch to support his moral advice.⁵³⁾ For example, there is no citation of the Decalogue No. 5, “Honor your father and mother” (Exod 20:12), when Ben Sira teaches “Duties toward Parents” in Sirach 3:1-16. However, Skehan and Di Lella comments that Ben Sira had preserved the legal tradition of the Pentateuch and extended it into his interpretation and application.⁵⁴⁾ According to them, the fifth commandment of the Decalogue is the first one to which a promise is attached: “Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD, your God is giving you.” (NRSV). By adapting this concept of reward, Ben Sira developed his idea of Jewish legal doctrines of atonement and mediation as in Sirach 3:3-4⁵⁵⁾. Ben Sira was a Jewish sapiential-oriented scribe in the time of Hellenism. Yet, it does not mean that

51) Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism 2*, tr. by Jung Su Park (Seoul: Nanam, 2012), 160; *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh. vor Christus* (Tübingen: Mohn Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, 1988).

52) Pancratius C. Beentjes, “Ben Sira and His Grandson on Torah and Wisdom: Similar or Divergent Views?” in *Between Wisdom and Torah: Discourses on Wisdom and Law in Second Temple Judaism*, eds. JiSeong J. Kwon and Seth A. Bledsoe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023), 57-61; George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Ancient Judaism and Christian Origins: Diversity, Continuity, and Transformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 41; John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 44-45.

53) J. T. Sanders, “When Sacred Canopies Collide the Reception of the Torah of Moses in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple-Period,” *JSJ* 32.2 (2001), 123.

54) Skehan & Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 155.

55) Those who honor their father atone for sins, and those who respect their mother are like those who lay up treasure(NRSV).

he disregarded the legal tradition of the Pentateuch. He does bear in mind Mosaic law when he mentions νόμος.

3.2.2. Eulogy of the Torah

A detailed interpretation of the verse 23 divulges the association between the covenant and Mosaic law in Ben Sira.

ταῦτα πάντα βίβλος διαθήκης θεοῦ ὑψίστου
All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, 23a
νόμον ὃν ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν Μωυσῆς
the law that Moses commanded us 23b
κληρονομίαν συναγωγᾶς Ἰακωβ
as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob. 23c

It is significant to find the emphasis on “covenant” (διαθήκη; 23a) in wisdom tradition. Before Ben Sira, the canonical wisdom literature has not called its attention to the Israelite specific relationship with God. Instead, sages have discussed general concerns of human happiness (Proverbs), suffering (Job), or vanities of life (Ecclesiastes). Jesus Ben Sira was exposed to the Hellenistic culture, which celebrated universalism of humanities and natural world. Yet, it appears that Ben Sira chose to swim against the current by retaining the traditional legal heritage of Israel.⁵⁶⁾ When he mentioned “the covenant of the Most High God,” no other wisdom materials than the Pentateuch itself was referred.⁵⁷⁾ Di Lella affirms, “The book of the covenant (23a)

56) Saul M. Olyan, “Ben Sira’s Relationship to the Priesthood,” *HTR* 80.3 (1987), 261–286.

57) James L. Crenshaw affirms that most allusions that Ben Sira speaks about covenant or promises derive from Pentateuchal traditions: James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 141,

is an expression taken from Exod 24:7.”⁵⁸⁾

Moreover, it is striking to find Sirach 24:23b and Deuteronomy 33:4a identical.

νόμον ὃν ἐνετείλατο ἡμῖν Μωυσῆς

תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה לְפָנֵינוּ

The law that Moses commanded us.

When Ben Sira expounds his wisdom discourse he does so as a scribe (סופר) of the law.⁵⁹⁾ He has preserved both the sapiential and legal traditions. Verse 23b clarifies that “all this” (23a), indicating previous verses 3-22 about wisdom, converges on the traditional ‘law of Moses.’⁶⁰⁾ Already, Ben Sira has occasionally explicated parallel status of wisdom to the law of Moses: 1:11-30; 6:32-37; 15:1; 19:20; 21:6; 23:27. Throughout his writing, Ben Sira does not veer towards the Hellenistic generalizations of his time. Instead, he maintains a Jewish emphasis on the Pentateuch, embodying a traditionalist approach.⁶¹⁾

Verse 23c demonstrates the most evident identity of wisdom as the law of Moses. The three Greek words, κληρονομία, σὺ ναγαγή, Ἰακώβ carry traditional covenantal terminology of

142, 144. Also, Wright III states, “where Ben Sira refers to Torah or Law he means Mosaic Torah.”: Benjamin G. Wright III, “Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy in the Book of Ben Sira,” in *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of ‘Torah’ in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. eds. Bernd U. Schipper and D. Andrew Teeter (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 164.

