



# Collective Accountability among the Sages of Ancient Israel

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Collective Accountability among the Sages of Ancient Israel

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the subject of  
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## **Collective Accountability among the Sages of Ancient Israel**

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to consider Israel's biblical wisdom traditions comments on collective accountability in a systematic way. In order to accomplish this, each of five biblical wisdom books—Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Ben Sira, and Wisdom of Solomon—will be examined individually. The investigation of each book will include an examination of any statement that refers to collective or individual accountability and of the author's position on the power of wisdom instruction to help the student overcome intergenerational punishment passed down to him by a sinful parent. In addition to a comprehensive look at biblical wisdom books, this study will also consider a proverb concerning collective punishment known from two prophetic books, Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 18, and the use of the divine attribute formula (Exod. 34:6-7), which describes YHWH as a deity who exercises collective punishment and reward, in wisdom texts. My analyses of these investigations produce the following conclusions: 1) The concept of collective accountability is not restricted to Israel's narrative, legal, and prophetic traditions. Israel's sages were familiar with and made use of the concept. 2) Israel's sages' use of collective accountability often differs from the concept's depiction in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. For the sages, collective accountability serves pedagogical functions and vindicates divine justice. 3) The representation of collective accountability in Israel's biblical wisdom tradition is not static. As the wisdom tradition itself

undergoes developments, like including historical and literary references or drawing upon non-biblical philosophical positions, so too does its depiction of collective accountability.

4) Israel's wisdom literature is not, as is often claimed, concerned solely with the individual. Communal notions held importance for Israel's sages.

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## **Chapter One: Collective Accountability among the Sages of Ancient Israel**

### **I. Introduction and Definitions**

The remembrance of one's ancestors and concern for one's descendants are frequently occurring themes in the Hebrew Bible. Israelite men and women often worry about producing offspring and the fates that will befall their progeny in the future. In addition to the concern to ensure a promising future for their offspring, Israelites also appeal to their ancestors to explain their own fortunes as punishment or reward for their ancestors' deeds. These concerns, namely that offspring may suffer or prosper because of the actions of their ancestors, fall under the rubric of collective accountability. Collective accountability, in contrast to individual accountability, involves holding a group, whether it be generations of a family or the members of some other collective, responsible for the actions of an individual. Individual accountability holds only the individual accountable for the consequences of his actions. For actions that provoke individual punishment, the penalty generally fits the crime in accordance with the principle of *lex talionis* (Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21).

Collective accountability does not manifest itself in only one form. The diachronic side of collective accountability, in which one's offspring inherit the consequences of their parents' deeds, is often referred to as intergenerational reward or punishment. The synchronic side of collective accountability, in which the contemporary members of a group prosper or suffer because of the actions of an individual member, is often referred to as intragenerational reward or punishment. These different

manifestations of collective accountability contain further sub-classifications and likely do not share a common origin.<sup>1</sup> The different origins and forms of collective accountability will be discussed in more detail below.

## II. The Problem

Although scholars have investigated the issues associated with collective and individual accountability in Israel's legal, narrative, and prophetic materials, Israel's wisdom literature has largely been ignored with respect to this topic.<sup>2</sup> The dominant trend in Israel's wisdom literature, which is often packaged as the instructions of a father to his son, is to instruct the pupil to avoid the negative consequences associated with sin and to reap the rewards of righteousness.<sup>3</sup> How, according to wisdom literature, do the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, David Daube has proposed a category of collective accountability that involves the suffering of a group because of the actions of its leaders, such as the king or high priest. David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, vol. reprint ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 154. The successor to a sinful leader can even inherit the consequences of his predecessor's sin. Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995), 111. In Mesopotamia, for example, the king holds personal accountability for his actions, and this appears to be related to the fact that his actions hold consequences for his subjects. See Hayim Tadmor, "Monarchy and the Elite in Assyria and Babylonia: The Question of Royal Accountability," in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, ed. S. N Eisenstadt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 203–226. Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, "Ideological Implications of the Problem of Royal Responsibility in the Neo-Assyrian Period," in *Hayim and Miriam Tadmor Volume*, ed. Amnon Ben-Tor, Israel Eph'al, and Peter Machinist, *Eretz-Israel* 27, 2003, 100–110.

<sup>2</sup> One exception is Gordis' work on Job 22:29-30, but studies devoted exclusively to the topic of collective accountability in wisdom literature are rare. Gordis' use of the now outdated terminology "corporate personality," made popular by sociologists Emile Durkheim and Lucien Levy-Bruhl, attests to the need to consider this topic more broadly (i.e., beyond the book of Job) and with the benefit of insights into the field of collective accountability achieved in the last half century. The concept of corporate personality will be discussed below in connection with the work of H. Wheeler Robinson in Section III on the history of scholarship. Robert Gordis, "Corporate Personality in Job: A Note on 22:29-30," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 4 (1945): 54–55. See also Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 135–156.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, not all of Israel's wisdom literature reflects the dominant trends. For example, Job and Qoheleth subvert instruction by forcing a redefinition of wisdom, as will be discussed below.

children of the wicked and of the just fare? Is a child affected by the sins or merits of his ancestors or contemporaries?

Israel's wisdom literature generally recognizes a correspondence between an individual's deeds and the ensuing consequences. Generations of biblical scholars have regarded individual thinking as a hallmark of Israel's wisdom literature. For example, Moshe Weinfeld describes individual retribution as being "rooted in the wisdom (= universalistic) sphere."<sup>4</sup> What does Israel's wisdom literature say about collective accountability? Should one expect to find exclusively individualistic ways of thinking about punishment, as Weinfeld seems to suggest? Or do the collective notions that are so persistent in other areas of the Hebrew Bible<sup>5</sup> also surface in Israel's wisdom literature?

As James Crenshaw has noted, one *Sitz im Leben* of wisdom literature is its use at court to facilitate social interactions, and this suggests that collective notions underlie wisdom literature's worldview because one of the primary functions of wisdom instructions was to ensure societal harmony.<sup>6</sup> Even without this understanding of the function of wisdom literature in the ancient world, the use of wisdom sayings in non-wisdom books of the Bible may prepare the reader of the Bible to expect some treatment of collective accountability in the wisdom books. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel quote the proverb, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18; Jeremiah 31), which appears to be a product of the wisdom tradition. On the

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<sup>4</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 40.

<sup>5</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 30–54.

<sup>6</sup> James L. Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence Upon Historical Literature," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 132. James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 3.

basis of this proverb, should one expect Israel's wisdom literature to espouse collective, rather than individual, accountability? Chapter 7 will address this proverb's relationship to the wisdom tradition and its significance for understanding the wisdom tradition's position on collective accountability.

The existence of a biblical proverb that appears to acknowledge collective punishment as a feature of the way the universe operates invites further investigation into whether or not Israel's wisdom tradition is as individualistic as it is often claimed to be. The presence of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom literature has not received adequate attention from scholars. The scholarly treatment of Proverbs 11:21 demonstrates this point well. Text-critical issues entangle this verse and also 11:18, which, depending on the translation followed, may also offer a comment on collective accountability. The following discussion of Proverbs 11:18, 21 is intended to demonstrate the degree to which the presence of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom literature has been ignored.

### Proverbs 11:18, 21 in Hebrew and Greek with English Translations

Passage	Hebrew	Greek
Proverbs 11:18	<p><i>rāšāʿ ʿōśeh p<sup>ʿ</sup>ullat-šāqer</i>  <i>w<sup>ʿ</sup>zōrēaʿ š<sup>ʿ</sup>dāqā šeker ʾemet</i>                      The wicked earns a wage of deception, but the one sowing righteousness earns a wage of truth.<sup>7</sup></p>	<p><i>asebēs poiei erga adika,</i>  <i>sperma de dikaiōn misthos alētheias.</i>                      The ungodly does unjust work,                      But the seed of the righteous is the wage of truth.</p>
Proverbs 11:21	<p><i>yād lʿyād lōʾ-ynnāqeh rāʿ</i>  <i>w<sup>ʿ</sup>zeraʿ šaddîqîm nimlāt</i>                      Hand to hand,<sup>8</sup> the wicked will not go unpunished, but the seed of the righteous will escape.</p>	<p><i>cheiri cheiras embalōn adikōs ouk atimōrētos estai,</i>  <i>ho de speirōn dikaiosynēn lēmpsetai misthon piston.</i>                      Hand to hand, the one acting wrongfully will not go unpunished,                      But the one sowing righteousness will receive a faithful wage.</p>

The Hebrew version of Prov. 11:18 reads, “The wicked earns a wage of deception, but the one sowing righteousness (*w<sup>ʿ</sup>zōrēaʿ š<sup>ʿ</sup>dāqâ*) earns a wage of truth.”

The Greek translation of this verse reads “seed of (the) righteous” (*sperma de dikaiōn = zeraʿ šaddîqîm*) instead of “one sowing righteousness.” Prov. 11:18 bears several similarities to v. 21. The Greek and Hebrew recensions of Prov. 11:21 reverse the situation found in v. 18: where the Hebrew text of v. 21 reads “seed of (the) righteous” (*zeraʿ šaddîqîm*), the Greek has “one sowing righteousness” (*ho de speirōn dikaiosynēn*).

The Greek translation of Prov. 11:21b does not accurately render the Hebrew text for this verse, but does resemble v. 18b thematically.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic texts in this dissertation are my own.

<sup>8</sup> “Hand to hand” may mean “assuredly.” Some scholars suggest that it may reflect a custom of joining hands at the conclusion of an agreement. Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, The Anchor Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 539. Richard J Clifford, *Proverbs: A Commentary*, 1st ed, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 125.

Two possible explanations for the differences between these versions present themselves. One possibility is that the Greek and Hebrew texts represent two different recensions of the book of Proverbs that were not exactly alike.<sup>9</sup> The other is that the Greek translator of vv. 18 and 21 recognized two graphically similar expressions and accidentally leveled them, either in anticipation or in reminiscence. A later scribe noticed the accidental leveling, but corrected the wrong verse. The other differences in the Greek version of v. 21b would be explained as the result of a corruption in the Hebrew text that prompted the translator to borrow themes from v. 18 because of the similarities between the verses.

Regardless of what explanation one follows, there is little reason to regard the reference to the seed of the righteous in v. 21 as secondary. The NRSV, however, omits any mention of the progeny of the righteous from its translation of this verse: “Be assured, the wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will escape.” The NRSV omits the term “seed of” (*zera*ֹ) from its translation on the basis of the Greek translation of the term, “the one sowing” (*ho de speirōn*). The Greek translation appears to be highly interpretive, which perhaps results from the difficult phrase “hand to hand” in the first colon and the lack of grammatical parallelism between the two lines. The fact that the Greek interprets the consonants for “seed of” (*z-r-ֹ*) as a verb from the same root indicates that the letters belong in the text. The consonantal text indicates that the

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<sup>9</sup> This is the easier explanation for the textual differences, but the similarities between the texts seem to point toward the likelihood of the role of scribal leveling in creating these different texts. For the conclusion that the Greek translation of Proverbs was based on a Hebrew manuscript that was different from the Hebrew Masoretic Text, see Emanuel Tov, “Recensional Differences Between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint of Proverbs,” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint*, vol. 72, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 431. Also, Emanuel Tov, “Recensional Differences Between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint of Proverbs,” in *Of Scribes and Scrolls* (Lanham, Md: Univ Pr of America, 1990), 43–56. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 304–305.

righteous are plural, but the Greek translation construes it as the singular object of the participle sowing. Prov. 22:8 uses a *plene* spelling for “the one sowing” (*zôrēa*), and the only other occurrence of this root as a verb occurs in 11:18. While its appearance in 11:18 is close enough to 11:21 that proximity might explain the presence of “seed” in v. 21 as a corruption introduced by a scribe who was influenced by a verse he had just copied, the expression used in v. 18 is “the one sowing righteousness” (*w<sup>e</sup>zôrēa<sup>c</sup> ṣ<sup>e</sup>dāqâ*), which uses a more appropriate noun. The Greek translation of v. 18 is *sperma de dikaiōn*, which matches the Hebrew of 11:21, whereas the Greek translation of 11:21 matches the Hebrew of 11:18. In sum, I see no reason to favor the Greek translation since it appears to be struggling to make sense of unusual terminology and a jarring poetic sequence.<sup>10</sup>

While one major translation (the NRSV) ignores the presence of collective accountability in the wisdom tradition altogether, commentators also generally skip over the significance of it in favor of more interesting features of the text. In his comments on Prov. 11:21, McKane writes, “It is just a little puzzling why the descendants of the righteous rather than the righteous themselves are mentioned here, but this extension of the doctrine of theodicy is not so interesting as the fact that...[the descendants of the righteous] escape from an unfavorable legal verdict.”<sup>11</sup>

In short, most commentators have been content to regard the various references to the children of the wicked and the righteous, which are scattered throughout Israel’s wisdom books, as curiosities not worthy of systematic investigation. However, in light of

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<sup>10</sup> I thank James Jumper for his advice on this matter via private communication.

<sup>11</sup> William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (London: SCM, 1970), 437.

widely held claims that the wisdom tradition is individualistic, such “aberrations” deserve further consideration. The purpose of the present study is to address these gaps in the scholarship of collective accountability in general and of collective notions in seemingly individualistic wisdom books in particular. The results of this study not only will be important to the study of collective accountability, but will also have repercussions for the modern understanding of biblical wisdom. Modern scholarship on wisdom literature has produced widespread depictions of this corpus of biblical literature as aberrational with respect to its views on, for example, history, the covenant, or the community. However, this dissertation will demonstrate that Israel’s wisdom tradition is not as individualistic as is often suggested.

### **III. A Brief History of Scholarship on Collective Accountability**

Within the scholarly community, the issue of collective accountability in the Bible has been explored extensively.<sup>12</sup> Two main trends have emerged in the study of this topic. Firstly, many scholars have focused on the theological importance of collective accountability by interpreting relevant passages from the Hebrew Bible. The second trend involves the use of sociological, anthropological, and archaeological evidence in combination with the biblical texts in order to elucidate the theological concept’s relationship to Israelite society.

The first trend includes textually based studies of the theological concept, and these studies fall into three categories. These are the explication of the function and significance of collective accountability in Israel’s narrative, legal, and prophetic

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<sup>12</sup> For a brief survey of this scholarship, see Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 16–29.



materials. Although studies of collective accountability in Israel's narrative literature are important,<sup>13</sup> I will here only focus on the latter two, which are the most useful for my thesis. Although most scholars posit the divine attribute formula in Exodus 34:6-7 as the original locus for the statement that YHWH punishes children to the third or fourth generation for the sins of their fathers but rewards them to the thousandth generation for their fathers' good deeds,<sup>14</sup> the formula is reiterated in Israel's most important legal texts, namely, the Decalogue (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9; cf. Deut. 7:9). In addition to these legal texts, the rabbis noticed that the concept of collective accountability found in Exodus 34:6-7 stood in tension with another legal text, Deuteronomy 24:16, which advocates individual accountability.<sup>15</sup> The attempt to reconcile these laws within Israel's law code has spawned several modern studies that suggest a dual standard for divine and human justice.<sup>16</sup> Whereas YHWH can punish children for the sins of their fathers (Exod. 20:5; Deut. 5:9), this juridical privilege is not afforded to human judges (Deut. 24:16), presumably, because human-administered justice is imperfect, in contrast to that of YHWH. One important observation resulting from these studies is that whereas laws like

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<sup>13</sup> Especially useful in this regard has been Yochanan Muffs, "Who Will Stand in the Breach? A Study in Prophetic Intercession," in *Love and Joy; Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel*, 1992, 9–48. Also crucial has been the work of Joel Kaminsky, especially his work on Joshua 7. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*. Joel S. Kaminsky, "Joshua 7: A Reassessment of Israelite Conceptions of Corporate Punishment," *The Pitcher Is Broken* (1995): 315–346.

<sup>14</sup> Robert C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 38–39. Josef Scharbert, "Formgeschichte Und Exegese Von Ex 34:6f Und Seiner Parallelen," *Biblica* 38 (1957): 130–150. Michael A Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 335.

<sup>15</sup> *Talmud Bavli*, *Ber.* 7a; *Sanh.* 27b; *Mak.* 24a. The observation of this tension is both ancient and modern, but it is important to distinguish between divinely-inflicted intergenerational retribution and human-executed vicarious punishment. The distinction will be discussed below.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Muffs, "Who Will Stand?"; Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 335–347. Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume; Studies in Bible and Jewish Religion* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1960), 344–345.

Deuteronomy 24:16 and other punishments administered by human courts are implemented in response to a crime, the human belief in divine judgment is an interpretation of one's current circumstances (or expectations of a certain future circumstance) that is produced by reflecting on the past.<sup>17</sup> This insight will be helpful for the study of collective accountability in wisdom literature, which often offers maxims and advice based on the observation of patterns of human experiences.

Some overlap exists between studies of collective accountability in Israel's legal materials and studies in its prophetic traditions, and one bond between these groups is the use of the divine attribute formula in both.<sup>18</sup> Although all the instances in which Exodus 34:6-7 is recycled in prophetic literature cannot be reviewed here (see chapter 7 for a full discussion),<sup>19</sup> it is interesting to note that Jeremiah 32:18 alludes to the formula and praises YHWH for this aspect of his divine nature. Yet, the apparent rejection of the concept of collective accountability by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel has inspired numerous studies. Several scholars have suggested that the usage of the sour grapes proverb in Ezekiel 18 (and Jeremiah 31) represents a prophetic attempt to correct the dual standard of justice created by Exodus 34:6-7 and Deuteronomy 24:16.<sup>20</sup> The use of "a

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<sup>17</sup> Barnabas Lindars, "Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 452–467.

