

1 and 2 Maccabees

E. J. Bickerman, *The God of the Maccabees* (reprint, Leiden: Brill, 1979). Classic study suggesting that Menelaus was the prime instigator of the persecution.

D. A. deSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 244–79. Concise treatment, highlighting the major themes.

R. Doran, “1 Maccabees,” “2 Maccabees,” *NIB* 4:1–299. Excellent readable commentaries, fully informed by up-to-date scholarship.

———, *2 Maccabees* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012). Full critical commentary.

D. J. Harrington, *The Maccabean Revolt: Anatomy of a Biblical Revolution* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1988). Lucid exposition of the differences between the two historical accounts.

M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (trans. J. Bowden; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 1:267–309. Influential account. Follows Bickerman.

D. R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008). Full critical commentary.

V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 39–265. Alternative to Bickerman’s account.

Supposes that the persecution was a reaction to rebellion.

G. G. Xeravits and J. Zsengellér, eds. *The Books of Maccabees: History, Theology, Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007). Essays on various aspects of the books of Maccabees.

CHAPTER 28

The Deuterocanonical Wisdom Books

BEN SIRA, WISDOM OF SOLOMON, BARUCH

This chapter examines two wisdom books included in the Catholic Old Testament but regarded as Apocrypha in Protestantism: Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon.

The deuterocanonical books that make the greatest theological difference between the Catholic Old Testament and the Protestant and Hebrew Bibles are the wisdom books of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon. These books greatly increase the prominence of wisdom literature in the Catholic Bible, and this material is congenial to the traditional Catholic interest in natural theology. The Wisdom of Solomon is indebted to Greek philosophy in a way that distinguishes it from all other books of the Old Testament. It is also the only book of the Old Testament that professes a belief in the immortality of the soul, an idea that would have enormous importance in the history of the Christian West.

THE WISDOM OF BEN SIRA (ECCLESIASTICUS)

The book of Ben Sira was written in Hebrew, in Jerusalem, in the first quarter of the second century B.C.E. It was well known in Judaism, and is the only book of the Apocrypha that is cited in rabbinic tradition. It was not included in the canon of Hebrew Scriptures, however. Its exclusion may be partly due to its late date, but the book of Daniel, which was included, is later. The obvious difference between the two books is that Daniel is pseudonymous—it supposedly contains the revelations given to Daniel in the Babylonian exile. Ben Sira, in contrast, is known by his own name. That he was known to be a latter-day writer, rather than anything in the content of his book, is likely to have prevented his inclusion in the Scriptures.

Ben Sira (Sirach in Greek) is identified in a preface written by his grandson, who translated the book into Greek. The grandson tells us that he arrived in Egypt in the



The Ptolemaic and Seleucid Empires c. 240 b.c.

thirty-eighth year of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, or 132 B.C.E. The translation was done some time later. According to the grandson, Ben Sira (whom he calls “my grandfather Jesus”) had devoted himself to reading the Law and the Prophets, and the other books of the ancestors. The notice is important, as it shows that the Law and the Prophets were recognized canonical categories at this time. The other writings of the ancestors, however, constituted an open-ended category, and Ben Sira’s book resembled them in kind.

The book is not fully preserved in Hebrew. Some Hebrew citations in the Talmud were always known, but in modern times several fragments of the Hebrew text have come to light.

Fragments of six medieval manuscripts were recovered from the Cairo Geniza in the late nineteenth century. These cover most of chapters 3–16 and fragments of chapters 18–36. Much older fragments were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Some of these are very small fragments, but the poem in 51:13–20 is included in the Psalms Scroll from Qumran Cave 11. Finally, twenty-six leather fragments were found at Masada, the stronghold by the Dead Sea where the Jewish revolutionaries made their last stand against the Romans in 73 C.E. These fragments contain much of chapters 39–44. In all, about 68 percent of the book is now available in Hebrew. The full text is preserved in Greek, Latin, and Syriac. The book enjoyed considerable popularity in Christianity, so that it became known as “the church book,” *Liber Ecclesiasticus*.

As was the case in Proverbs, literary structure is difficult to discern in Ben Sira. The book is divided roughly in two by the great hymn to Wisdom in chapter 24. Much of the first half of the book is taken up with practical instructions, punctuated by poetic passages in praise of wisdom. The second half of the book contains longer, more theological reflections. The instructional part of the book is brought to conclusion with hymns to the Creator in 39:12–35 and 42:15–43:33. The

“Praise of the Fathers,” a long poem in praise of biblical heroes, follows as a kind of epilogue (chaps. 44–50). The book concludes with two poems in chapter 51.

Ben Sira on Women

The practical instruction, found mainly but not exclusively in the first half of the book, deals with matters familiar from ancient wisdom instructions: honor of parents, friendship, treatment of children and slaves, and so on. The most controversial part of this instruction is Ben Sira’s view of women. The sage extols the virtues of the good wife in Sir 26:1–4, 13–18, in a manner similar to Proverbs 31. Admittedly, her virtues are assessed from the husband’s point of view. She is praised for silence and modesty. There