58) Skehan & Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 336.

59) H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Cosmology of P and Theological Anthropology in the Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sira,” in *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture*. ed. C. Evans (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 69–113.

60) Schmidt, *Wisdom, Cosmos, and Cultus in the Book of Sirach*, 267.

61) Skehan & Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 75; Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 66-67.

Israelite cultus.⁶²⁾ This phrase again directly derives from Deuteronomy 33:4b.

κληρονομίαν συναγωγᾶς Ἰακωβ

מִוִּרְשָׁה קְהִלַּת יַעֲקֹב

Heritage for the congregation of Jacob

With regard to the “possession” (מִוִּרְשָׁה), Exodus 6:8 witnesses Yahweh’s particular relationship with Israel by promising the land as their *morasha*. This verse is followed by the typical decree of covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel (Exod 6: 7⁶³⁾). Regarding the term “congregation” (קְהִלָּה or קְהִלָּה), which corresponds to συναγωγή, Deuteronomy 5:22 delineates the meeting of the chosen as “all your assembly” (כָּל-קְהִלְכֶּם), which has heard the Decalogue (Deut 5:7-21) and entered into the covenant relationship.⁶⁴⁾ Gerald T. Sheppard regards Ben Sira’s citation of Deuteronomy 33:4 as a recapitulation of the essence of the entire Mosaic blessing (Deut. 33), That is a eulogy of the Torah which God gave Moses and the people at Sinai.⁶⁵⁾

Why does Ben Sira commemorate the “eulogy of the Torah” in the center of the wisdom hymn? It must be related to his identification of wisdom with the law of Moses. John J. Collins does not view the confluence as substantial but rather as rhetorical, stating that “the assertion that wisdom *is* the book of the law may be regarded as the natural culmination of Sirach’s

62) When Israelite prophets speak of the proper noun, Jacob, they stresses the specific covenantal relationship of Israel with their Yahweh; Isa 14:1; Jer 2:4; Ezek 20:5; Hos 12:2; Amos 3:13; Mic 2:12 and etc.

63) I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.

64) Num 16:3; 19:20; 20:4, 6, 10, 12; Deut 9:10; 10:4; 18:16; 23:1-3, 8; 31:30; 33:4; etc.

65) Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 61-62.

rhetoric.”⁶⁶) However, Sirach 24 describes the journey of wisdom which is neither rhetorical nor spatial. Ben Sira transparently proclaims that the wisdom *is* essentially the law of Moses by quoting the specific verse 4 in Deuteronomy 33.

3.2.3. Preface and Epilogue of Deut 33

Deuteronomy 33 in its entirety contains Moses’ blessings for the 12 tribes of Israel.⁶⁷) Duane L. Christensen recognizes that the blessings (Deut 33:6-25) are enveloped by “Proem” (Deut 33:2-5) and “Closing” (Deut 33:26-29a).⁶⁸) Surprisingly, both the beginning and ending of Deuteronomy 33 deal with the transition of divine presence from the transcendental sphere to earthly territory.

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| 2 | YHWH’s epiphany on Sinai with the heavenly host | A |
| 3 | Words of God given to the favored people | B |
| 4 | Law of Moses inherited to the assembly of Jacob | B’ |
| 5 | YHWH’s reign established in Jeshrun | A’ |

Verse 2 depicts the almighty coming of Yahweh onto or from the mount Sinai with the heavenly host. Nobody can approach to this awful presence (A; cf. Exod 9:12, 21). Yet, the awe-inspiring manifestation of God ultimately culminates in the divine rule in Jeshurun (A’). This transition is mediated by the

66) Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 52.

67) Scholars compare Deut 33 with Gen 49 which also delivers the blessing of Jacob toward his 12 sons: Joel D. Heck, “A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 147 (1990), 16-31; Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 185; Frank M. Cross and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1950), 77.