<sup>18</sup> The passage is quoted in Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3. It is alluded to in Micah 7:18; Jeremiah 30:11b = 46:28b, 32:18.

<sup>19</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 335–347. Peter Machinist, "The Fall of Assyria in Comparative Ancient Perspective," in *Assyria 1995: Proceedings of the 10th Anniversary Symposium of the Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, Helsinki, September 7-11, 1995* (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1997), 179–195.

<sup>20</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 338–339. Moshe Greenberg, "Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law," in *Essential Papers on Israel and the Ancient Near East* (New York: New York University, 1991), 344–345. Bernard Levinson, "The Human Voice in Divine Revelation: The Problem of Authority in Biblical Law," in *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change*, ed. Michael A. Williams and et al. (Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 51–53.

simple human proverb, a product of traditional wisdom”<sup>21</sup> to accomplish this will be considered below, as it is the starting point for the consideration of this proverb’s bearing on Israel’s wisdom literature’s position on collective accountability.

The second main trend in collective accountability studies involves the use of sociological, anthropological, and archaeological approaches. This trend has roots in some of the earliest studies on collective accountability in the Hebrew Bible, in which biblical scholars drew on the work of prominent sociologists<sup>22</sup> and applied their methods to biblical stories of collective punishment.<sup>23</sup> As with much early scholarship, the conclusions drawn from such studies have not withstood the test of time,<sup>24</sup> but the method used has driven new insights by modern scholars, like Baruch Halpern, who continue to be interested in the topic. Combining archaeological, anthropological, and biblical evidence, Halpern argues that a drastic shift from a group-oriented to a more individual-oriented social system occurred as a result of Hezekiah’s reforms and

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<sup>21</sup> Levinson, “The Human Voice,” 52.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: Le système totémique en Australie*, 2nd ed. (Paris: F. Alcan, 1925).

<sup>23</sup> For example, H. Wheeler Robinson applied theories about “corporate personality,”—or the notion that the group can function as a single individual through any individual member, dead or living, of it—to narratives in the Hebrew Bible that involved a group suffering punishment for the sin of one of its members. In Robinson’s views, examples like the punishment of Achan and his family in Joshua 7 were outward expressions of an ancient inner conception about the individual and his relationship to the group. Unlike the strict modern separation of the individual and his community, Robinson argued that the line distinguishing the individual from the collective was much blurrier in ancient Israel. Most sociologists now consider the notion of corporate personality outdated. Within biblical studies, the model does not always fit the text, and so this concept will not be relevant for this study. See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Reprinted by Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>24</sup> Rogerson offers a critique of Wheeler Robinson’s conclusions. John W. Rogerson, “Old Testament View of Nature: Some Preliminary Questions,” *Instruction and Interpretation* (1977): 67–84. For a more nuanced discussion of the tension between the individual and the collective, see Robert A. Di Vito, “Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 217–238. Jon Douglas Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (Yale University Press, 2006), 113.

Sennacherib's campaign at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE.<sup>25</sup> For example, by drawing upon the gradually decreasing size of pottery used in the ancient Israelite home, Halpern is able to build an argument that family life in eighth century Israel shifted from including multiple generations to focusing only on the nuclear family unit. For Halpern, sociological, not theological, factors drove this change. This reintroduction of sociology to the field fills a significant gap in the scholarly discussion. Halpern's theory that sociology leads to theology holds relevance to this study. Wisdom literature is frequently described as experiential, which is to say that its teachings derive from the lived experiences of generations of sages. Do these social norms influence how sages understand God and the manner in which he executes human justice?

Although Halpern's study offers a compelling theory based on abundant evidence from varied sources, his interpretations and conclusions are not unassailable. Scholars have called into question major components of his archaeological,<sup>26</sup> textual,<sup>27</sup> and

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<sup>25</sup> Baruch Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability," in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Deborah Hobson, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 124 (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1991), 11–107.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Bloch-Smith has offered an archaeological critique of Halpern's burial evidence, and James Osborne's archaeological and textual interpretation of secondary mortuary practices also challenges Halpern's interpretation. According to Bloch-Smith, Halpern's dating of the dissolution of larger family units and the rise of the individual is largely based on biblical evidence and is not supported by burial evidence found in the archaeological record, which lacks any large-scale appearance of individual-centered burial features—like ossuaries or coffins, the use of personal names in tomb inscriptions, or the absence of secondary repositories—in the ninth to seventh centuries. Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Life in Judah from the Perspective of the Dead," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65 (2002): 128. Osborne finds extensive archaeological and textual evidence for the widespread practice of secondary burial and the use of a bench tomb. These practices, according to Osborne's analysis, are "a vital component of Judah's kinship-oriented social structure. The construction and use of these tombs, and the repeated secondary mortuary rituals that were conducted within them, must be seen as some of the most significant practices that generated the self-sustaining household metaphor of society." In other words, the continued use of this practice suggests that the demise of lineages in favor of individuals was neither as complete nor as decisive as Halpern argues. James F. Osborne, "Secondary Mortuary Practice and the Bench Tomb: Structure and Practice in Iron Age Judah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 70 (2011): 2, 25.

anthropological<sup>28</sup> evidence. Despite his tightly crafted argument, his interpretations of the evidence to dovetail with his theory of a shift from a group-oriented to individual-oriented social system are not necessarily the most plausible interpretations, especially in light of much evidence that the clan system remained in tact during the seventh century. Furthermore, although Halpern observes a shift from an emphasis on multigenerational families to the nuclear family in the archaeological record, this alone does not necessitate that collective notions be abandoned in favor of individual ones. A nuclear family, after all, is still a collective unit, albeit a smaller one than a clan. Nevertheless, Halpern's study is a formidable piece of scholarship that demonstrates the breadth of evidence available to the study of collective accountability in the ancient world.

Whereas Halpern located the origins of divinely executed collective accountability in sociological patterns in the family structure of ancient Israel, Bernard Levinson has proposed that the theological concept was borrowed from the realm of international treaties, which could include provisions for blessing or cursing the ancestors of the treaty-makers for their fidelity or infidelity to the covenant forged by their predecessors.<sup>29</sup> Levinson's contribution to our understanding of the origins of collective accountability will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 7 in connection with the reuse of the divine attribute formula, found in Exodus 34:6-7, in the Decalogue.

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<sup>27</sup> Note that Jon D. Levenson has critiqued Halpern's interpretation of burial customs in ancient Israel on the basis of the biblical text alone. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 59–63.

<sup>28</sup> Pamela Barmash's conclusions about the persistence of the notion of the blood feud into the seventh century, which requires the preservation of families, lineages, and clans into this time period, also pose problems for Halpern's thesis that society shifted decisively from lineage-oriented to individual-oriented during this time period. Pamela Barmash, "Blood Feud and State Control: Differing Legal Institutions for the Remedy of Homicide During the Second and First Millennia B.C.E.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 63 (2004): 183–199.

<sup>29</sup> Levinson, "The Human Voice," 46.

David Daube has been critical of what he believes is a scholarly tendency to identify more cases of collective accountability than actually appear in the Bible. He argues that many examples of what scholars consider collective accountability actually belong to the category of “ruler punishment,” in which a leader’s group suffers because of the actions of its leader as a divine means of punishing the leader, who will be grieved by the loss of his power and property, even though this property happens to be human.<sup>30</sup> Daube understands vicarious punishment, a practice prohibited in ancient Israel by Deuteronomy 24:16 but a vestige of which may be preserved in Exod. 21:31,<sup>31</sup> as ruler punishment of the *paterfamilias*, who is deprived of his property (his family members) on the basis of *lex talionis*.<sup>32</sup>

Daube emphasizes the importance of distinguishing among the various types of accountability found in the Hebrew Bible because the concepts do not all originate from one source; this caution is certainly merited, but one must bear in mind that even if the concepts stem from different origins, they may ultimately function similarly, namely to limit in a merciful way the severity of the punishment brought upon the sinner, even if that punishment does not seem merciful to the sinner’s offspring and associates. Because of this, the concepts likely already overlapped in ancient Israel,<sup>33</sup> just as they did for the rabbis who perceived tension between the description of YHWH as a god who practices

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<sup>30</sup> Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, reprint ed: 168–169.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., reprint ed:154–189. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 211–212. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, reprint ed:168–169.

<sup>33</sup> Note that while biblical law prohibits vicarious punishment, which is based on the principle of *lex talionis* from the perspective of the *paterfamilias*, it still considers a man’s wife and children as his property (i.e., Exod. 20:17 ; Deut. 5:21).

intergenerational punishment in the second commandment (Exod. 20:5-6 ; Deut. 5:9-10) yet who also prohibits the human exercise of vicarious punishment in Deut. 24:16, despite the different origins of these forms of collective accountability.

Part of Daube's distinction among the categories involves the presence or absence of shared guilt.<sup>34</sup> I would argue that none of the various types of punishment that involve a group suffering for the sin of an individual relies on shared guilt. Collective punishment need not imply that those who suffer bear any guilt for the sin that prompted their suffering. For example, Daube understands the Deuteronomic law mandating community-wide repentance measures to atone for the sin of an unknown murderer (Deut. 21:1-9) to employ communal guilt as a means of ensuring that every member of the community make an active commitment to crime prevention.<sup>35</sup> However, notions of contamination and blood guilty and the perils of contagious divine wrath offer better explanations than collective guilt for the collective accountability of an entire city for the actions of one unknown murderer.<sup>36</sup>

Though Daube criticizes other scholars for not distinguishing carefully enough between intergenerational accountability and vicarious/ruler punishment and thus risking a confusion of concepts that derive from different origins, he himself does not discern the category of intragenerational accountability in his discussion; this concept likely does not share its origins with intergenerational or vicarious punishment. For his part, Daube tentatively proposes that the concept of collective accountability emerged from ruler punishment, a category that includes vicarious punishment. This proposal undermines

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<sup>34</sup> Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, reprint ed: 169–170.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, reprint ed: 180.

<sup>36</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 65.

Daube's complaint that the categories must be carefully distinguished because of their different origins. If collective accountability emerged from ruler punishment, then both ultimately have the same origin. Furthermore, if the purpose of ruler punishment is to diminish the power and property of the leader through collective punishment, then it achieves a purpose different from that of intergenerational punishment, which appears to have merciful, not punitive, intentions. While there is much to commend in Daube's study, such as its reminder to proceed with caution before lumping anything that bears a resemblance to collective accountability into a single category, it is important to bear in mind that ancient Israelites were not necessarily aware of the origins of every concept or practice. The function of a practice could change over time despite its origins. For example, in the case of divinely executed intergenerational punishment, the practice appears to have originated as an act of mercy, but by the time of the Babylonian Exile it could also be interpreted as divine injustice. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Though these previous studies will provide a framework for my own study and a basis for comparing the results that I find in the wisdom literature to the rest of the Bible, they also reveal at least two gaps that need to be filled in the investigation of collective accountability. Firstly, studies of collective accountability often underemphasize or ignore altogether the associated concept of collective reward. I intend to consider both collective punishment and collective reward without privileging one over the other. Secondly, no study has yet examined Israel's wisdom literature systematically.

#### **IV. Israel's Wisdom Literature and Collective Accountability**



Although scholars struggle to isolate criteria for identifying wisdom literature in the Hebrew biblical tradition,<sup>37</sup> most agree in assigning the books of Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth, Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon to this category. Although the latter two are not included in the Masoretic canon, both books engage with biblical tradition and seem to consider themselves a continuation of the wisdom tradition found in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>38</sup> While certain affinities may exist between wisdom literature and other biblical books,<sup>39</sup> such claims are made on the basis of comparison to wisdom themes and terminology found in the five books listed above, which provide extensive ruminations on the juridical, natural, practical, and theological issues<sup>40</sup> related to the sage's "quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people, and the Creator."<sup>41</sup> The books of Job and Qoheleth, as well as the words of Agur in Proverbs 30, complicate any

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<sup>37</sup> Scholars have offered a variety of criteria. J. A. Loader describes wisdom as literature "occupied with man's attitude to and conduct in the midst of the realities of life" (J. A. Loader, "Different Reactions of Job and Qoheleth to the Doctrine of Retribution," *Studies in Wisdom Literature* (1981): 43–48). J. J. Collins notes that, in addition to literary form and world view, over half of the occurrences of the Hebrew word for wisdom appear in the books traditionally considered wisdom literature (John Joseph Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, Old Testament Library (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 1). J. L. Crenshaw describes wisdom as the "reasoned search for specific ways to ensure personal well-being in everyday life" (James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, vol. Rev and enlarged edition (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Pr, 1998), 3).

<sup>38</sup> For examples of their engagement with biblical tradition, see especially Wis. 2, which seems to be a response to Qoheleth, and Sir. 44-50, the Hymn in Praise of the Fathers, which recites the exploits of Israel's historical heroes, including, however, one that is post-biblical, or post-canonical, Simon the Righteous.

<sup>39</sup> E.g., Gerhard von Rad, "Josephgeschichte Und Altere Chokma," in *Congress Volume, Copenhagen 1953*, *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 1 (Leiden, 1953), 121–127. Cf. Shemaryahu Talmon, "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 419–455. For a critique of von Rad's theory, see Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)*, Supplement to *Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1970). Michael V. Fox, "Wisdom in the Joseph Story," *Vetus Testamentum* 51 (2001): 26–41. Other sources of Israelite wisdom, especially Psalm 37:28 and 4QInstruction, will be introduced to my discussion as necessary.

<sup>40</sup> For the delineation of these four types of wisdom, see Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence Upon Historical Literature."

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

effort to define wisdom literature because they treat the issue of traditional instruction by subverting it in order to force a redefinition of wisdom. Nevertheless, these three books will be treated systematically in an effort to understand the notion of collective accountability in Israel's biblical wisdom tradition because these books focus their subversion on traditional wisdom features and, thus, appear to constitute an inner-wisdom critique.

To determine the wisdom tradition's view of collective accountability, the various statements that either endorse or reject collective accountability must be explored systematically, book by book. Except for Qoheleth, all of the books above contain direct statements that reflect the issues associated with collective accountability (although Qoheleth will still be important to my discussion; see below). For example, in the book of Proverbs, several statements promise negative consequences for the "house/household" of the individual who commits sins (Prov. 15:27; cf. Prov. 17:13). In the book of Job, the protagonist refuses to accept collective accountability as an explanation for why the wicked sometimes remain unpunished while the righteous suffer. Thus, Job says, "You [O Zophar] say, 'God stores up their iniquity for their children.' Let it be paid back to them, so that they may know it. Let their own eyes see their destruction, and let them drink of the wrath of the Almighty. For what do they care for their household after them, when the number of their months is cut off?" (Job 21:19-21). Although Job refuses to accept it, collective accountability appears to have been a popular explanation in wisdom circles for innocent suffering. In the later wisdom books, both Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon note that the illegitimate children of an adulteress will suffer for their mother's sins without regard for the merits of the children

(Sir. 23:24-25; Wis. 3:16, 4:3). The collective impact of the sinner's actions on his household is confirmed by archaeological, anthropological, and sociological studies that suggest that the Israelite household included several generations of a family alive at the same time.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the authorial voice of the Hebrew Bible is by no means monolithic, and this fact is quite prominent in the diversity of perspectives preserved in Israel's wisdom literature.

In addition to wisdom statements directly related to collective accountability, the role of wisdom instruction in the rearing of children is also relevant. The interpreter who produced the *Targum Onkelos* to Exodus 20:4-6 avoided the theological problem of innocent children suffering for the sins of their fathers by describing the children as "rebellious" and continuing "to sin after their fathers."<sup>43</sup> This solution to the theological problem of collective punishment may have an analogy in wisdom literature. Several texts from non-wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible with wisdom affinities, as well as from the New Testament, suggest a widespread notion that like begets like.<sup>44</sup> Is this concept also present in the Hebrew biblical wisdom tradition and does it play any role in Israel's wisdom literature's understanding of the origins of good and wicked children? If so, this would suggest that wicked parents who deserve punishment produce wicked children who also deserve punishment; righteous parents who deserve reward produce righteous children who also deserve reward. Collective accountability does not create a theological problem in this scenario. So the following question must be addressed: Does

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<sup>42</sup> See Lawrence E. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* no. 260 (1985): 260.

<sup>43</sup> *Targum Onkelos* to Exodus 20:4-6. Bernard M. Levinson, "The Case for Revision and Interpolation Within the Biblical Legal Corpora," *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (1994): 57.

<sup>44</sup> Ezek. 16:44; Luke 6:43; Matt 7:17-18; and Jas 3:11-12. Cf. Deut 32:32. Note the contrast with Jer. 2:21.

Israel's wisdom literature, like some ancient adages, hold that righteous parents beget righteous children while wicked parents beget wicked children? Given the nature of much of wisdom literature as instruction intended to help the pupil avoid sin and act righteously, a related question arises: What is the power of wisdom instruction to help the child of the wicked avoid the consequences of his parents' sins? Can anyone who avails himself of the instruction found in wisdom literature avoid punishment because of the sins of others?