68) Duane L. Christensen, “Two Stanzas of a Hymn in Deuteronomy 33,” *Biblica* 65.3 (1984), 388.

law of Moses (B-B’), signifying that the untouchable became accessible through the words of God.

26	Transcendental manifestation of God	A
27a	Eternal habitation ⁶⁹⁾ for Jeshrun	B
27b-28	Safety and prosperity for Jacob	B’
29	Immanent happiness of people	A’

The concluding part of Deuteronomy 33 repeats the mysterious descent of God from the heaven to the earth. Verse 26 pictures heavenly sphere of divine activity (A). Yet, the transcendental God endows his people with earthly happiness and salvation (A’). This transformation occurs through God tabernacling (מִעֲנָה) among the Israelites, ensuring safety and prosperity for Jacob (B-B’). Verse 29 as the last verse of the whole chapter betrays a sapiential overtone: אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל (“Happy are you, Israel”; cf. Prov 8:32, 34).

If we put together both ends of chapter 33, a parallel structure emerges.

2	YHWH’s epiphany at Sinai	A
3	YHWH’s words given	B
4	Law of Moses inherited to Jacob	C
5	YHWH’s reign as King	D
26	Divine majesty through skies	A’
27a	Divine habitation installed	B’
27b-28	Success and prosperity for Israel	C’
29	YHWH’s salvation for the people	D’

Yahweh’s transcendental march (A) had been transformed into the words of God (B), which was inherited to Jacob as the law

69) מִעֲנָה אֱלֹהֵי קָדֶם (33:27aα) “habitation/dwelling of the eternal God” or “the ancient God is a refuge.”

of Moses (C) establishing Yahweh's reign in Jeshrun (D). In the epilogue again, mythic manifestation of God (A') had been embodied in the refuge for Israel (B'), which represents security and prosperity (C'), confirming happiness of Israel (D'). Duane attempts to combine the structure of the preface and epilogue of Deuteronomy 33 to emphasize the theme of Yahweh's sovereign kingship in Jeshrun centering on two verses, v.5 and v.26.⁷⁰ However, both the preface and epilogue of the chapter allude to a movement of divine interest from the celestial to the terrestrial. They focus on the happiness of Israel, thanks to the graceful embodiment of sacredness on earth, which is the law of Moses.

The structure above includes all the elements we have observed both from Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24: Mythic dimension (A-A'); Divine presence among people (B-B'); Heritage of Israelite teaching and its reward (C-C'); Happiness and Salvation by Yahweh's reign (D-D'). Both authors of Deuteronomy and Sirach make the revelation of God tangible. By accepting the legal tradition of Israelite religion (Deut 33:4), Ben Sira explicitly identifies wisdom with the law of Moses as the incarnate presence of God.

4. Historical and Cultural Factors

Jesus Ben Sira was more of a conservator than an innovator. He was a traditionalist, rather than a pioneer. Here we can find a radical difference between 'Ecclesiastes' and 'Ecclesiasticus'. While 'Qoheleth' emphasizes experiences of human life with his anti-orthodox teachings, Ben Sira upholds the orthodox traditions of divine revelation in Judaism. What has caused this disparity despite the fact that they are contemporaries?⁷¹

70) Christensen, "Two Stanzas of a Hymn in Deuteronomy 33," 389.

As we have seen above, wisdom in the Hebrew Bible reveals her multifaceted features. That is why the wisdom tradition developed into several divisions during the intertestamental period. Cornelis Bennema identifies four strands of wisdom tradition that emerged after the canonical wisdom literature:⁷²⁾ 1. Torah-centred Wisdom tradition; 2. Spirit-centered Wisdom tradition; 3. Apocalyptic Wisdom tradition; 4. Qumranian Wisdom tradition. As Bennema discusses, Ben Sira surely represents the “Torah-centered” stream.⁷³⁾ In contrast to Qoheleth, Ben Sira reverts to traditional values of Israelite religion. Oda Wischmeyer discusses that the identification of wisdom with the law of Moses was a strategy to combat Hellenism.⁷⁴⁾ Most of scholars agree that Ben Sira belonged to a priestly group or the circle of the scribe-sage subjugated to Jerusalem priesthood and temple.⁷⁵⁾ It is obvious when we read Ben Sira’s praise of the High Priest Simon II (219-199 BCE) in Sirach 50:1-21. His deference toward priesthood supports a close relationship with the temple authorities, even though no passages plainly indicate that Ben Sira was himself a priest.⁷⁶⁾ This socio-political context of Ben Sira explains his conservative attitude toward Hellenism.

71) Crenshaw discusses the date of the Qoheleth as the middle of the third century: Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 132. However, he also considers later time in the middle of the second century by referring to the discussion of Whitley: Charles F. Whitley, *Koheleth: His Language and Thought* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979), 119-146. In spite of the disputation of the book, the influences of the Hellenistic culture are evident in the Qoheleth.

72) Cornelis Bennema, “The Strands of Wisdom Tradition in Intertestamental Judaism: Origins, Developments and Characteristics,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 52.1 (2001), 61-82.

73) Bennema, “The Strands of Wisdom Tradition,” 68.

74) Oda Wischmeyer, *Die Kultur des Buches Jesus Sirach* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 199-200.

75) JiSeong James Kwon, “Sapientialised Priest?: Reconsidering the Priestly Torah in Sirach,” *ZAW* 134.2 (2022), 215.

76) Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 37.

On the other hand, it is apparent that Ben Sira, as a sage, assimilated all previous traditions and articulated a new conception of the law of Moses as intertwined with wisdom. He was a wisdom teacher conducting a school or academy, presumably in Jerusalem (Sir 51:23).⁷⁷⁾ He does not entirely adopt an antagonistic position toward Hellenistic culture but accommodate it. He endorses the Greek banquets encouraging readers to participate them, subscribes to Greek medical practice,⁷⁸⁾ and employs Greek form of praise, encomium.⁷⁹⁾ According to Blenkinsopp, Ben Sira responds to the challenge of Hellenism in his own way: as a defense of Judaism, he manages to declare that Israel has its own wisdom which is superior to that of the Greeks.⁸⁰⁾ Surrounded by gentile influences, he reminds loyal Jews of their traditional background, “showing them how they can integrate Greek ways with their Jewish faith without disloyalty to God.”⁸¹⁾

Scholars agree that Hebrew sages must have been prepared to engage with Greek philosophy, as they had already demonstrated a critical and universal way of thinking in Job and Qoheleth.⁸²⁾ For Ben Sira, wisdom serves as a bridge between Hebrew heritage and Hellenistic culture, ultimately proclaiming that true wisdom is found within the Mosaic law.⁸³⁾

77) J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 162.

78) It is surprising to find how harshly later rabbinic Judaism reject the medical profession, “the best among physicians is destined for Gehenna.” (*Kiddushin* iv 14)

79) Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 149.

80) Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, 163.

81) John G. Snaith, “Ecclesiasticus: A Tract for the Times,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in honour of J. A. Emerton*, eds. John Day, Robert P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 181.

82) Ahn, *Development of the Hebrew Wisdom Tradition*, 107-113.

83) Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, 140.

5. Paradoxical Character of Hebrew Wisdom

Proverbs 8 reveals the inscrutable nature of Hebrew wisdom. Sirach 24, on the other hand, identifies wisdom clearly as the law of Moses. This change becomes comprehensible if we refer to the heritage of the Deuteronomistic teaching. The observation on Deuteronomy 33 above has focused on the transition of divine presence from the transcendental to the immanence. Both Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24 share this paradoxical character of Hebrew wisdom. As a faithful scribe, Ben Sira preserved the legal traditions of the Hebrew faith.⁸⁴⁾ As a wise teacher, however, he also had to respond to the challenges posed by the prevailing Hellenistic culture. The way he undertook was to utilize the paradoxical essence of Hebrew wisdom.

Hebrew wisdom is both inaccessible and accessible. As we have observed above, Proverbs 8 contains incongruous features of experiential and non-experiential wisdom. While the personified wisdom raises her voice at the gate and crossroads (Prov 8:1-21, 32-36), the mysterious wisdom elucidates her mythical origin beyond time and space (Prov 8:22-31). This confluence of antithetical traits of wisdom is also found in one of the Hebrew wisdom literature, the Book of Job. A wisdom hymn in Job 28 represents inaccessible character of wisdom (28:20-22).