According to the worldview of wisdom literature, instruction and discipline have the power to teach children how to avoid sin (Prov. 10:17, 13:24, 14:26, 15:5, 22:6, 23:13-14, 29:15-17; Sir. 3:1-13). Yet children, despite the discipline and instructions provided to them, do not necessarily reap the rewards of wisdom simply because it is available. For example, in Proverbs 5:7-14 the sage warns the child to heed his instructions lest one day he should wind up saying, "Oh, how I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. Now I am at the point of utter ruin in the public assembly" (Prov. 5:12-14). Wisdom protects only those who embrace it. Indeed, "A fool despises a parent's instruction, but the one who heeds admonition is prudent" (Prov. 15:5). Although parents may offer instruction to their child, if the child does not heed it, he will be a fool, and "A stupid child is ruin to a father" (Prov. 19:13a, cf. 17:25, 19:26). Evidently, Israel's sages recognized that good parents could produce bad children, who would bring shame and suffering upon their parents, a reversal of the usual direction of collective, or here more specifically, intergenerational punishment (cf. Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18).

Although Qoheleth does not worry about his progeny bringing shame upon him during his lifetime, he also grapples with this issue: “I hate all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me—and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity” (Qoh. 2:18-19). Thus Qoheleth also, like Proverbs, acknowledges that, despite a parent’s best efforts, a good person can produce a bad child. In fact, some people appear to be foolish or wicked by nature. For example, Ben Sira notes that some are so innately foolish that it is useless to provide wisdom instruction: “Whoever teaches a fool is like one who glues potsherds together, or who rouses a sleeper from deep slumber” (Sir. 22:9; cf. Prov. 9:7-8 and 15:5, noted above). Although Genesis 9:22-27 attributes the lowly status of the Canaanites to their sinful ancestor Ham, Ben Sira attributes their condition to creation (Sir. 33:10-12). This raises the possibility that, in addition to their use of collective accountability, the sages also use predestination as an explanation for the fates that befall the children of the righteous and of the wicked. Proverbs 16:4 suggests that the wicked are a divine creation that fulfills a particular purpose (cf. Sir. 33:10-12). Wisdom instruction promises to protect those who heed it (Prov. 6:20-24), but if the fool by his very nature does not follow wise advice (for example, Prov. 12:15, 13:1, 15:5,12), it holds no promise for the one born foolish, only for the one born righteous or wise. The righteous, of course, is inclined to heed instructions, but association with wicked individuals can still lead him astray (for example, Prov. 1:10, 6:27-28, and the threats posed by association with the strange woman in 2:16-19; 5:3-6; 6:24-26; 7:5; 9:13-18). The existence of an alternative explanation for the fates that befall the children of the righteous and the wicked raises the

question of what factors compel the sages to choose one explanation over another in any given situation.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel both use wisdom, namely a proverb, to challenge the notion that God punished the generation of the Babylonian exile for their ancestors' sins. Ezekiel 18 delivers an oracle on the issue of collective responsibility that appears first to overturn the theological concept and then to provide examples of a righteous parent producing an unrighteous child who in turn begets a righteous child. For Ezekiel, one's own nature can differ from that of his parent or child, and so the individual is not accountable for the sins of another. Ezekiel's treatment of this topic is relevant to the discussion of collective accountability in wisdom literature because, as I have noted, Ezekiel (cf. Jer. 31; note also Jer. 32:18-19) refers to what appears to be a traditional wisdom proverb in order to refute the doctrine of collective accountability expressed in it: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2, Jer. 31:29). What is the relationship between this proverb and Israel's wisdom literature? Do Ezekiel and Jeremiah use this proverb, a product of human wisdom, in order to avoid contradicting a more sacred text (*i.e.*, the Decalogue), as Bernard Levinson has argued,<sup>45</sup> or does their use of the proverb reflect an underlying connection between the concept of collective responsibility and traditional wisdom? If this proverb did originate in wisdom circles, does the wisdom tradition eventually reject the notion expressed in the proverb, just as the two prophets appear to? Each prophet's use of the proverb and position on collective accountability is complex and will be explored more in depth in Chapter 7.

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<sup>45</sup> Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87.

Apart from Jeremiah and Ezekiel's use of this proverb, another formulaic expression of YHWH's propensity to visit the sins of the father upon the sons occurs in Exodus 34:6-7 and is reiterated in the Decalogue (Exod. 20; Deut. 5). Although this passage is quoted in various ways in many places in the Bible, none of the wisdom books quotes it directly. Nevertheless, some scholars have posited a connection between Exodus 34:6-7 and the wisdom tradition because of overlapping language and shared values.<sup>46</sup> Whether this formula is a product of the wisdom tradition or not, the contrast between the statement that YHWH visits the sins of the fathers upon the sons with the secular proverb known from Jeremiah and Ezekiel raises the issue of God's perceived role in collective accountability. Do the various wisdom statements that relate to the topic of collective accountability envision God as rewarding the good and punishing the bad, or are the consequences simply the natural result of one's actions?<sup>47</sup>

In summary, this dissertation will investigate the question, what does Israel's wisdom literature say about collective accountability vis-à-vis individual accountability? How do credos and proverbs about collective accountability known from non-wisdom literature relate to the wisdom tradition? Does Israel's wisdom literature's view of

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<sup>46</sup> E.g., Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," 48.

<sup>47</sup> A useful starting point for this question will be the study of Klaus Koch, which posits a view of divine retribution in Israel's wisdom literature, and in the Hebrew Bible more generally, that God does not inflict punishment himself but rather acts as a midwife to the automatic act-consequence model that is built into the fabric of the universe. This will be discussed in Chapter 2. Klaus Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 52 (1955): 1-42. Translated in part as Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 64.

collective accountability reflect any diachronic changes? If so, what might account for these changes?<sup>48</sup>

## V. Outline

The purpose of this dissertation is to consider the comments on collective accountability in the wisdom books in a systematic way. In order to accomplish this, each of the next five chapters will focus on the presence of collective accountability in the five major wisdom books in canonical order, Proverbs (Chapter 2), Job (Chapter 3), Qoheleth (Chapter 4), Ben Sira (Chapter 5), and Wisdom of Solomon (Chapter 6). Each chapter will proceed by first examining each respective book's statements about collective punishments, then its statements about collective reward, and, if relevant, any statements that seem to reject collective accountability. Next, each of these chapters will consider the roles of divine determinism and wisdom instruction in influencing the moral character of individuals in order to determine whether or not wisdom authors understood collective accountability to apply only in cases in which the offspring conduct themselves as their parents do.

The penultimate chapter (Chapter 7) will investigate two formulaic statements about collective accountability found outside of Israel's wisdom literature but with proposed origins in the realm of wisdom. The first half of this chapter will explore the divine attribute formula found in Exodus 34:6-7 and its reuse throughout the Hebrew Bible and in Israel's wisdom books. The second half will investigate the nature of the

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<sup>48</sup> Especially important to consider in this regard will be the rise of eschatological judgment and its influence of notions of retribution in Israel's wisdom literature, especially in the Wisdom of Solomon. Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 6.



sour grapes proverb quoted by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel to determine whether or not it aligns with conclusions drawn from the previous five chapters about the understanding of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom books. The final chapter (Chapter 8) will synthesize the results of the previous chapters in order to understand the nature and function of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom tradition. This conclusion will trace the developmental trajectory that emerges within Israel's wisdom tradition on the subject of collective accountability.

## Chapter Two: Collective Accountability in the Book of Proverbs

### I. Introduction

As discussed in the introduction, collective accountability involves holding a group, whether it be the generations of a family or the members of some other collective, responsible for the actions of an individual. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate this phenomenon in the book of Proverbs. The discussion of collective accountability in the book of Proverbs will begin with an examination of the verses relating to collective punishment (section II) and those pertaining to collective reward (section III). Next it will examine the efficacy of wisdom instruction for helping children to reap rewards and avoid punishment in order to determine, as discussed in the introduction, if Israel's sages regarded the children of the wicked as ineluctably wicked themselves and thereby deserving of intergenerational punishment (section IV). The chapter will conclude with a summary of its findings (section V).

### II. Collective Punishment in Proverbs

#### Proverbs 3:33

In the book of Proverbs, several statements promise negative consequences for the "house" (*bêṭ*) of the individual who commits sins. A good example of this occurs in Proverbs 3:33: "The curse of YHWH is on the house (*b'ḥêṭ*) of the wicked, but he blesses the abode (*ûn'wê*) of the righteous." This passage contrasts the punishment of the wicked with the reward of the righteous. In both cases, the divine response appears to be

collective. To demonstrate this conclusively, it is necessary to understand the ancient Israelite concept of the “house” (*bayit/bêṭ*).

Working with the ideal type that Max Weber identified as patrimonialism, Lawrence Stager has pioneered the modern understanding of the Israelite house.<sup>49</sup> Building upon Weber’s model, Stager envisions Iron Age Israelite society as a series of nested households, the largest being that of YHWH (*bêṭ yhwh*) and the most basic being that of the father (*bêṭ-ʾāb*), which can refer either to a nuclear or extended family depending on context.<sup>50</sup> The house of the father is known both from the archaeological record of four-room houses in the Israelite and Judean highlands throughout the Iron Age and beyond and also from the biblical text. Archaeologically, the house of the father likely included a compound of several four-room homes that shared a common courtyard. These multiple family compounds allowed the nuclear family, which likely consisted of two parents and two children occupying a single four-room house, to adapt to changing life circumstances, such as parents dying or children marrying and becoming parents themselves, and to keep the larger family group, the lineage, in close proximity.<sup>51</sup> In addition to the term “house” (*bayit/bêṭ*) being used to describe the physical structure

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<sup>49</sup> Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” 25.

<sup>50</sup> Lawrence E. Stager, “The Patrimonial Kingdom of Solomon,” in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age Through Roman Palaestina*, ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 70–71. More recently, Stager’s student David Schloen has built a case for patrimonialism in ancient Israel based on archaeological and anthropological evidence. J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East*, Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2001). Schloen’s argument refutes Mario Liverani’s proposal of a Marxist two-sector model in reconstructing the socioeconomic history of Ugarit. Henri Cazelles et al., “Supplément Au Dictionnaire De La Bible,” in *Ras Shamra (Ugarit Ou Ougarit)*, vol. 9 (Paris: Letouzey & Ané, 1979), 1123–1466.

<sup>51</sup> Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” 18–20.

within which the nuclear family resided, the Hebrew term (*bayit/bêt* or *bêt-ʿāb*) can also refer to the family itself. The identification of Achan, whose story will be discussed in greater detail below, as the guilty party in the theft of devoted objects from Jericho demonstrates this semantic range for *bayit* quite well (Josh. 7:14-18). The family, not the physical structure of a house, is brought near so that Joshua can determine the guilty individual.

As the above discussion makes clear, a curse on the house of an individual results in a curse on the individual's entire nuclear family, and possibly even the extended family residing within the *bêt-ʿāb* compound.<sup>52</sup> The same would seem to be true for the family of the righteous individual who receives a blessing. Here, however, the sage uses not the familiar term *bayit* to describe the family of the righteous, but rather the term *nāweh*, which is often found in poetry and associated with pastoralism. Although the vocabulary differs, *nāweh* seems to function as a semantic equivalent to *bayit* and all of its associations with the family. While the pastoral associations of the term *nāweh*<sup>53</sup> might ostensibly suggest a dwelling place for a lone shepherd, and thus not hold any implications for the shepherd's family, its usage in Prov. 3:33 in parallel with *bayit* implies that the sage envisions the family of a righteous individual experiencing benefits analogous to the consequences that the family of the wicked experiences.<sup>54</sup> The intended contrast between the fate of the righteous and the wicked would be lost if *nāweh*, "abode"

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<sup>52</sup> Lennart Boström, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 220.

<sup>53</sup> M. Delcor, "Quelques cas de survivances du vocabulaire nomade en Hébreu biblique: Leur signification," *Vetus Testamentum* 25, no. 2 (1975): 319, doi:10.2307/1516948.

<sup>54</sup> R. N Whybray, *Proverbs*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 73.

were interpreted to lack the familial associations that accompany the term *bayit*, “house.” The term *nāweh*, “abode,” parallels *bayit*, “house,” and *’ōhel*, “tent,” in other biblical texts, which suggests that the term should be affiliated with family life and not the solitude of a shepherd.<sup>55</sup>

On the whole, Proverbs 3:33 is quite general. It does not offer collective punishment and reward for any specific actions but rather for one’s general moral disposition. The sage likely intends this passage to function pedagogically; the student learns that his moral character has consequences that extend beyond his own experiences. Not only does it affect YHWH’s relationship with the individual, as Proverbs 3:34 makes clear, but it also affects YHWH’s relationship with his entire family, the individuals upon whom his posterity depends.

### **Proverbs 15:27**

The notion of an individual bringing trouble upon his house appears again in Proverbs 15:27: “The one who is greedy for profit troubles (*’ōkēr*) his house, but the one who hates bribes will live.” Several important issues arise from this verse and its relevance to the topic of collective responsibility. These include the sage’s choice of the root *’-k-r*—which has connections to one of the Bible’s most famous examples of collective punishment, that of Achan in Joshua 7—the contrast between collective punishment and individual reward, and the issue of divine causality.

The sage describes the consequence that will befall the house of one who is greedy for profit with the root *’-k-r*, “to trouble.” A study of this root in the Hebrew

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<sup>55</sup> Helmer Ringgren, “Naweh,” ed. Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 2:275.

Bible more generally is instructive for understanding this proverb in particular (the use of the root in Proverbs will be considered below in connection with Proverbs 11:29 and 15:6). With respect to the issue of collective punishment, the most important occurrence of this root is in 1 Chronicles 2:7, which describes Achar (*ʿākār*) as “the one troubling (*ôkēr*) Israel when he transgressed the ban.” This personal name likely reflects an attempt to create wordplay between the name of Achan, the villain known from Joshua 7, and the effects of his sinful behavior.<sup>56</sup> In Joshua 7, the wordplay is between the name of the valley where Achan’s punishment is executed, Achor (*ākôr*), and the effects of his sin.<sup>57</sup> The verbal form of the root *ʿ-*k-r**, “to trouble,” occurs repeatedly throughout the tale. In declaring the conquered city of Jericho under the ban, Joshua warns the Israelites against taking any spoils home from battle. The result of disobedience, Joshua notes, is that Israel’s camp would become like an object placed under the ban, and this would “trouble” (*wa<sup>ʿ</sup>qartem*) it (Josh. 6:18). Despite this warning, Achan steals some of the devoted spoils and hides them in his tent. After Israel’s army suffers a loss at Ai, Achan is identified by lot as responsible for the defeat, he confesses to his transgression and describes the great value of the stolen goods (Josh. 7:21). As Achan and his family await execution in the valley of Achor (*ākôr*) for the *pater familias*’ crime, Joshua asks him,

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<sup>56</sup> Richard S. Hess, “Achan and Achor: Names and Wordplay in Joshua 7.,” vol. 14, *Hebrew Annual Review* (Columbus: Melton Center for Jewish Studies, 1994), 94. The author of Proverbs would not have needed to know Chronicles in order to be familiar with this wordplay. It is possible that the nickname Achar for Achan predates Proverbs. The Hebrew *Vorlage* to the LXX appears to have used Achar instead of Achan in Joshua 7.

<sup>57</sup> Note, however, that the personal name Achan (*ākān*), the wordplay Achar (*ākār*), and the toponym Achor (*ākôr*) derive from different roots. Achan’s name derives from the root *ʿ-*k-n**, possibly meaning “be curved,” which is semantically unrelated to *ʿ-*k-r**. The root *ʿ-*k-r** appears to be a homonym for the separate semantic categories of I) “push back,” II) “make turbid,” and III) “be fertile.” The toponym likely has an etymological link to meaning III. R. Mosis, “Ākar,” ed. Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 8:68–69.

“Why have you troubled (*ʿq̄kartānû*) us? YHWH is troubling (*yaʿkʿr̄k̄ā*) you this very day” (Josh. 7:25). The following verse (7:26) offers a folk etymology for the name of the valley of Achor (*ʿākôr*).

As the above summary makes clear, the root *ʿ-k-r*, “to trouble,” lies at the heart of one of the most famous biblical examples of collective punishment.<sup>58</sup> In this context, the root appears to have close affinities to the concept of collective accountability. The actions of the individual, Achan, have stirred up trouble for the collective, Israel, and as a consequence YHWH stirs up trouble not only for the individual, Achan, but also for a collective, his entire family. The sage’s choice of this particular root may be an allusion to the individual who stirred up trouble for his family through his greed for war spoils devoted to destruction.

Apart from the Achan narrative, other uses of the root *ʿ-k-r*, “to trouble,” outside of Proverbs also connote collective punishment. When Israel was in the grips of a famine caused by a drought that Elijah had prophesied, Ahab confronts the prophet after his long absence, “When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, ‘Is it you, you troubler (*ʿōk̄ēr*) of Israel?’” (1Kgs. 18:17). Presumably, Ahab blames the prophet for the prophecy he had delivered, which was now causing hardship for all Israelites, including Ahab. Elijah replies to Ahab, “I have not troubled (*ʿāk̄arî*) Israel, but you and the house of your father

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<sup>58</sup> The story is remarkable not only for its instances of collective accountability (the defeat of Israel’s army at Ai as punishment for Achan’s theft and the punishment of Achan’s entire family for this same sin), but also for the degree to which it involves individual accountability. Although Joshua warns that theft of devoted objects will result in Israel becoming a devoted object herself, YHWH informs Joshua that he will relent from this proposed punishment if the devoted objects are destroyed. In order to destroy the stolen goods, the guilty individual is identified first by tribe, then clan, then lineage, and finally individually. Although Achan’s family suffers for his sin, the punishment is restricted only to this individual family (and those who unwittingly went to war against Ai without the knowledge that YHWH would not fight for Israel) rather than to all of Israel. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” 22.

have because you forsook the commandments of YHWH and you went after the Baals” (1Kgs. 18:18). Elijah accuses Ahab and his family of stirring up trouble for Israel by provoking YHWH’s wrath and his punishment of all Israelites with drought and famine for the sins of their leaders (1Kgs. 16:33-17:1).<sup>59</sup>

The root *ʿ-k-r* appears in another familiar account of collective punishment, although in this case humans, without any direction from YHWH, inflict the punishment. The liaison between Shechem and Dinah in Genesis 34 results in Simeon and Levi’s cunning attack on all the male inhabitants of Shechem (Gen. 34:25). When Jacob learns of his sons’ actions, he immediately notes that he and his family will reap what Simeon and Levi have sown, ““You have troubled (*ʿqkartem*) me by making me abhorrent among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I am few in number, and they will gather themselves against me and strike me. I shall be destroyed, I and my house”” (Gen. 34:30). Although the consequences that Jacob fears will be inflicted by humans, the associations between the root *ʿ-k-r*, “to trouble,” and the notion of a collective suffering for the actions of another seem clear.

Given the earlier examination of the semantic range of *bayit*, “house,” and the historico-literary associations of the root *ʿ-k-r*,<sup>60</sup> Proverbs 15:27 likely has in mind a situation in which the larger family unit suffers because of the sinful actions of one of its members. The archaeological record of Iron Age Israel, which demonstrates that the

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<sup>59</sup> This would appear to be a case of leader punishment. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 111. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law*, reprint ed:154.

<sup>60</sup> In addition to the root’s connection to accounts of collective punishment, the sage’s use of the *qal* active participle may suggest that *ʿōkēr* “functions as a kind of technical term or title characterizing the personal nature of the subject rather than the name of that subject’s action.” Almost half the appearances of this root in the Hebrew Bible are *qal* active participles, a fact that suggests that the term should be understood as an appellative. Mosis, “’Ākar,” 70.



nuclear family shared a small house within a compound of homes that housed the extended family, also suggests that trouble brought on one's house would likely affect all those living in the small house and possibly the extended family as well. As in Proverbs 3:33, the use of *bayit*, "house," in 15:27 seems to suggest collective punishment. This passage also contrasts the negative consequences of wickedness with the positive rewards of righteousness. However, unlike 3:33, in which both the punishment and the reward are collective, only the punishment is collective in this verse. Whereas 3:33 deals with the very general categories of "the wicked" and "the righteous," 15:27 has more specific crimes and merits in mind.

The crime that results in collective accountability involves being "greedy for (unjust) profit" (*bôṣēa' bāṣa'*). This expression, or its positive variant, "hating (unjust) profit" (*śōnē' bēṣa'*), occurs elsewhere in Proverbs and in the Hebrew Bible more generally.<sup>61</sup> Three verses in Proverbs, including 15:27, refer to the individual who either is greedy for profit (*bôṣēa' bāṣa'*) or hates (unjust) profit (*śōnē' bēṣa'*). Proverbs 1:15-19 offers advice to the child who will be enticed by sinners to join them in gaining riches through illegal activities (Prov. 1:10-14): "My son, do not walk in their way; withhold your foot from their path for their feet run to evil and they hurry to shed blood...yet they lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives! Thus is the path of all who are greedy for profit (*bôṣēa' bāṣa'*); it takes away the life of its possessors." The sage discourages his pupil from associating with sinners who are greedy for profit because their crime results in poetic justice; although they think they will gain riches for

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<sup>61</sup> Outside of Proverbs, the expressions "greedy for profit" and "hating (unjust) profit" occur most often among the prophets (Cf. Jer. 6:13, 8:10; Eze. 22:27; Hab. 2:9).

themselves by plundering others, they in fact damage their own well being. This picture of retribution appears to be individual. Rather than bringing negative consequences upon the entire family, the sinner's crimes result in him suffering the same fate he intended to inflict on others.

Proverbs 28:16 deals with the one who hates unjust profit (*šōnē' beša'*): "A prince lacking understanding causes much oppression; one hating (unjust) profit will have a long life." Although this verse approaches the issue of unjust gain from the opposite angle, like Proverbs 1:19 it envisions individual consequences. However, the view of Proverbs 28:16, that the one who hates unjust profit will live a long time accords well with Proverbs 15:27b, "the one who hates bribes will live." Bribes qualify as a type of unjust gain, and both 28:16 and 15:27 are in agreement that the reward for the individual who eschews such things is individual, not collective, in nature.

Why the punishment and reward for either coveting or eschewing unjust profit should emphasize individual, not collective accountability, is not entirely clear. The legal concept of hating unjust profit (*šōnē' beša'*) appears in YHWH's command to Moses, via his father-in-law Jethro, to create a judicial system over which "trustworthy men hating (unjust) profit" (Exod. 18:21) preside. Hating unjust profit appears to be a qualification for office, rather than a good deed that deserves reward. This may perhaps shed some light on the distinction that the sage makes between the collective punishment that this crime deserves and the individual reward that obedience produces.

The final major issue associated with Proverbs 15:27 is the issue of agency. Whereas 3:33 makes explicit that YHWH's curse is on the house of the wicked and that it is YHWH who blesses the abode of the righteous, 15:27 does not attribute to YHWH the

consequences that befall the individual greedy for gain. Does the sage envision the trouble brought upon the greedy person's home as divine punishment or the natural consequence of such an action?

The debate concerning this question more generally began in earnest with Klaus Koch's important 1955 article, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?"<sup>62</sup> As the title suggests, Koch's article called into question the then widely-held position that punishment for sin is divinely administered in the Hebrew Bible's worldview. According to Koch, this view has been most firmly entrenched in the study of ancient Israel's wisdom literature.<sup>63</sup> Koch argues that YHWH does not, in fact, administer retribution against sinners on the basis of juridical standards, but rather he acts "somewhat like a 'midwife who assists at a birth' by *facilitating the completion of something which previous human action has already set in motion.*"<sup>64</sup> Koch envisions a universe, or sphere of influence, that has automatic, unalterable consequences built into its very fabric. YHWH may set these consequences into motion, hurry them along, delay them, or bring them to completion, but he himself does not judge, either to punish or to reward.

Although Koch's argument has reshaped the modern understanding of divine retribution as often impersonal and automatic,<sup>65</sup> scholars have raised numerous objections to Koch's theory. For example, many commentators observe that his definition of

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<sup>62</sup> Originally published in German as Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma Im Alten Testament?". Published in English as Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?".

<sup>63</sup> Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," 58.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> See Chapter 7 for further discussion of the merits of Koch's thesis.

retribution as requiring a direct juridical role based upon an established legal standard is far too narrow and thus makes his conclusion that divine retribution does not exist anywhere in the Hebrew Bible appear exaggerated.<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, his conclusions have challenged many biblical scholars' views on punishment and reward. For example, P. D. Miller's study of sin and judgment in prophetic literature yields the conclusion "that a number of passages in which the correspondence of sin and judgment is effected suggest in various ways that the judgment is found in the consequence that is worked out of the sinful deed."<sup>67</sup> Whether the text explicitly attributes the judgment to YHWH or not, "God is seen as the one who brings about the consequence."<sup>68</sup> YHWH built into his creation the act-consequence connection<sup>69</sup> that underlies such passages, even if they do not attribute the consequences to him directly. The tension between the notion of divine retribution and the built-in act-consequence model dissipates when one considers the Israelite concept of YHWH as a god who acts in history. Although Israel's enemies may appear to be inflicting punishment on her, the biblical text makes clear that YHWH controls the actions of these enemies, and thus the fate of Israel.<sup>70</sup> Miller cites Deuteronomy 32:21ff as an example of a text that holds in tension divine retribution and

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<sup>66</sup> Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 3. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 27–28. Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 135–137. Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 95.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets*, 132.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Lennart Boström prefers the term "character-consequence relationship" because often Proverbs denotes punishments not for specific actions but rather for an individual's general character. Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 90.

<sup>70</sup> For example, see Isaiah 10:5-11.

the act-consequence model. Israel's sin against YHWH will result in a similar affliction of Israel (32:21), but at the hands of human enemies, whom YHWH controls (32:27).<sup>71</sup>

In addition to direct statements of divine retribution and the military punishment used in Deuteronomy 32:21ff, the Hebrew Bible also uses social and natural punishment to indicate the correspondence between action and consequence.<sup>72</sup> As Michael Fox has noted, however, Proverbs' view of YHWH as the creator of a justly ruled universe<sup>73</sup> also demands that divine impetus be seen in these cases as well: "God's judgment subsumes natural causality rather than the other way around."<sup>74</sup>

In the specific case of being greedy for profit in Proverbs 15:27, certain biblical accounts of people being greedy for unjust gain and God's role in punishing them may be instructive. For example, the prophet Jeremiah describes the many offenses for which the city of Jerusalem must be punished (*hopqad*, Jer. 6:6; cf. 6:15): "For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for profit (*bôšēa' bāša'*)" (Jer. 6:13a, cf. 8:10). For this offense (among others), the prophet promises punishment for the entire city and all of its residents (Jer. 6:11-12). Although the collective will suffer punishment, Jeremiah 6:13a makes clear that every member of the collective is guilty and deserving of punishment, and thus the punishment for being greedy for profit is individual. Nevertheless, Jeremiah also makes clear that YHWH is responsible for the impending judgment.

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<sup>71</sup> Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets*, 133.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>73</sup> Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 87–89.

<sup>74</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 92.

The sale of Joseph to slave traders by his brothers offers another useful example. Although this example uses a different expression from “the one greedy for profit” (*bôṣēaʿ bāṣaʿ*), Judah’s question, “what profit (*ma-beṣaʿ*) is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?” (Gen. 37:26), indicates that his brothers, who agree to his plan, are indeed “greedy for profit” (*bôṣēaʿ bāṣaʿ*). Although Joseph’s brothers do not attribute the famine that afflicts their homeland following the sale of Joseph into slavery to divine retribution, Joseph makes clear to his brothers that YHWH orchestrated the consequences of their malicious actions to have a positive impact on those that they aimed to harm, namely their father Jacob and brother Joseph, who were rewarded with wealth, progeny, and elevated status in a foreign court. As this example makes clear, even when humans do not recognize YHWH’s presence, he does in fact play an active role in thwarting the sinful actions of the wrongdoer.

None of the occurrences of the concept of “unjust profit,” (*beṣaʿ*) in Proverbs directly attributes the consequences to YHWH. Lennart Boström concludes from his study of God’s role in retribution in Proverbs that perhaps presenting a consistent position on this issue was less important to Israel’s sages than it is to modern interpreters. Rather, Proverbs recognized that the consequences for one’s behavior came to fruition through a variety of means, which could include human, societal, and divine agency.<sup>75</sup>

### **Proverbs 11:17**

The root *ʿ-ḵ-r*, “to trouble,” also appears in Proverbs 11:17: “A man of kindness rewards himself, but a cruel man troubles (*w<sup>ʿ</sup>ōḵēṣ*) his flesh.” Given the parallelism between the two halves of the verse, the effects of the cruel man’s behavior ostensibly

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<sup>75</sup> Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 133.

appear to result in individual negative consequences for himself. However, “his flesh” (*š<sup>e</sup>ērô*) can refer not only to his own flesh, but also to his blood relatives. The use of this root (*-k-r*) in Proverbs 11:29 and 15:27 in connection with the family (*bayit*) suggests that the sage intends “his flesh” (*š<sup>e</sup>ērô*) to mean simultaneously both the individual who acts cruelly and his family.<sup>76</sup> In other words, the character of the cruel individual brings negative consequences not only upon himself, but also upon his family.

The sage’s words of wisdom in 11:17 are somewhat general. They refer not to specific actions but rather to one’s character. The incongruence between the reward for good character, which is individual, and the punishment for bad, which appears to be both individual and collective, perhaps lies in the nature of the character traits addressed. Kindness and cruelty are attributes that apply to an individual’s relationship with others. A kind person is concerned for others, often even at his own expense. His reward for such kindness is that he personally will benefit despite his selfless intentions. A cruel person intends to inflict harm on others, but the result is that he harms himself and his own posterity.

### **Proverbs 17:13**

As has already become evident from some of the examples examined above, sin often results in the sinner suffering in a manner similar to the wrong he committed. The wrongs committed by an individual can result in those same transgressions being inflicted upon the group associated with that individual. YHWH troubling (*ya<sup>k</sup>r<sup>k</sup>ā*) Achan’s family as retribution for Achan’s troubling (*<sup>a</sup>kartānû*) of Israel is an excellent example of

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<sup>76</sup> Fox argues that the parallel constructions *w<sup>o</sup>ōkēr š<sup>e</sup>ērô*, “troubles his flesh,” and *ōkēr bêtô*, “troubles his house” (Prov. 11:29, 15:27) suggest that “his flesh” can refer to the man’s family, perhaps in a manner akin to the English expression “his own flesh and blood,” which refers metaphorically not to the individual’s body but rather to his blood relatives. Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:538.

this (Josh. 7:25). Proverbs 17:13 recognizes this pattern: “As for the one returning evil for good, evil will not depart from his house.” *Lex talionis*, or the notion that a criminal’s punishment should inflict pain and loss that is commensurate with the crime committed, underlies the legal system not only of Israel, but also much of the ancient Near East.<sup>77</sup> Although modern sensibilities often object to the biblical expression of *lex talionis*, “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth...” (Exod. 21:23-25; Lev. 24:19-21; Deut. 19:16-21), the underlying principle suggests that the punishment should fit the crime. Thus, this legal principle prevents, for example, a debtor from being executed for failure to repay his loans. For the evildoer in Proverbs 17:13 to experience evil as punishment for the evil he inflicted on others is fair according to the principles of *lex talionis*. However, the sage does not condemn the sinner alone; he suggests that evil will afflict the sinner’s entire family. In this manner, the sinner’s punishment is worse than the evil he inflicted on another.

The rejection of *lex talionis* here in favor of a more vindictive form of punishment has a parallel in Psalm 109. The psalmist complains about his enemies: “In return for my love, they accuse me, even though I am in prayer. Thus they return to me evil instead of good and hatred instead of love” (Ps. 109:4-5). The psalmist continues with some of the most poignant curses found anywhere in the Bible. Rather than merely wishing for his enemies to suffer as they have made him suffer, the psalmist asks YHWH to extend their punishments to their children (Ps. 109:9-15).<sup>78</sup> In contrast to the emotionally

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<sup>77</sup> Tikva Simone Frymer-Kensky, “Tit for Tat : The Principle of Equal Retribution in Near Eastern and Biblical Law,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 43 (1980): 230–234.

<sup>78</sup> The speaker in verses 6-19 is not entirely clear. However, even if the psalmist is not the speaker, the speech of the enemies concludes in verse 19, at which point the psalmist asks YHWH to enact the curses that his enemies intended for him against the enemies themselves (v. 20).



charged words of Psalm 109, however, Proverbs 17:13 does not appear to be motivated by a desire to see one's enemies suffer. Two possibilities present themselves as possible explanations for the sage's divergence from the principle of *lex talionis*. Either the sage is observing a pattern of human behavior and consequence that is familiar to him, or he is offering a didactic warning that the evil one reaps will be worse than the evil one has sown. As evidence for the former, one need only look at the previously discussed examples, like Genesis 34 in which the actions of two individuals (first Shechem and Dinah, then Simeon and Levi) result in the punishment of a larger group (first the inhabitants of Shechem, then Jacob and his family).

As in Proverbs 15:27, the sage makes no direct comment concerning the agent behind the collective retribution described in 17:13.<sup>79</sup> Although YHWH may redirect the sinner's actions so that the sinner and his family suffer its consequences, it is the individual who starts the chain of events and has the power to prevent the evil that will afflict his family. Regardless of whether YHWH is the direct agent behind the retribution described in Proverbs 17:13, the individual, armed with the knowledge that both he and his family will bear the consequences of his evil actions, can avoid setting the act-consequence process into motion. In this respect, the verse may function pedagogically to discourage bad behavior.

### **Proverbs 13:22**

The thwarting of the sinner's intentions with ensuing wider consequences for the sinner's family occurs again in Proverbs 13:22: "The good leaves an inheritance for the

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<sup>79</sup> Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:631.

sons of his sons, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.”<sup>80</sup> Although the sinner, like all individuals in ancient Israel, intends to leave an inheritance to his sons and thus protect his name and heritage,<sup>81</sup> his offspring will not inherit the riches that he has acquired, perhaps unjustly. Rather, the righteous will, through unexplained mechanisms, gain the sinner’s wealth.

Many of the details of this verse are vague. The crime of the sinner is unknown. The verse does not specify the manner in which his wealth is transferred to the righteous. Given this vagueness, the verse does not appear to be an observation of the sage’s lived reality but rather another pedagogical warning of the far-reaching consequences of the individual’s actions. Proverbs 28:8 suggests the same transfer of wealth from wrongdoer to righteous individual: “One increasing his wealth through interest and usury gathers it for one who is kind to the poor.” This verse differs from 13:22, however, in that it does not suggest that the transfer will affect the wrongdoer’s offspring.