Where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place
of understanding?

It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from
the birds of the air.

Abaddon and Death say, 'We have heard a rumor of it with
our ears.' (NRSV)

84) In particular, those cultic traditions evinced in his emphasis on the priestly service in the Tent of Meeting (Sir 24:10) along with his praise of Aaron in Sir 45:6-22.

The sage of this song⁸⁵⁾ confesses, “God (alone) understands the way to it, and he knows its place” (28:23). Job’s friends also assert the divine and inscrutable nature of wisdom (Eliphaz 5:9; 15:8; 22:2-3, 12; Bildad 8:9; Zophar 11:6-9; Elihu 36:22-26; 37:5). Even Job laments over the hidden knowledge of God (9:4-11). By contrast, one of the cardinal issues of Job is the accessibility of God’s wisdom. The sage persistently seeks to understand the will of God by invoking a ‘divine-human tribunal’ (13:20ff). Eventually, the mystery of wisdom in creation is revealed in the whirlwind speeches of God (38-41). Job ultimately asserts his acquisition of divine wisdom through his ‘sublime’ experience of God (42:2-5).⁸⁶⁾ In fact, the paradoxical nature of wisdom, with both inaccessible and accessible traits, was familiar to Israelite sages. They were not troubled by juxtaposing polar opposites in wisdom’s manifestation. Ben Sira even integrated these antithetical traits, embodying the transcendental aspect of wisdom within the immanent law of Moses.

According to Blenkinsopp, a distinction between unfathomable and fathomable wisdom existed when Deuteronomy was redacted. In Moses’ final sermon, Deuteronomy 30:11-14⁸⁷⁾ presupposes “a hidden wisdom, an esoteric knowledge, which God has not chosen to reveal, and which should not be sought

85) Scholars dispute the identity of the speaker of this song. However, it is widely agreed that the poem itself in chapter 28 was originally an independent composition: Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, 153.

86) Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 236-237, 241-243, 252-256.

87) Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. (NRSV)

in heaven or overseas.”⁸⁸⁾ Deuteronomy 29:29 evidently demonstrates this point: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.”⁸⁹⁾ The movement of wisdom from the heavenly to the earthly dimension in Deuteronomy 30, along with Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24, is a consistent tendency in the wisdom tradition.

Ben Witherington III recognizes that Ben Sira reasserted the old wisdom mixed with some new and original thoughts.⁹⁰⁾ Traditional Hebrew wisdom has been preserved, reinterpreted, and applied anew. The identification of wisdom with the law of Moses signifies the apex of the development of the Hebrew wisdom tradition prior to the time of Jesus.⁹¹⁾ This is made possible by the malleability of wisdom, which entertains incongruous traits of paradoxical pairs such as the transcendental and immanent, the mysterious and revealed, the divine and personified. ‘Sapientializing’ the legal tradition of Hebrew Yahwism of Ben Sira⁹²⁾ also contributes to his didactic purpose. By bringing wisdom and the law of Moses into relationship, Ben Sira links them with his major theme, ‘fear of the Lord’: “The whole of wisdom is fear of the Lord, and in all wisdom there is the fulfillment of the law” (Sir 19:20).⁹³⁾

Ben Sira’s identification of wisdom with the law of Moses

88) Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament*, 152.

89) With regard to the impact of the Book of Deuteronomy on Ben Sirah, refer to the following material: Timo Veijola, “Law and Wisdom. The Deuteronomistic Heritage in Ben Sira’s Teaching of the Law,” in *Leben nach der Weisung: Exegetisch-historische Studien zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 144-164.

90) Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 89.

91) Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom*, 99.

92) Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct*, 19-71.

93) Wright III, “Torah and Sapiential Pedagogy in the Book of Ben Sira.” 157.

is not merely a work of coalescence or confluence but one of integration. He does not erase the characteristic multi-faceted nature of Hebrew wisdom to create his own apologetics against Hellenistic philosophy. Instead, he mobilizes the essential trait of this wisdom, which embraces the paradoxical features of divine revelation. Hebrew wisdom is not just a universal concept or a moral perfection. The wisdom ceaselessly runs through different dimensions of existence, moving from the celestial to the secular, from the cosmological to the personal, from the transcendental to the immanent.