Outside of Proverbs, the notion that the assets of wrongdoers are forfeited to the children of the righteous occurs both in Job 27:13-17, which will be discussed in the section on Job, and in the Egyptian wisdom instructions of Amenemope. According to Amenemope’s teachings, if a man encroaches on the fields of another, “His property will be taken from his children, and his belongings will be given to another” (Ch. 6; 8.7-8 [cf. AEL 2.152]). Amenemope’s instruction makes clear that the crime in question is the

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<sup>80</sup> The inheritance envisioned here need not be only monetary. According to rabbinic thinkers, for a father to behave in a manner that merited reward and to seek to collect that reward during his own lifetime was wicked. He should leave his reward for his children, whom he has raised to be righteous themselves, to inherit. *Leviticus Rabba* 36:5. Efraim Elimelech Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ Pr, 1987), 501.

<sup>81</sup> Herbert Chanan Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife: A Biblical Complex,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 9–10.

illegal acquisition of land, the inheritance of another man that he will leave to his children. In Proverbs 13:22, this point is unclear. The sinner's crime is unknown and the treasure that he will lose to the righteous is not necessarily land. The generalized nature of the sage's warning would seem to support a pedagogical function for the mention of the wrongdoer's effects on his children.

### **Proverbs 11:29**

The root *ʿ-k-r*, which has recurred several times in the above discussion, also occurs in connection with the family in Proverbs 11:29: “The one who troubles (*ʿôkē̄r*) his house (*bêṭô*) will inherit wind, and the foolish one will be a servant to the wise of heart.” In this context, however, the trouble brought upon one's family is not the punishment for sinful or foolish behavior but is rather the cause of a negative consequence, inheriting the wind (cf. Prov. 30:4b). Fox connects this verse with Proverbs 17:2:<sup>82</sup> “A wise slave will rule over a son causing shame, and in the midst of brothers he will share an inheritance.” If the one troubling (*ʿôkē̄r*) his house (*bêṭô*) is a brother hoping for more inheritance than he is due, the consequence of his actions is that his inheritance will be reversed; instead of receiving more, he will receive nothing (Prov. 11:29a) and one who should have received no inheritance will gain (Prov. 17:2).

This passage does not directly advocate collective accountability. It acknowledges the ability of an individual through his own actions to create trouble for his family, but the consequences envisioned thwart the wicked individual's intentions and result in the family members whom he attempted to wrong reaping the wicked individual's forfeited share of the inheritance. Although the passage does not mention

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<sup>82</sup> Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:544.

the wrongdoer's progeny, they presumably suffer from their father's exclusion from the family inheritance. If he receives only wind as his allotment, the inheritance that he can pass on to his own sons will be only the wealth that he can amass during his own lifetime through his own work.

#### **Proverbs 12:4**

Several passages in Proverbs focus on the wife and the effects that she has on her husband and family. Because of the ode to the wife of valor in Proverbs 31:10-21, which will be discussed in the next section on collective reward, a great many of these passages focus more on the rewards that she brings her family. A couple of passages, however, suggest that a wife's husband and family can suffer for her misdeeds. Proverbs 12:4 recognizes both of these aspects of a wife's contribution to her marriage: "A wife of valor is the crown of her husband, but the one bringing shame is like rotteness in his bones." While a good wife can bring her husband pride that is externally visible, a bad wife causes him not only shame, which is presumably public as well, but also internal destruction.<sup>83</sup> The mechanism of punishment is not an external force but something that corrupts from within, unseen and unperceived, until it eventually destroys the husband.

#### **Proverbs 14:1b**

The personification of wisdom and folly as women in Proverbs 14:1 also suggests that a woman can positively or adversely affect her family through her actions: "Wisdom builds her house (*bān<sup>e</sup>tâ bêtâh*), but Folly tears hers down with her own hands." As in previous verses, the term *bayit*, "house," here refers not to the physical structure but

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 2:548.

rather to the family.<sup>84</sup> In addition to the fact that an individual likely was not able to tear down the physical structure of a house by herself, the usage of house in connection with Wisdom in other proverbs suggests that the sage is referring to Wisdom's family and household economy.<sup>85</sup> Proverbs 24:3-4, 31:15, 21, 27 all suggest that the house to which a woman attends is her family and that she plays a crucial role in its economic prosperity. Mismanagement of this responsibility would result in unpleasant consequences for her entire family. If, like these other passages, this passage deals with financial well-being, then the negative consequences that a woman brings upon her family through her own folly are not divine retribution but the natural, observed result of such actions. This observation of wisdom literature is not limited to the *paterfamilias*. Both men and women could behave in a manner that brought negative consequences upon their children.<sup>86</sup>

### **Proverbs 13:20b**

Although the examples discussed so far are generally instances of transgenerational punishment, Proverbs 13:20 hints at intragenerational collective accountability: "The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." The suffering of fools is contagious for those who keep company with them.<sup>87</sup> The text is brief and does not specify its precise meaning. It seems unlikely, however, that the suffering envisioned is divinely inflicted. More

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<sup>84</sup> Note, however, that Proverbs 9:1 appears to have in mind an actual house being built by Wisdom, and 9:14 also seems to envision a foolish woman sitting in a physical house structure.

<sup>85</sup> Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:572.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Psalm 109:14b.

<sup>87</sup> McKane, *Proverbs*, 457.

probable is the possibility that association with fools leads to foolish behavior, which produces suffering. The first half of the verse seems to express the same notion with respect to the wise. It does not, by contrast, mention the rewards gained through the wisdom acquired by spending time with the wise.

### **III. Collective Reward in Proverbs**

Many of the passages discussed in the previous section offer insight into both collective punishment and collective reward. Some of those will be reconsidered here for their comments on collective reward. Still more passages occur in Proverbs that deal only with collective reward without presenting any contrast to collective punishment. Those will be considered in this section as well.

#### **Proverbs 3:33**

As discussed above, the term *nāweh*, “abode,” in poetic parallelism with *bayit*, “house,” in Proverbs 3:33 likely suggests that the term carries the same connotations as *bayit* in this context. YHWH does not bless the structure so much as he blesses the family unit residing within that structure. The family of the righteous benefits from the righteous individual’s good character.

#### **Proverbs 13:22**

In Proverbs 13:22, the righteous benefit not only from collective reward, but also from the collective punishment of the sinner and his would-be heirs: “The good leaves an inheritance for the sons of his sons, but the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.” The children of the righteous benefit from their father’s own good deeds, and

the righteous individual comes into possession of the sinner's savings. Again, the mechanism by which this occurs is unclear.

### **Proverbs 15:6**

In addition to its use in connection with collective responsibility in Proverbs 11:17 and 15:27, the root *ʿ-k-r* also appears in Proverbs 15:6: “In the house of the righteous there is great treasure, but the produce of the wicked is troubled (*ʿ-k-r*).” The two halves of the proverb are not antithetical. Rather than stating that the wicked have no treasure, the verse permits the possibility that the wicked have treasure but notes that it is “troubled” (*ʿ-k-r*). Given the associations between the root *ʿ-k-r* and the family discussed above, the sage is likely implying that the family that occupies the house of the righteous is not troubled by its fortunes.<sup>88</sup>

### **Proverbs 21:20**

“Precious treasure and oil are in the abode (*binwê*) of the wise, but the foolish man devours it.” Following the LXX, many translators emend the MT's “and oil are in” (*wāšemen*) to “dwells in” (*yiškōn*), which heightens the contrast between the permanent residence of wealth in the house of the wise with the fool's hasty consumption of resources.<sup>89</sup> Although the sage may indeed have in mind the physical structure of a dwelling, the issue raised, namely that of safeguarding one's inheritance, affects those who dwell in that structure with the wise man, his family. The wise man is careful with his assets, and those assets remain to him and his heirs. The fool devours his resources and leaves not only nothing for himself, but also nothing for his heirs.

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<sup>88</sup> For example, see Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:590.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:688.

### **Proverbs 14:26**

“In the fear of YHWH one has strong confidence, and one’s children will have refuge” (Prov. 14:26). Fox describes the second colon as an apparent *non sequitur*, but nevertheless one that gains meaning from the metaphorical use of *mibṭah*, “trust, confidence,” to denote a stronghold or fortress, into which an individual brings his family in the event of peril.<sup>90</sup> On the functional level, the individual who fears YHWH abides by his laws and teachings, which provide for the instruction of one’s children in those same laws and teachings (e.g. Deut. 6:1-2). In this respect, the children of the righteous will have refuge in the same fear of YHWH in which their father found strong confidence. The collective reward for fearing YHWH, then, appears to be a practical observation of reality; the individual who strictly adheres to the teachings of Yahwism will teach his children to do the same, and they will benefit from this instruction in the same manner that their father did, namely through a sense of security.

### **Proverbs 20:7**

Like Proverbs 13:22, 20:7 suggests that the children of the righteous individual will benefit from their father’s good behavior: “The righteous walks about with integrity; happy are his children after him!” The sage does not specify the manner in which the righteous individual’s children receive this blessing. One possibility is that the father has imparted his righteous ways to his children, who, consequently, enjoy a happy existence because of the virtue they gained through good parenting. If YHWH himself bestows this blessing upon the children because of the righteous ways of their father, the issue of merit becomes pertinent. Should YHWH reward the children of the righteous if they

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 2:582.



should not turn out to be righteous themselves? This issue will be considered more in depth in the section below on the role of wisdom instruction for the righteous and wicked in Proverbs.

### **Proverbs 11:21b**

“Hand to hand,<sup>91</sup> the wicked will not go unpunished, but the seed<sup>92</sup> of the righteous will escape” (Prov. 11:21). According to this passage, the seed, or offspring, of the righteous will not succumb to the calamities and punishments that threaten the wicked. The nature of the fate that the children of the righteous escape is unclear. Likewise, the specific characteristics that merit this reward and the role of YHWH are not mentioned.

Although the first colon does not deal with the issue of collective accountability, several commentators<sup>93</sup> have pointed out that the phrase “will not go unpunished” (*lō-yinnāqeh*) draws on terminology familiar from the divine attribute formula in Exodus 34:6-7. The relationship between this formula and Israel’s wisdom literature will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 7. According to Van Leeuwen, the allusion to God’s justice may suggest that the sage who penned this verse, and others like it (see Prov. 6:29;

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<sup>91</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, “Hand to hand” may mean “assuredly.” Some scholars suggest that it may reflect a custom of joining hands at the conclusion of an agreement. Ibid., 2:539. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 125.

<sup>92</sup> The NRSV omits the term “seed of” (*zeraʿ*) from its translation on the basis of the Greek translation of the term, “the one sowing” (*ho de speirōn*). The Greek translation appears to be highly interpretive, which perhaps results from the difficult phrase “hand to hand” in the first colon and then lack of grammatical parallelism between the two lines. The fact that the Greek interprets the consonants for “seed of” (*z-r-ʿ*) as a verb from the same root indicates that the letters belong in the text. I see no reason to favor the Greek translation since it appears to be struggling to make sense of unusual terminology and a jarring poetic sequence. I thank James Jumper for this insight via private communication.

<sup>93</sup> Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “The Book of Proverbs,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, vol. 5 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 119. Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:539.

16:5; 17:5; 19:5, 9; 28:20) drew his insight not from his lived experiences and observations but rather from traditional notions of God's character.<sup>94</sup>

### **Proverbs 14:1a**

The statement that “Wisdom builds her house (*bayit*),” like other passages containing the term *bayit*, “house,” suggests that the wise woman provides enduring goodness for her family. The expression “to build a house” in connection with a female subject also occurs in Ruth 4:11, a passage in which the townspeople act as witnesses to Boaz's agreement to fulfill the obligations of the levirate marriage for Ruth. The people bless Ruth as she joins Boaz's family: “May YHWH make the woman entering your house like Rachel and like Leah, who together built the house of Israel” (Ruth 4:11). In addition to producing numerous offspring, Rachel and Leah also helped to build the house of Israel by contributing to the family economy. The woman who builds her house in Proverbs 14:1a produces the children who will benefit from the collective reward that she brings upon the house.

### **Proverbs 31:10-31**

The praise of the virtuous wife (*ʿēšet-ḥayil*) in Proverbs 31:10-31 contains numerous praises of the beneficial role that a good wife can play for her family. That she is “more precious than jewels” (v. 10) may again refer to the woman's role in managing the family economy. Verses 11 and 12 both focus on the advantages that she brings to her husband, namely “gain” and “good.” Not only does she provide benefits for her husband explicitly, but she is also praised for securing food (v. 15) and clothing (v.

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<sup>94</sup> Van Leeuwen, “The Book of Proverbs,” 119. Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:539.

21) for her family. She accomplishes such things by avoiding idleness (v. 27) and her family appreciates her contribution to their prosperity (v. 28).

Given the rather practical nature of the activities for which the virtuous wife receives praise, the collective reward in which her family basks is more likely a general observation than a religious belief that YHWH rewards the family that is managed by an industrious wife. The author of the poem mentions the virtuous wife's fear of YHWH (v. 30), but the divine is otherwise not mentioned as the source of the benefits that befall the family of the virtuous wife.

#### **IV. The Role of Wisdom Instruction for the Righteous and the Wicked in Proverbs**

As already noted, the interpreter who produced the Targum Onkelos to Exodus 20:4-6 avoided the theological problem of innocent children suffering for the sins of their fathers by describing the children as “rebellious” and continuing “to sin after their fathers.”<sup>95</sup> Does this solution to the theological problem of collective punishment have an analogy in wisdom literature? Several texts with wisdom affinities from the New Testament suggest a widespread notion that like begets like or that people reap what they sow.<sup>96</sup> Is this concept present in the Hebrew biblical wisdom tradition and does it play any role in Israel's wisdom literature's understanding of the origins of good and wicked children? If so, this would suggest that wicked parents who deserve punishment produce wicked children who also deserve punishment; righteous parents who deserve reward produce righteous children who also deserve reward. Collective accountability does not

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<sup>95</sup> Targum Onkelos to Exodus 20:4-6. Levinson, “The Case for Revision and Interpolation Within the Biblical Legal Corpora,” 57.

<sup>96</sup> Matt. 7:17-18, Luke 6:43, Jas 3:11-12. Cf. Deut. 32:32 in the Hebrew Bible. Note the contrast with Jer. 2:21.

create a theological problem in this scenario. So the following question must be addressed: Does Israel's wisdom literature, like the New Testament passages just mentioned, hold that righteous parents beget righteous children while wicked parents beget wicked children? Given the nature of much of wisdom literature as instruction intended to help the pupil avoid sin and act righteously, a related question arises: What is the power of wisdom instruction to help the child of the wicked avoid the consequences of his parents' sins? Can anyone who avails himself of the instruction found in wisdom literature avoid punishment for the sins of others?

According to the worldview of wisdom literature, instruction and discipline have the power to teach children to avoid sin (e.g. Prov. 10:17, 13:24, 14:26, 15:5, 22:6, 23:13-14, 29:15-17). Yet children, despite the discipline and instructions provided to them, do not necessarily reap the rewards of wisdom simply because it is available.<sup>97</sup> For example, in Proverbs 5:7-14, the sage warns the child to heed his instructions lest one day he should wind up saying, "How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! I did not listen to the voice of my teachers nor did I incline my ear to my instructors. Now I am in the midst of every distress in the assembly and congregation" (Prov. 5:12-14). As this statement indicates, wisdom only protects those who embrace it. The individual who has access to wisdom teachings but does not make use of them will suffer.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, "A fool despises the instruction of his father, but the one who heeds reproof is prudent" (Prov.

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<sup>97</sup> Little explicit evidence for educational accessibility in ancient Israel exists, but a good case can be made that schooling outside of the home was not widely available. Most education in ancient Israel was likely family-based, and the use of family terminology in biblical wisdom literature likely reflects this. David McLain Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 129–131. James L Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 86–108.

<sup>98</sup> Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 129.

15:5). Although good parents offer wisdom instruction to their children, if a child does not heed it, he will be a fool. Israel's wisdom literature is acutely aware of the problems that a foolish child can cause: "A foolish son is a calamity to his father" (Prov. 19:13a); "A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him" (Prov. 17:25); "The one who ruins the father and chases away the mother is a son causing shame and bringing reproach" (Prov. 19:26); "A wise son gladdens his father, but a foolish son is a mother's grief" (Prov. 1:1); "Be wise, my son, and gladden my heart so that I may respond to the one reproaching me" (Prov. 27:11). The foolish child can cause his parents suffering, including both mental anguish and physical harm. The wise child brings his parents pride and happiness.

Although this is a reversal of the usual direction of transgenerational punishment, in which the children suffer for the sins of their parents, this situation is not without precedence. Deuteronomy 24:16 prohibits not only the capital punishment of children for the crimes of their parents, but also the capital punishment of parents for the crimes of their children.<sup>99</sup> That this law code prohibits such a practice suggests that it was indeed a common conception that children could bring bad legal consequences upon their parents. That the parents should be put to death by a civil court may indeed be hyperbolic,<sup>100</sup> but the concern expressed in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (cf. Exod. 21:15; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 27:16; Prov. 20:20) to execute a stubborn and rebellious son suggests children could cause trouble for their parents so that the death of the child was preferable to the parents

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<sup>99</sup> Ezekiel 18 also deals with the case of a righteous parent producing a sinful offspring. A sinful father can produce a righteous son who in turn produces a sinful son. The apple can, in fact, fall far from the tree. In such cases, Ezekiel advocates individual, rather than collective, accountability.

<sup>100</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 341.

enduring the consequences of their child's actions.<sup>101</sup> Proverbs 28:7 perhaps relies on the Deuteronomic law of the stubborn and rebellious son:<sup>102</sup> "A wise son keeps the law, but the one keeping company with gluttons (*zôl'îm*) shames his father." The term *zôl'el*, "glutton," also appears in Deuteronomy 21:20, in which the parents of the stubborn and rebellious son make formal charges against their son to the town elders: "And they will say to the elders of his town, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He does not obey us. He is a glutton (*zôl'el*) and a drunkard.'" In light of the charges leveled directly against the stubborn and rebellious son in Deut. 21:20, the phrasing of Prov. 28:7 seems peculiar. The sage does not warn that a glutton causes his father shame but rather that the companion of gluttons humiliates his father. Is the son guilty of gluttony himself through mere association with gluttons? Or has the sage recognized a pattern of human behavior whereby individuals tend to engage in the same behavior, good or bad, of their peers?<sup>103</sup> The son's culpability is unclear, but evidently his friends' poor character can bring shame upon the son's father, who is responsible for raising a wise son who keeps the law (Prov. 28:7a).

On the basis of the wisdom passages examined above, it would appear that Proverbs allows for the possibility that a good parent can produce a bad child. Yet the

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<sup>101</sup> The mention in Deut. 21:21 that "all Israel will hear and be afraid" suggests that this punishment functioned pedagogically to deter children from shunning discipline.

<sup>102</sup> Clifford, *Proverbs*, 244.

<sup>103</sup> A similar notion may underlie the warnings against associating with the outsider woman in Prov. 1-9. Joseph Blenkinsopp has proposed that the historical context for the denunciation of the outsider woman may have been a postexilic community struggling with problems arising from exogamy. Association with people who do not hold the same beliefs, customs, values, and interests as one's own family and culture threatens the enculturation process for which purpose education likely functioned in ancient Israel. Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman' in Proverbs 1-9," *Biblica* 72, no. 4 (1991): 472-473. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 130-131.

parents' role in producing good offspring appears to be crucial according to other passages:

“The one withholding his rod hates his son, but the one loving him is diligent with discipline” (Prov. 13:24).

“Discipline your son, for there is hope; don't set your heart on killing him” (Prov 19:18).

“Train youth according to his way, and even when he is old, he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6).

Do not withhold discipline from youth; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. If you strike him with a rod, you will save his life from Sheol” (Prov 23:13-14).

“The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a neglected child shames his mother...Discipline your son and he will give you rest; he will give your heart delight” (Prov. 29:15, 17).

These passages would seem to suggest that good parents are those who abide by the oft-repeated instructions to discipline their children. The very model that the good parent is to follow is that of YHWH himself: “My son, do not reject the discipline of YHWH or be grieved by his reproof, for YHWH reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:11-12). How then does a good parent produce a child that causes shame (Prov. 19:26) or ruin (Prov. 19:13a) or “A generation [that] curses its father and does not bless its mother” (Prov. 30:11)? Proverbs 19:17 even seems to offer a measure of guarantee that the parent who properly disciplines his child will not be disappointed. Does this suggest that the parents who produce foolish children were not diligent enough with their discipline and therefore share in the culpability for the shame and ruin that their children will bring upon them? Is the suffering brought back on the parent by the child who does not listen to reproof the product of YHWH turning the

consequences of the sin (failure to discipline harshly enough) back on the sinner (the negligent parents)? Are the foolish children who bring their parents grief, bitterness (Prov. 17:25), shame (Prov. 19:26), and calamity (Prov. 19:13a) the product of parents who did not properly rear their children (Prov. 29:15)? Do such foolish children deserve the suffering that their foolishness, caused by their parents' failure to discipline them, has caused them?

To judge from the threat in Proverbs 20:20 that the lamp of the child who curses his parents will be extinguished, it would appear that the sage holds the individual, in this case the foolish child who has rejected the wisdom instruction not to curse his parents, responsible, even though it appears possible elsewhere that the child's failings may be the result of improper parenting. The issue of free will, however, complicates the issue. If YHWH created and controls the universe, to what extent is he responsible for the nature of those, including the foolish and the wicked, who exist within it? According to Proverbs 16:4, "YHWH has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." Are the wicked and the foolish predestined for their wickedness and foolishness? If this is so, does wisdom instruction have the power to save them from this fate?

To answer these questions, it is first necessary to consider the interpretation of Proverbs 16:4 and the larger unit within which it occurs, 16:1-9, which R. N. Whybray describes as a "theological compendium" that has "deliberately been given the central place in the book [of Proverbs]." <sup>104</sup> Verses 1, 3, and 9 all suggest that YHWH has ultimate control over human plans:

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<sup>104</sup> Whybray, *Proverbs*, 329.



“The plans of the mind belong to mortals, but the answer of the tongue is from YHWH” (Proverbs 16:1).

“Commit your work to YHWH, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3).

“The human mind plans the way, but YHWH directs the steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

The exact nature of these human plans is not explicit.<sup>105</sup> Does the sage mean to suggest that God will thwart a fool devising a wicked plan?<sup>106</sup> Or is it merely a statement suggesting that all human endeavors require divine guidance?<sup>107</sup> If the former interpretation is correct, why do innocent people suffer at the hands of the wicked at all? Why does YHWH not thwart their plans before they harm another person? If the latter interpretation is correct, does this mean that YHWH helps the wicked individual who plots murder or some other action that causes harm to others?

The statement in Proverbs 16:4 that YHWH created the wicked for its purpose is difficult to translate. The expression translated as “for its purpose” (*lamma<sup>a</sup>nêhû*)<sup>108</sup> involves an unusual rendering of the noun *ma<sup>a</sup>neh*, which more often means “answer.” In this vein, William McKane interprets the verse as “Yahweh has made everything in relation to what answers to it,” or, in other words, a counterpart.<sup>109</sup> This implies, for McKane, that YHWH created a “self-contained, self-regulating order rather than theodicy

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<sup>105</sup> Boström describes the plans in 16:1, 9 as “neutral,” in contrast to a similar wisdom saying in *The Instruction of Ptahhotep*, maxim 6. Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 183.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Von Rad’s interpretation of Gen. 50:20 as an example of wisdom in the Joseph narrative that is parallel to Prov. 16:9. Von Rad, “Josephgeschichte Und Altere Chokma.” Fox notes that this notion is not limited to wisdom literature. Fox, “Wisdom in the Joseph Story,” 36.

<sup>107</sup> Whybray, *Proverbs*, 242.

<sup>108</sup> Alternatively, “for his (= YHWH’s) purpose.”

<sup>109</sup> McKane, *Proverbs*, 497.

in the strict sense.”<sup>110</sup> Many interpreters prefer to translate *ma<sup>a</sup>neh* as “purpose” on the basis of Arabic usage and the Hebrew expression *l<sup>e</sup>ma<sup>an</sup>*, “for the purpose of.”<sup>111</sup> Although McKane’s interpretation removes the issue of predestination from the verse, Fox’s more traditional translation renders an interpretation that is suggestive of something akin to predestination: “the present proverb says that the evildoer (as a *type*) was created just to give God’s grim judgments something to do, to keep them busy, as it were.”<sup>112</sup> Boström proposes that this verse was penned in response to the problem of theodicy. Although the verse offers no conclusive answer to the problem, the sage grappled with the issue. He argues that the passage does not offer a solution to the origins of wickedness in predestination by the world’s creator but rather reassures its audience that YHWH created a suitable punishment for those who are wicked.<sup>113</sup>

Proverbs 20:24 contrasts YHWH’s control of human activity with the inability of humans to understand that activity: “The steps of man are from YHWH; how can man understand his own way?” Although the first line also appears in Psalm 37:23 in a positive context that suggests that YHWH offers humans protection, the negative question following it here likely suggests that the sage considered the task in question impossible.<sup>114</sup> If humans cannot understand their own ways, which this verse claims originate from YHWH rather than from humans themselves, can they make use of the wisdom instruction contained elsewhere throughout the book? Such instruction is

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Whybray, *Proverbs*, 241.

<sup>112</sup> Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:611.

<sup>113</sup> Boström, *The God of the Sages*, 61, 148. Cf. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 158.

<sup>114</sup> Whybray, *Proverbs*, 301.

generally based on the premise that actions produce consequences and one should act according to the consequences that one hopes to produce. However, if humans cannot understand their own ways, and perhaps also the consequences that they entail, how can wisdom help them? As Fox observes, despite the determinism expressed in the verse, most of Proverbs attributes free will to humans, so the statement is perhaps better read as a recognition of human limits and of the need for faith in YHWH.<sup>115</sup>

As noted above, Proverbs claims that discipline and reproof offer the instructor the tools necessary to produce a righteous and wise child. Yet, Proverbs 9:7-9 suggests that a class of people exists for whom instruction is futile: “Whoever disciplines a scoffer receives abuse; whoever rebukes the wicked gets hurt. Do not rebuke a scoffer lest he hate you; rebuke the wise and he will love you. Give instruction to the wise, and he will become wiser still; teach the righteous and he will gain in learning.” Some commentators interpret verse 7 to mean that not only can the wisdom instructor not teach a scoffer, but also that his efforts will result in the instructor acquiring some of the scoffer’s disgrace.<sup>116</sup> While this latter assertion may be an unnecessary interpretation of a difficult text,<sup>117</sup> the verses understood as a whole seem to suggest that only the righteous benefit from wisdom. The scoffer, by his very nature, rejects discipline and rebuke, which are crucial pedagogical tools for learning wisdom.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:675.

<sup>116</sup> Clifford, *Proverbs*, 106.

<sup>117</sup> Whybray rejects this position based on the difficult reading and the probable need for emendation. Whybray, *Proverbs*, 145–146.

<sup>118</sup> Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 1:307.

Given the biological relationship between most teachers and pupils in ancient Israel, David Carr argues, “A key goal of such (largely) family-based education was the cultural reproduction of the parent/teacher: enculturating a son (and some daughters) to play a similar sociocultural role to that of the parent (or pseudoparent).”<sup>119</sup> In some cases, this education may have involved the learning of a trade, like writing, but most often the nature of the instruction was much broader.<sup>120</sup> The lessons learned from one’s parents taught the student to appreciate, respect, and sustain the culture and beliefs of his parents. In this manner, wisdom instruction, like the later Jewish documents known as ethical wills, offered the teacher an opportunity for immortality.<sup>121</sup> This type of immortality depends on the individual’s descendants not doing anything to jeopardize the prosperity or longevity of the family lineage. Accordingly, the concern to avoid behavior that resulted in collective retribution for one’s family and to embrace actions that garnered transgenerational rewards was an important one. With this goal of enculturation of the son in mind, it seems likely that the sages who produced Proverbs generally felt that their instructions could steer a pupil on the right course. However, the book’s advice is not so disconnected from reality that it does not recognize the possibility of exceptions to the general rule.

## **V. Summary of Findings in Proverbs**

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<sup>119</sup> Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 130.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 3. Judah Goldin, *Studies in Midrash and Related Literature*, ed. Barry L Eichler and Jeffrey H Tigay, 1st ed., JPS Scholar of Distinction Series (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988), 197. Cf. *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

Several trends have emerged from the preceding discussion of collective accountability in Proverbs. For both collective punishment and reward, many of the relevant statements deal with the “house/abode” or “family” of the wrongdoer or righteous individual.<sup>122</sup> Some passages refer to the effect of one’s actions on his children or grandchildren, and a few note that a child’s behavior can have consequences for his parents. On the whole, collective accountability in the book of Proverbs appears to be transgenerational.

Under the rubric of collective punishment, the sin or crime for which one’s family suffers is often quite vague. In some cases it is a specific character trait (Prov. 11:17), rather than a particular action, but in many cases it is a general attribute, like wickedness (Prov. 3:33) or sinfulness (Prov. 13:22). Similarly, the punishment is also usually quite general, such as an unspecified curse (Prov. 3:33) or the troubling of one’s house (Prov. 15:27). Some of the more specific punishments suggest the loss of wealth or an inheritance (Prov. 11:29, 13:22). In most cases, YHWH’s role in administering the negative consequences for the family of the individual wrongdoer is not explicit, with Prov. 3:33 being the only exception. Only by recognizing the sage’s understanding of the universe and everything that occurs within it as the result of YHWH’s creative actions can one attribute the bad consequences that befall the family of sinners to the divine will. That YHWH’s role is only explicitly mentioned on one occasion speaks to the prominence of the act-consequence connection in Proverbs and wisdom literature more generally. Although YHWH ultimately lies behind the design of the universe that

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<sup>122</sup> For example, Prov. 3:33; 14:1; 15:27; 17:13; 21:20.

automatically brings consequences upon individuals for their actions, the text rarely attributes intergenerational punishment to YHWH directly.

As many scholars have pointed out in their studies of collective accountability in the Hebrew Bible more generally, the types of crimes that merit intergenerational punishment are limited to those that involve infidelity to the covenant between the people of Israel and YHWH (Deut. 5:9-10).<sup>123</sup> The types of misdeeds and character traits that result in negative consequences for the wrongdoer's family in Israel's biblical wisdom tradition are not examples of treason against YHWH. One instance, that of "being greedy for unjust profit," *bôṣēa' bāṣa'* (Prov. 15:27), does involve the divine punishment of an entire community in Jeremiah 6:13, but in that context, every individual is personally guilty; the group suffers for the sins of every member, not those of an individual or a smaller subset. Proverbs 17:13 forewarns that evil will not depart from the house of the one returning evil for good. A parallel to this situation occurs in Psalm 109: "They reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love." The psalmist goes on to ask that the family of his enemies be punished for their iniquitous requital: "May the iniquity of his father be remembered before YHWH and do not let the sin of his mother be wiped out" (Psa. 109:14). Whether the psalmist's plea for divine assistance in seeking revenge upon his enemies was answered is unknown. The psalm's inclusion in the canon may suggest that the wider community accepted that returning evil for good merited transgenerational punishment, but most of the narrative material relating to this issue agrees in reserving such a severe punishment for the gravest crimes, those committed against YHWH himself.

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<sup>123</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 344. Levinson, "The Human Voice," 47.

Many of the observations made about collective punishment in Proverbs also apply to collective reward. The rewards are often quite general (Prov. 3:33, 14:26). In several cases, the rewards appear to be monetary (Prov. 13:22, 15:6, 21:20). This is especially true in the case of the contribution of the virtuous wife (*ʿēšet-ḥayil*) to her family's economy in Proverbs 31:10-31. The characteristics and deeds being rewarded are perhaps even more vague than they are for the misdeeds that are punished. Often the reward is for general character traits like being righteous (Prov. 3:33, 13:22, 15:6, 20:7), good (Prov. 13:22), or wise (Prov. 14:1, 21:20). Most of the verses do not directly attribute the good fortunes of the righteous to YHWH himself.

Proverbs generally holds that wisdom instruction, combined with discipline, has the power to produce good children who can avoid sin and punishment (Prov. 13:24, 19:18, 22:6, 23:13-14, 29:15, 17). Nevertheless, some statements suggest that some people exist who cannot be reached through wisdom and discipline (Prov. 9:7-9) or who turn out rebellious despite their parents' efforts to raise them according to the law. Such children bring shame upon otherwise good parents, who are consequently deemed bad parents in the eyes of their peers (Prov. 27:11). Although several statements may grapple with the issues of theodicy and origins of bad children (Prov. 16:4), no answer is reached and the book on the whole tends to hold the individual accountable for his own behavior (Prov. 20:20).

## Chapter Three: Collective Accountability in the Book of Job

### I. Introduction

According to Halpern, “Job’s dilemma draws its locomotion from the dissonance, then, between rigid reality and the even more rigid theory of individual retribution; he, and he personally, must have sinned. Job, and Ecclesiastes, puncture the theory of individual retribution; against the old, supple idea of corporate responsibility, their lances would splinter harmlessly.”<sup>124</sup> Despite the rise of the individual and the general shift from collective to individual accountability in ancient Israel, Job’s suffering has a large social dimension to it.<sup>125</sup> A major component of his distress is the fact that his condition has alienated his friends and family (Job 19:13-22). Although his prominence in the community once earned him the respect, admiration, and acclaim of all his community’s members, from its orphans to its rulers (Job 29), he now suffers not only from the rejection of his friends and family, but also from the mockery of even the lowliest of his community (Job 30:1-15). Job’s complaint against God begins in earnest only when he personally experiences physical suffering (cf. the pious sufferer’s reactions in Job 1:18-22 and 2:3-3:26), but his suffering is unbearable not so much because of the physical pain that he must endure as an individual but because of the ostracism that it ultimately causes him.

The discussion of collective accountability in the book of Job will begin with an examination of the verses relating to collective punishment (section II) and those

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<sup>124</sup> Halpern, “Jerusalem and the Lineages,” 15.

<sup>125</sup> In addition to the social dimension to Job’s suffering, every human action for good or evil, according to Elihu (Job 35:8), affects other humans (as opposed to God).



pertaining to collective reward (section III). It will then consider examples in which the book rejects collective punishment (section IV), examine the role of wisdom instruction for helping children to reap rewards and avoid punishment (section V), and, finally, offer a summary of the findings (section VI).