Wisdom is not just the order of creation or the principle of morality. It is the revelation of God that unfolds who God is. In the Old Testament, ‘the fear of Yahweh’ prepares covenant people to enter into a right relationship with God. In the Hellenistic period, the revelation of God embodied in the Law of Moses preserves the identity of the observant as God’s people. In the New Testament, the wisdom finally becomes the son of man⁹⁴⁾ to disclose God the Father (John 14:9⁹⁵⁾). At last, the journey of wisdom culminates in the incarnated Word, through which people on earth are transformed into children of God.

94) It reminds us of Proverbs 31:10-31 where the wisdom becomes אִשְׁתִּיחִיל (woman of valor/capable lady) in the final chapter of the book.

95) Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

6. Conclusion

I started this paper with a question about the two sides⁹⁶⁾ of Hebrew wisdom: the transcendental wisdom in Proverbs 8 and the immanent wisdom in a written form of Torah in Sirach 24. Through interpretations of each text, I have found a consistent operation of wisdom whose occupied dimension changes from one to another. Even the introduction and conclusion of Moses' blessings to 12 tribes in Deuteronomy 33 assures of the movement of divine presence from mythical to physical resulting in happiness and salvation of covenant people. This specific mode of wisdom emerges due to the anomalous nature of Hebrew wisdom, which is both transcendental and immanent. Hebrew sages have utilized this paradoxical nature of wisdom to reveal the character of God in each contemporary world. The author of Proverbs 8 introduces both aspects of wisdom, accessible in Prov 8:1-21 and 8:32-36; inaccessible in Prov 8:22-31. Ben Sira in Sirach 24 displays the mythic origin of wisdom (Sir 24:1-9) and the substantial presence of wisdom (Sir 24:10-12), side by side. Then, he proclaims the transcendental wisdom is the immanent law of Moses (Sir 24:23). Throughout the wisdom tradition, multi-faceted character of wisdom function to unfold the revelation of God more effectively. I have defined the movement of wisdom throughout history as "the journey of wisdom." This is the characteristic trait of Hebrew wisdom. The consummation of this wisdom journey is realized in the coming of Jesus as the Word incarnate.

This study is not a comprehensive research on the development of Hebrew wisdom. I have just investigated different pro-

96) It is interesting to find the same word in Job 11:6, חֵכְמָה בִּיכְפָלִים לְתוֹשִׁיָּהּ תַּעֲלֹמָה (secret of wisdom that has 'double sides' in comprehension; my translation) employed by one of Job's friends who are traditional sages.

files of wisdom in Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24. Unexpectedly, I have found more consistent features than disparities due to the antithetical trait of Hebrew wisdom, which applies appropriately into each particular circumstances of the wise. In this paper, I have had a chance to open the case of the book of Job; how the author of Job integrate both inscrutable and scrutable aspects of wisdom together. Yet, I am not able to visit the case of Qoheleth due to the limitation of time and pages. For further and complete exploration, a study on wisdom's journey within the book of Ecclesiastes as well as other Apocryphal wisdom material such as Wisdom of Solomon or Qumran's wisdom material is inevitable.

<Key Words>

Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, Wisdom, immanence, transcendence

<주요어>

잠언 8장, 집회서 24장, 지혜, 내재성, 초월성

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<Abstract>

Journey of Wisdom from Proverbs 8 to Sirach 24: A Characteristic Trait of Hebrew Wisdom

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This paper aims to explore how the nature and function of Hebrew wisdom evolved from the period of ancient Israel to the time of ancient Greece. Wisdom in Proverbs 8 reveals a divine nature in creation, while Sirach 24 identifies wisdom with the Law. What has led to these different understandings of wisdom? The main task of this paper is to elucidate the radical traits of Hebrew wisdom: what characteristics of wisdom accommodated the various phases of Israelite Yahwism through the vicissitudes of history? In order to resolve the question, this study undertakes the following steps. First, a review is conducted on how the texts of Proverbs 8 and Sirach 24 have been interpreted by scholars. By doing so, the characteristic features of wisdom will stand out. Second, a comparative study of the two texts is performed using structural analysis and rhetorical criticism. The multifaceted nature of wisdom is commonly found, with both heavenly and earthly dimensions consistently unfolding. However, Ben Sira's identification of wisdom with the law of Moses portrays a transformation of Hebrew wisdom. Third, the historical and cultural impacts on Ben Sira's book are examined. Both conservative and innovative attitudes of a Jewish sage emerge in response to Hellenism. Fourth, paradoxical characteristic of Hebrew wisdom is considered. Focusing on the movement of the Hebrew wisdom from the heavenly

to the earthly dimension, the integration of Ben Sira's 'Hokmah' with 'Torah' is expounded. In conclusion, a summary is provided along with prospective remarks.