## II. Collective Punishment in Job

### Prologue

The prologue to Job's dialogue with his comforters raises several issues related to collective punishment.<sup>126</sup> The first issue arises in Job 1:4-5 with the notice that "His sons used to prepare feasts in one another's houses in turn, and they would send and call for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. When the feast days concluded, Job would send and sanctify them and rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings (*ōlôt*) according to the number of them all; for Job said, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their hearts.' Job did thus every day." For an individual who, as Halpern argues, wholly accepts the notion of individual retribution, one must question why Job engages in such precautionary activities. Whom does Job hope to

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<sup>126</sup> Although the prose prologue and epilogue most likely originate from a source different from that of the poetic dialogue, they constitute a "didactic wisdom tale." Although other didactic wisdom tales will not be considered for the purposes of this study, the prose narratives accompanying Job will be for a couple of reasons. Firstly, although the dissonances between the narrative framework and the poetic dialogues are at times jarring (cf. Job 42:3 and 42:7), without the prose, the dialogue begins *in media res*. Secondly, that the author or redactor of the final work saw fit to leave the two different genres side by side suggests that modern distinctions between genres were likely less meaningful to ancient readers. Consequently, both the prose and poetic portions of the book of Job will be considered with respect to the issue of collective accountability. Although they do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the same author (the same is true for the poem on Wisdom in Job 28 and Elihu's speech), they do present perspectives held by the ancient Israelite scribes and sages who collated the final book, and their insights are pertinent to understanding Israel's wisdom tradition. It must also be remembered that the speeches of Job's friends represent a different viewpoint from that of Job. The book as a whole presents a wide array of opinions from various sources, all of which are constructive for understanding collective accountability in the diverse category of Israelite literature known as wisdom. Carol A. Newsom, "Job," ed. Lindsay Jones, *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 4931. Carol Ann Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 2003), 41.

protect by vicariously offering sacrifices for his children? Does he offer these sacrifices to protect his children from suffering the consequences of a very serious, albeit hypothetical, crime? Or does he have more selfish, individual motives? Does he hope to ensure their welfare, and thus preserve the longevity of his own lineage? Or does he hope to avoid the shame that having raised a blasphemous child would have brought upon such a preeminent parent (Job 29)?

The text does not offer any more information about Job's motives beyond what is quoted above. The author of the prologue uses verse 5 to convey that Job's piety was beyond reproach.<sup>127</sup> Although the author's intent in providing the notice about Job's sacrificial activities seems clear, discerning Job's purpose in offering these preemptive sacrifices may still be a worthwhile endeavor. Although Job hails from the land of Uz, likely in the Transjordanian nation of Edom,<sup>128</sup> and does not operate with the normative Israelite cult, a comparison of Job's sacrificial measures to other ancient cultic practices, especially those familiar to the intended audience of the book, is in order. Would an ancient Israelite audience have understood Job's habitual practice of vicariously offering sacrifices for his children to have been effective and, if so, for what?

Although some evidence may suggest that burnt offerings (*ʿōlôṭ*) functioned as an atonement ritual very early in the Israelite cult, this evidence is in part based on the verse in question (Job 1:5). Leviticus 1:4 may confirm their atoning function, but these offerings were more frequently associated with the activities of gift giving and drawing the deity's attention to the cult. Whatever Job's precise motive, it is clear that these latter

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<sup>127</sup> Newsom, *The Book of Job*, 2003, 39. Meir Weiss, *The Story of Job's Beginning: Job 1-2, A Literary Analysis* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1983), 29. David J. A Clines, *Job 1-20*, Word Biblical Commentary v. 17 (Waco, Tex: Word Books, 1989), 15.

<sup>128</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 10.

two functions of the burnt offering are not it.<sup>129</sup> Clines proposes that because the tale is set outside Israel, the term for burnt offerings, *ʿōlōt*, does not refer to the sacrifice known from the Priestly law code that governed the Jerusalem cult but rather to a general sacrifice.<sup>130</sup> This may explain the aberrant usage of whole burnt offerings, *ʿōlōt*, to atone for sins, but the ability of any type of sacrifice, within the Jerusalem cult or that of neighboring Edom,<sup>131</sup> to absolve an individual of a grave sin like blasphemy is, as will be seen, nebulous.

The author of the prologue offers the reader one small insight into Job's thought process. Job worries that his children may have cursed God in their hearts. Blasphemy was a serious crime and its first occurrence in ancient Israel resulted in a proclamation from YHWH that the individual guilty of such a crime would bear his own sin (Lev. 24:10-15). The prescribed punishment was death by stoning in which the entire community participated (Lev. 24:14, 16). The text makes no mention of sacrificial offerings as an effective method of atonement for this grievous sin. The death of the sinner appears to be the only method capable of purging the contagious effects of the sin from the community and the land.

Even if sacrificial offerings could atone for blasphemy, it is unclear that Job's vicarious offerings would be effective for his children. A recurring theme elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, including wisdom literature, is the impotence of sacrifices without underlying sincere sentiments (Psa. 51:17-19; Prov. 15:8, 21:3, 21:27; Qoh. 4:17; Isa.

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<sup>129</sup> Gary A. Anderson, "Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 878.

<sup>130</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 16.

<sup>131</sup> Source material about normative Edomite cultic practices are limited, so I will primarily draw upon Israelite sources.

29:13). However, if Job's concern is to shield himself and the rest of his family from the collective consequences of the accidental sin of one child, evidence does exist for the use of cultic practices to prevent a community from suffering from the contagious effects of unintentional sins or sins committed by a member whose identity is unknown (for example, the use of the red heifer in Deuteronomy 21 and the scapegoat in Leviticus 16).

That the hypothetical curse is not spoken aloud, but rather said "in their hearts," places even greater emphasis on Job's efforts to maintain piety.<sup>132</sup> Blaspheming God silently would not likely result in punishment by one's community because human law codes cannot punish individuals for thoughts that never materialize as either words or actions. It is possible that the ancient Israelite conception of YHWH as omniscient would have resulted in the unrepentant blasphemer suffering divine retribution of some sort, like impoverishment, infertility, illness, or death. In light of this, Job's actions would seem to suggest that he is not concerned about the shame and suffering that his children's sinful thoughts may cause him (a la Prov. 10:1, 17:25, 19:13a, 19:26, 27:11), but rather concerned either strictly for the well-being of his children or perhaps also for the longevity of his lineage, which depends upon the welfare of his children. However, given the narrator's careful distinction in Job 2:10 that "Job did not sin *with his lips*" (cf. 1:22), it is also possible that individuals were thought to incur guilt only from malicious words and actions, not thoughts.<sup>133</sup>

Job's reaction to the death of his children while they feasted in one of his sons' homes (Job 1:18-19) may favor the interpretation that Job offers vicarious sacrifices out

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<sup>132</sup> Weiss, *The Story of Job's Beginning*, 30.

<sup>133</sup> Marvin H Pope, *Job*, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1965), 23.

of concern for his children's welfare: "Job rose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground and worshipped. He said, 'Naked I came forth from the womb of my mother and naked I shall return there; YHWH has given and YHWH has taken away; may the name of YHWH be blessed. In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing'" (Job 1:20-22). Job's response conveys his sorrow at the loss of his children. Job's attitude makes clear that he attributes the loss of his children to divine judgment, but, as the narrator makes clear, his actions are conventional mourning customs and his act of prostration indicates that he does not hold God culpable.<sup>134</sup> God's judgment is fair. Job's acceptance of this judgment, however, focuses not on what his children did to deserve this punishment but rather on himself;<sup>135</sup> Job entered the world without possessions and children and he will leave it in the same manner. Job does not question whether he himself has done something to deserve such calamity but rather observes that his scale is balanced. He is unconcerned with the scale of justice for his children.

As the Satan had predicted, only personal affliction can prompt Job to curse YHWH. Job's complaint about YHWH's justice does not begin until Job personally suffers. YHWH's original bargain with the Satan demanded that only Job's possessions, which include his family, but not the righteous man personally, be affected (Job 1:12). After Job passes this initial test, the Satan implores YHWH to allow him more power, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But send forth your hand and strike his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face" (Job 2:4-5). YHWH consents to the physical affliction of Job but demands that his life be spared (Job 2:6).

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<sup>134</sup>Weiss, *The Story of Job's Beginning*, 58.

<sup>135</sup>David Bakan, *Disease, Pain, & Sacrifice: Toward a Psychology of Suffering* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 109.

The Satan promptly afflicts Job with boils, and the prologue concludes with Job suffering for seven days while his comforters watch in distress (Job 2:7-13). Although the conclusion of the prose prologue suggests that Job accepts his suffering (Job 2:10), the dialogues begin with Job cursing the day he was born (Job 3:1).<sup>136</sup> The Satan was correct; the loss of his family did not anger Job as much as personal affliction did.

This observation should not have surprised the ancient Israelite reader because of the understanding of YHWH's use of intergenerational punishment as an act of mercy. Although the punishment of children for the sins of their parents eventually elicits complaints from the suffering progeny (i.e. Lam. 5:7), several narratives suggest that this divine practice is a manifestation of YHWH's mercy upon the sinful parent. The divine attribute formula in Exodus 34:6-7 ("YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love to the thousandth generation, bearing iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons and the sons' sons to the third and fourth generation") appears to reflect the tension between YHWH's justice and mercy.

However, the reuse of this formula elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible may suggest that it was at one time understood to point entirely to YHWH's mercy. Although the punishment of children for the sins of their parents does not seem merciful from the perspective of the suffering children, from the sinner's point of view, the dispersion of his

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<sup>136</sup> While I certainly do not deny or intend to minimize the disjunction between the prose and poetic portions of the text, for the reasons cited above, I will continue to consider the book as a whole rather than ignoring either the prose or the poetry.

punishment over several generations of children reduces his own suffering.<sup>137</sup> In some cases, it may even have prevented the death of the sinner, which in turn enables the continuance of his line, even though the next several generations will suffer for a crime they did not commit.

Numbers 14 offers compelling evidence for this interpretation. After the Israelite spies bring back an unfavorable report of the land that YHWH has promised them, the congregation complains that they would have preferred death in Egypt to their journey through the wilderness (Num. 13:31-14:4). The rebellion angers YHWH, who informs Moses that he will smite the entire population with pestilence and spare only Moses (Num. 14:12). Moses pleads with YHWH not to kill the entire group altogether; in addition to his logic that such an action would reflect poorly on YHWH among the other nations who know of him, Moses also reminds YHWH of the divine attribute formula: ““YHWH is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, bearing iniquity and transgression, yet by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons to the third and fourth generation”” (Num. 14:18).<sup>138</sup> From the context of Moses’ prayer, he is clearly asking for mercy, which suggests that he understands YHWH’s use of delayed punishment,<sup>139</sup> or slowly doling out punishment to the family of the sinner, to be an act of mercy, not justice.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>Muffs, “Who Will Stand?,” 19.

<sup>138</sup>Note that Moses omits any mention of rewarding to the thousandth generation those who are steadfast in their love for and obedience to YHWH. He appeals instead to the punishment of subsequent generations for the sins of their father. This portion of the attribute formula is generally regarded as an indication of YHWH’s justice, but Moses cites it in order to ask for mercy.

<sup>139</sup>This may also refer to YHWH punishing an adult for the sins of his youth. Job 13:26 is one such example. Although commentators do not often make this distinction, it would appear that transgenerational punishment is one, but not the only, method of delayed punishment. In other words, transgenerational punishment is a type of delayed punishment, but not all cases of delayed punishment are transgenerational.

Further confirmation of this interpretation appears in the account of King Hezekiah allowing Babylonian envoys to inspect his treasury and storehouses. As punishment for the otherwise righteous king's sin, the prophet Isaiah warns him: "Days are coming when all that is in your house and that your fathers have stored up until this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left, says YHWH. Some of your sons who are born to you will be taken away; they will be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (2 Kgs. 20:17-18). When Isaiah informs the king that his children will endure punishment because of him, Hezekiah responds, "The word of YHWH that you have spoken is good.' And he said, 'Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?'" (2 Kgs. 20:19). As Hezekiah's reaction makes clear, he considers YHWH's punishment of his descendants to be merciful since he himself will not suffer any great hardship.<sup>141</sup>

Following King Ahab's participation in Jezebel's scheme to usurp Naboth's vineyard without regard for his objections and legal rights, Elijah delivers YHWH's judgment to bring evil upon both the king and queen; but the king repents: "When Ahab heard those words, he tore his garments and put sackcloth over his flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly" (1 Kgs. 21:27). Moved by Ahab's display of repentance, YHWH mercifully lessens his judgment in a prophecy to Elijah: "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before

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retribution. K. van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* (Assen/Maastricht, the Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985), 99.

<sup>140</sup> In the case of Numbers 14, it would appear that Moses is asking YHWH to visit the sins of the sinful generation upon their offspring (v. 18). However, he also asks in v. 15 that YHWH not kill his people as one man, or, in other words, all at once. The resulting actions make clear that YHWH responds to Moses' request in v. 15 and not v. 18. The generation guilty of rebellion slowly dies off while wandering in the wilderness, but their children are permitted to enter the land once their parents are all dead. Muffs, "Who Will Stand?," 21, 41.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



me, I will not bring evil in his days, but in the days of his son I will bring evil upon his house” (1 Kgs. 21:29).

As these examples demonstrate, the Satan’s observation that losing his property and children has not adequately tested Job’s devotion to YHWH seems to reflect human nature accurately. YHWH’s original agreement in Job 1:12 that the Satan could touch everything that Job possesses but not Job personally is an act of mercy by YHWH.<sup>142</sup> Even though neither Job nor his children appear to be deserving of divine judgment, the act of inflicting harm on Job’s children as part of a test of their father functions as an act of divine mercy for YHWH’s beloved and faithful servant Job.

#### **Job 4:10-11**

Most commentators suggest that Job 4:7-11, part of the speech of Job’s comforter Eliphaz, affirms the notion of individual retribution.<sup>143</sup> Indeed, verses 7-9 would seem to suggest just this: “Remember now, who that was innocent has perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, the ones plowing iniquity and the ones sowing trouble will reap it. By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his nostril they are consumed.” Without much argument, these lines clearly indicate an operational concept of individual retribution.

Verses 10-11 are a bit more ambiguous. Gordis regards these verses as hinting at collective retribution:<sup>144</sup> “The roar of the lion, the voice of the lion, and the teeth of the

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<sup>142</sup> Gordis argues that YHWH insists on this limitation because allowing the Satan to kill Job would render the results of the test unknowable. This observation is more apt for Job 2:4 than 1:12. Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978), 15.

<sup>143</sup> Pope, *Job*, xv.

<sup>144</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 52.

young lions are broken. The lion perishes without prey, and the whelps of the lioness are scattered.” The passage depicts the suffering of multiple generations of lions, perhaps parents and their offspring. They refer to the animal kingdom rather than the human realm,<sup>145</sup> and verse 11 may merely observe a common occurrence in the animal kingdom that was less customary in ancient Israelite society: an animal’s young males, unlike human young who remain within the family compound even into adulthood,<sup>146</sup> eventually find their own territory and live independently of their progenitors. In the natural world, young male lions, however, which are the subject of these verses, do not separate from their mother unless tragedy strikes. The punishment of the parents results in the suffering of their offspring.

Although one must grant, as Gordis does, that 4:10-11 contains only a hint of collective accountability in its depiction of family-wide animal suffering, Eliphaz’s juxtaposition of these verses with the preceding ones, which advocate individual accountability, invites their interpretation in the context of the tension between collective and individual accountability. Although some commentators regard these verses as an insertion on the basis of syntax and context,<sup>147</sup> Roberts has observed that analogies between the wicked and lions are frequent in the psalms (for example, Ps. 7:3 [2]; 17:12; 22:14 [13], 22 [21]; 34:11 [10]; 35:17; 58:7 [6]), and the abrupt use of animal imagery,

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<sup>145</sup> J. J. M. Roberts, “The Young Lions of Psalm 34,11,” *Biblica* 54 (1973): 265.

<sup>146</sup> In a patrilocal society like ancient Israel, a young woman would remain in the family compound only until married, but the general preference for endogamy likely usually kept her nearby.

<sup>147</sup> Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Hiob*, Kurzer Hand-Commentar Zum Alten Testament Abt. 16 (Freiburg i. B: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1897), 7.

both in vv. 10-11 and in Psalm 34:11, suggests a well-known literary motif.<sup>148</sup> In short, just as lions and their young suffer from calamity, so too do the wicked and their offspring. The juxtaposition of vv. 10-11 with vv. 7-9 seems to suggest that the suffering of the offspring of the wicked is the result of retribution or the consequences of the wicked individual's activities.

Kaminsky has shown that although the notion of individual accountability enjoyed increased emphasis following the trauma of the Babylonian exile, the notion of collective accountability did not disappear.<sup>149</sup> Eliphaz's speech would seem to indicate that he simultaneously believes both individual and collective retribution are operational.<sup>150</sup> The problems with such a belief system might bother him if he were the righteous child of a sinful individual, but such is not the case and he does not need to confront the issue head-on. Exceptions to the rule can generally be explained with ideas like the human inability to avoid sin, the beneficial nature of suffering, or the mirage of the wicked's prosperity, which will prove to be temporary.<sup>151</sup> In the case of the lions depicted in vv. 10-11, they need not constitute an exception to Eliphaz's rhetorical question in v. 7. The lion's offspring are not humans and do not possess qualities like innocence or righteousness. On account of this, the suffering of the lion cubs, which are

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<sup>148</sup> Roberts, "The Young Lions of Psalm 34,11," 266. The lion also symbolizes the wicked in Prov. 28:15 and Nahum 2:11-12 [12-13]. Carol A. Newsom, "The Book of Job," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 377.