This study contributes to illuminating the characteristic trait of Hebrew wisdom as paradoxical. The tradition of Hebrew wisdom portrays multifaceted features that integrate both transcendental and immanent dimensions. The journey of wisdom is ultimately consummated in the Incarnated Wisdom of God, Jesus the Christ.

<초록>

잠언 8장과 집회서 24장에 나타난 지혜의 변천 -히브리 지혜의 특징-

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본 연구의 목적은 고대 이스라엘의 지혜가 헬레니즘 시대에 이르기까지 어떤 변천을 겪는가를 살펴보면서 히브리 지혜의 특징을 규정하는 일이다. 잠언 8장의 하나님의 창조 능력으로서의 초월적 지혜가 집회서 24장에서 어떻게 내재적 지혜로서 모세의 율법과 동일시될 수 있는가의 문제가 주요 과제이다. 이를 위하여, 먼저 학자들의 잠언 8장과 집회서 24장에서의 지혜에 관한 연구들을 고찰한다. 일반적 히브리 지혜의 특징들이 비판적 논의를 통하여 정리될 것이다. 이어서, 잠언 8장과 집회서 24장의 지혜의 성격을 규명하기 위하여 구조분석과 수사학적 비평이 진행될 것이다. 잠언 8장은 전통적 지혜의 묘사가 수미상관의 구조를 이루면서 중앙 부분인 8:22-31에서 선재적 창조자로서의 지혜를 강조한다. 성문에서 들리는 지혜여인의 음성 과 태초의 창조에 참여한 지혜의 모순적 성격이 병렬되어 나타난다. 집회서 24장은 전체 본문의 정중앙인 23절에서 지혜와 모세의 법을 동일시하는 선포를 중심으로 동심원 구조를 형성한다. 집회서 24장 23절 자체는 출애굽기 24장 7절과 신명기 33장 4절을 인용한 것으로 벤 시라는 지혜를 모세의 율법과 직접적으로 연관시키고 있다. 잠언과 집회서의 본문 분석은 공히 지혜의 초월성과 내재성을 여전히 드러내고 있음을 알려준다. 그럼에도 불구하고, 벤 시라의 지혜와 율법의 동일시는 기존의 히브리 지혜전통에서 파격적

인 일이다. 일반적 지혜 개념을 역사적이고 민족적인 율법 개념과 통합시키고 있기 때문이다. 이는 헬레니즘의 문화적인 도전과 유대인들의 신앙적 위기의 시대에 유대인 현자가 취할 수 있었던 최선의 응답이다. 이미 구약시대로부터 내려오던 히브리 지혜의 역설적 특징의 관점에서 당대의 젊은이들의 신앙교육을 위하여 벤 시라가 제시할 수 있었던 적절한 신학적 대안이었다. 신명기로부터 잠언을 비롯한 히브리 지혜문헌을 통과하여 집회서에 이르기까지 히브리 지혜전승은 지혜의 초월성과 내재성이 항상 창조세계 내에서 작동하고 있었다는 사실을 알려주고 있다.

본 연구의 공헌은 히브리 지혜의 역설적 특징을 발견한 것이다. 존재세계의 질서를 설명하는 지혜가 초월적이면서도 내재적으로, 또는 접근 불가하면 서도 접근 가능한 원리로 작동하고 있음을 잠언 8장에서 집회서 24장에 이르는 지혜전승의 변천 과정에서 도출할 수 있었기 때문이다. 더 나아가, 그러한 역설적 특징을 지닌 지혜전승의 기반에서 하나님의 아들인 예수 그리스도의 성육신의 길이 예비되고 있었음을 또한 밝힐 수 있었다. 구약성서에서 신약성서로 이어지는 말씀의 맥락이 히브리 지혜전승을 통해서 설명되고 있다.