<sup>149</sup> For evidence of the rising importance of the individual, see Deut. 5:9, 29:15-20. For the continued importance of the individual, see Dan 6:25; Est. 9:7-10; Matt. 23:29-36; John 9:2; 1 Thess. 2:14-16; *Lev. R.* 4:6; *b. Sandh.* 43b-44. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 137-138.

<sup>150</sup> Compare Eliphaz's position with Jeremiah's use of both individual and collective themes in Jer. 30-31. *Ibid.*, 152-153.

<sup>151</sup> Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 150.

wild animals and not innocent children, was unlikely to force Eliphaz to confront the injustice of collective punishment.

Eliphaz does not consider collective punishment from the perspective of the innocent sufferer, and, consequently, he is able to see value both in individual punishment as an explanation for Job's troubles and in collective punishment as a tool for reassuring the righteous of the magnitude of the wicked's suffering. Eliphaz perceives no tension between individual accountability in 4:7-9 and collective accountability in 4:10-11 because of his narrow perspective that ignores the concept of innocent suffering, one of Job's chief complaints.

### **Job 5:3-5**

Eliphaz counsels Job that the fool will eventually suffer a just fate: "I have seen a fool taking root, but I (saw) his dwelling suddenly cursed.<sup>152</sup> His children are far from salvation; they are crushed in the gate and there is no one to deliver them. His harvest the hungry will eat; he (that is, the hungry) will take it (even) to the thorns. The thirsty pants for their wealth" (Job 5:3-5).<sup>153</sup> Although the text is difficult, it expresses the conviction that the family of the individual who is foolish will suffer for his folly.<sup>154</sup> This is evident

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<sup>152</sup> I follow Robert Alter's translation, with modification, so as to preserve the first person verb present in the Masoretic Text while still indicating the passive nature of the curse. *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2010), 27.

<sup>153</sup> The antecedents for "his harvest" and "their wealth" would appear, based on the grammatical number of each possessive pronoun, to refer to the father and his children, respectively. In context, one expects both nouns to have the same antecedent, despite the grammatical difficulty. The children are the most likely antecedent, but, ultimately, the children's harvest and wealth derive from that of their father.

<sup>154</sup> Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," 49, n. 1.

not only in the general proclamation that the fool's dwelling (*nāweh*)<sup>155</sup> is cursed, but also in the ensuing list of calamities that will trouble his children: the children of the fool suffer injustice and have no defender in legal and commercial matters; their father's harvest and the wealth his children should have inherited from him are consumed by others, rather than by his family. The image of the children of the wicked in hunger because they have lost their father's harvest contrasts starkly with the portrayal of the children of the righteous in Psalm 37:<sup>156</sup> "I was a youth, and now I have grown old, but I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his seed seeking bread. Daily he shows favor and lends, and his seed becomes a blessing" (Ps. 37:25-26).

Although the Masoretic Text reads "I cursed" (*wā'eqqôb*) in verse 3 and is the *lectio difficilior*, the Greek use of an impersonal passive verb (*ebrōthē*) makes more sense in the context of Eliphaz's argument that human suffering is the consequence of human activity that sets into motion the act-consequence model.<sup>157</sup> This observation is important to understanding the role of YHWH in the execution of justice. Eliphaz's point is not that he personally cursed the home of the fool and caused the suffering of the fool and his family, but rather that the fool's own folly produced his suffering and that of his family.<sup>158</sup> This is the result of the act-consequence model woven into the divinely

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<sup>155</sup> As was seen in the previous chapter, this appears to be a parallel term to *bayit*, "household." Both terms can connote the family that resides in the dwelling in addition to the physical structure.

<sup>156</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 141.

<sup>157</sup> This argument is admittedly circular, but the great difficulty that this passage presents to interpreters—including those of the Greek translation, which seems to lack any textual basis for its emendation—is evidence that the Hebrew text does not make sense at it stands. Gershon Brin, "Job V:3--Textual Test Case: The Translator's Limits of Consideration," *Vetus Testamentum* 42 (1992): 392. David J. A. Clines, "Job 5:1-8: A New Exegesis," *Biblica* 62 (1981): 192.

<sup>158</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 140.

created fabric of the universe. By this theory, Job's suffering is the result of some wrongdoing, and neither YHWH nor any other lesser deity to whom Job might appeal (Job 5:1) can alter the course of the sin-consequence nexus once human activity has set it into motion.

Clines speculates that the suffering of the fool's children results from their father's death, although the text does not make this explicit.<sup>159</sup> Clines considers Job 5:3-5 to be an illustration of verse 2:<sup>160</sup> "Surely anger kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple." On this reading, one expects the fool depicted in verses 3-5 to die because of his folly. While the death of the *pater familias* could certainly devastate a family financially and socially, the widow and orphan who suffer from such a loss are protected by laws governing social justice for segments of society that could not adequately fend for themselves (i.e., Exod. 22:21; Deut. 24:17-21, 27:19). A description of orphaned children being denied justice and losing their only source of sustenance, the family farm, to other indigents, seems unlikely based on traditional Israelite values.<sup>161</sup> Although the situation depicted in Job 5:4 resembles the psalmist's request in Psalm 109 that his enemies' orphaned children not receive the charity prescribed by Israelite law (Ps. 109:9-15), Psalm 109 is an especially egregious example of human vindictiveness that seeks the overturning of tradition. Although 5:2 indicates that the foolish father suffers death for his folly, it seems more likely that the fool's children suffer punishment for their father's

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<sup>159</sup> Clines, "Job 5:1-8: A New Exegesis," 193.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>161</sup> Admittedly, Eliphaz is not an Israelite, but the audience is and would associate orphans and widows with those legal protections that were familiar to its own society.

sins rather than because of his absence through death.<sup>162</sup> Instead of benefitting from the protections afforded to orphans (Deut. 24:17), they lose their access to the human justice system (Job 5:4). Instead of receiving the gleanings of more fortunate families' crops (Deut. 24:19-21), the needy consume theirs (Job 5:5). The father's death initiates the suffering that will befall his children, but the punishment appears to be the failure of the Israelite welfare system to protect his orphans. In short, Eliphaz assures Job that the sinful father will not benefit from Israel's welfare laws to ensure the longevity of his line.

### **Job 8:22**

Bildad, another of Job's three comforters, reassures Job, "See, God will not reject a blameless person, nor will he take the hand of wrongdoers" (Job 8:20). As evidence of this, Bildad tells Job that "Those who hate you will be clothed with shame, and the tent of the wicked will be no more" (Job 8:22). Like the "house" (*bayit*) and "dwelling" (*nāweh*) that can designate both a physical structure as well as the family unit in Proverbs, "tent" (*ʾōhel*) takes on the same function in the book of Job (Job 5:24-25, 11:14, 12:6, 15:34, 18:6, 18:14-19, 20:26, 22:23, 29:4-5). Bildad, then, appears to ascribe to the doctrine of collective accountability.<sup>163</sup> The tent of the wicked, and its associations with the household, will disappear. The sage offers no indication that the wicked's family are guilty of any wrongdoing. The wicked individual's home and lineage are impermanent. Because of the misdeeds of their parents, the children of the wicked will not successfully pass on their heritage. Bildad implies, indirectly, that God orchestrates this scenario (v. 20).

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<sup>162</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 52.

<sup>163</sup> Gordis, "Corporate Personality in Job," 54. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 135–156.

Clines proposes that “those who hate you” may refer to the conventional figures depicted as enemies and evildoers in the Psalms.<sup>164</sup> The destructive fate that lies in store for the tent of the wicked in Job contrasts with the activities that occur within the “tents of the righteous” (Ps. 118:15) in Psalm 118; rather than experiencing divinely caused trauma to the entire household, the tents of the righteous are filled with victory songs that praise YHWH. The joy and laughter with which Bildad promises God will fill Job’s mouth (Job 8:21) are reminiscent of those same sounds in the tents of the righteous in Psalm 118.

### **Job 15:28-35**

Eliphaz passes on to Job the wisdom that sages of old have passed down to him concerning the wicked:

15:28 He<sup>165</sup> will live<sup>166</sup> in desolate cities,  
in houses in which no one should dwell,  
which are destined to become heaps of ruins;  
15:29 he will not be rich, and his wealth will not endure,  
nor will his gain stretch out over the land;  
15:30 he will not escape from darkness;  
his branch will wither in the flame,  
and his blossom<sup>167</sup> will be swept away by the wind.  
15:31 Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself;  
for his branch<sup>168</sup> will be his recompense.

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<sup>164</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 211.

<sup>165</sup> This passage oscillates between third masculine singular and plural endings. I have leveled all pronouns to third masculine singular for the sake of clarity.

<sup>166</sup> Although the prefixed verb here is a *waw*-consecutive, which usually indicates a past tense, my translation uses the future tense in order to fit the context more appropriately.

<sup>167</sup> My translation follows the *Vorlage* to the LXX, which translates *pîw*, “his mouth” as *autou to anthos*, “his flower.” Presumably the Greek translator was reading the graphically similar *pirhō* “his flower, his blossom,” which is elsewhere used to translate *perah*, “flower, blossom” (Isa. 5:24; 18:5). S. R Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job: Together with a New Translation*, vol. 2 (New York: Scribner, 1921), 101.



15:32 It will wither<sup>169</sup> before its time,  
 and his branch will not be green.  
 15:33 He will shake off his unripe grape, like the vine,  
 and cast off his blossom, like the olive tree.  
 15:34 For the congregation of the godless is barren,  
 and fire consumes the tents of bribery.  
 15:35 They conceive (*hāro*) trouble and bear (*w<sup>ʿ</sup>yālōd*) iniquity,<sup>170</sup>  
 and their womb (*ûbīṭnām*) prepares deceit. (Job 15:28-35)

The house of the wicked lies in a desolate city, an inhospitable place in which humans do not generally reside. Here, according to Eliphaz, is where the wicked individual will raise his family. His children may face the many perils associated with inhabited places in other parts of the Bible, like wild animals and demons (Isa 13:19-22; 34:8-15; Jer. 50:39-40; 51:37-44),<sup>171</sup> on account of their relationship to their father. The wicked's house, perched on a ruined city, will itself become a heap of ruins. The destruction that befalls his home will not likely spare his offspring, as the plant imagery makes clear.<sup>172</sup> Although Eliphaz mentions the destruction of the wicked's home in v. 28, he notes again in v. 34 that the wicked's "tents of bribery" will burn, presumably with his offspring inside.<sup>173</sup> The family of the wicked appears unlikely to escape suffering for its

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<sup>168</sup> This translation follows Dhorme in reading *z<sup>ʿ</sup>môrāto*, "his branch," for *ī<sup>ʿ</sup>mîrātô*, "his exchange, recompense." Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (London: Nelson, 1967), 224. Clines, *Job 1-20*, 344.

<sup>169</sup> This reading emends the Masoretic Text from *timmālē*, "it will be paid in full," to *timmāl*, "it will wither," on the basis of the LXX's *phtharēsetai*. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, 224. Pope, *Job*, 132. Clines, *Job 1-20*, 344.

<sup>170</sup> The verbs in this line are both infinitive absolutes.

<sup>171</sup> Newsom, "The Book of Job," 1994, 452.

<sup>172</sup> Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 260.

<sup>173</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 364.

patriarch's sins. Using the language of childbearing, Eliphaz hints at the possibility that the children of the wicked are wicked themselves (v. 35).<sup>174</sup>

### **Job 17:5**

In his response to Eliphaz's second discourse, Job proclaims, "The one who denounces (*yaggîd*) friends for an (additional) portion (*l'ḥēleq*), the eyes of his sons will fail" (Job 17:5). The text is difficult. Literally, it reads, "For a portion he tells/declares friends, and the eyes of his sons will fail." Although none of the Hebrew words is rare, a literal translation does not yield a meaningful English sentence. "For a portion" is difficult because of its ambiguity. I have inserted the word "extra" in order to indicate that the subject is intent on gaining an advantage through his activity.<sup>175</sup> This fits the context established in the previous verse, in which Job describes his comforter's negative activity and its resulting negative consequences. The next difficulty arises in making sense of the unusual expression to *yaggîd rē'im*, "tell/declare friends," in which *rē'im*, "friends" is the direct object of the verb *yaggîd*, "tell, declare." This expression occurs nowhere else in Hebrew, and this verb does not generally take a human direct object in either Hebrew or English, so a literal translation is impossible. Because the context seems to call for a description of the comforter's negative activities, I have translated *yaggîd*, "tell/declare," with a verb of speaking that is capable of taking a human direct and carries a negative connotation, namely, "denounce." The interpretation followed in the translation above, namely that the individual in question informs against friends so as to gain a share of their property, is followed by numerous scholars and important

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 363.

<sup>175</sup> Some translations make this same interpretation by using the word "reward" instead of "portion." Pope, *Job*, 119, 121.

translations (for example, see the NRSV),<sup>176</sup> but commentators have proposed other translations, which will be considered below.

Because the phrase *yaggîd rē'im*, “tell/declare friends” is not meaningful in Hebrew or English, Gordis has proposed understanding the verse as a once common proverbial saying that does not translate into English literally, “He invites friends to a feast, While his own children’s eyes fail with longing (for food).”<sup>177</sup> Although certainly a creative solution, I do not believe it is faithful to the original text as we have it. Gordis favors his translation because of shortcomings that he perceives in the interpretation that I have proposed above. These objections include (1) the unusually elliptical use of *hēleq* (“portion”), (2) Job’s objections elsewhere to Eliphaz and Bildad’s support of collective punishment as explanations for suffering, and (3) the lack of indication that Job’s friends intend to enrich themselves through him. His objections to the interpretation favored above can be at least partially addressed.

(1) Gordis’ interpretation offers no improvement over mine with respect to the charge that it does not hew closely enough to the meaning of *hēleq*, “portion.” Gordis’ interpretation also introduces unattested meanings (“feast” and “invites,” respectively) for *hēleq*, which normally means “portion,” and *yaggîd*, which normally means “to tell, declare.” The translation of both these words is problematic in my proposal as well, but no straightforward translation of this verse has enabled commentators to make sense of it, so any translation would likely involve applying otherwise unattested meanings for these

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<sup>176</sup> For example, *Ibid.*, 121. S. R Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job: Together with a New Translation*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, 1921), 151–152.

<sup>177</sup> Such a proverb criticizes a parent who engages in festivities and hosting others while not meeting the needs of his own family. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 182.

words. It does not make sense to discount a translation on this basis alone when the proposed alternative can do no better.

(2) Although Gordis argues that Eliphaz and Bildad favor collective punishment as an explanation for Job's suffering, which the sufferer himself rejects (21:19-21), the comforters argue in favor of individual retribution on other occasions (for example, 4:7-9; 8:4; etc.). They are not entirely consistent, and perhaps the reader should not expect Job to be consistent either. In Job 29:4-5, the pious sufferer reflects on the collective reward that his children enjoyed; if he accepts collective reward, it seems possible that he might also, at times, accept collective punishment. The consistency of any one individual's position on collective accountability cannot determine whether this interpretation is impossible. Furthermore, Job's objection to intergenerational punishment in 21:19-21 may not be to the entire concept but rather to the specific application of the concept whereby only the children suffer without the sinner himself sharing in the suffering caused by his sin.<sup>178</sup> In other words, Job's rejection of collective punishment is not as certain as Gordis asserts. He objects strongly to sinners avoiding punishment, but he does not protest innocent children suffering for the sins of their father.

(3) Finally, Job suggests in both 6:26-7 and 13:7-11 that his friends are capable of telling falsehoods, and 6:27 suggests that he feels they would forsake friendship for monetary considerations.<sup>179</sup> In light of this, my translation of 17:5, ““The one who denounces (*yaggîd*) friends for an (additional) portion (*l'ḥēleq*), the eyes of his sons will fail,” could be an appropriate criticism of Job's comforters.

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<sup>178</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 136–137.

<sup>179</sup> Habel, *The Book of Job*, 277. Pope, *Job*, 121.

None of the proposed interpretations is entirely certain, and Alter even admits in his translation that it “is no more than a guess.”<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, based on the best conjectures that are possible from the available evidence, Job appears to suggest that one who betrays his friends brings punishment upon his children. Job’s declaration reads like an impromptu curse. Much like the psalmist in Psalm 109:9-15, Job seems to draw upon a familiar concept, the punishment of children for the sins of their parents, to curse his enemies. There is no indication that Job has the power to see this curse through to fruition or that YHWH will grant his imprecation. Accordingly, Pope translates the verb *tiklenâ* as “*should fail*” (italics added for emphasis).<sup>181</sup>

The exact nature of this punishment is relatively specific; their eyes will fail. The explanation for this may lie in the fact that Job’s speech is dotted with references to his eyes and their biological functions:

“My face is red from weeping, and deep darkness is upon my eyelids” (Job 16:16).

“My friends scorn me; my eyes pours out tears to God” (16:20).<sup>182</sup>

“Surely there are mockers around me, and my eye dwells on their antagonism” (17:2).

“My eye has grown dim from grief, and all my members are like a shadow” (17:7).

Job’s eyes act as a symbol of his suffering, and the righteous sufferer wishes such suffering on the offspring of his false friends. While this may not inform our

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<sup>180</sup> *The Wisdom Books*, 75. Driver and Gray describe the verse as “hopelessly corrupt.” Driver, *Book of Job*, Vol. 1, 1:151.

<sup>181</sup> Pope, *Job*, 119.

<sup>182</sup> Commentators generally recognize this verse as difficult. Regardless of what interpretation one follows, it is clear that Job refers to his eye in a context of distress.

understanding of divine collective punishment, Job’s understanding of the phenomenon of collective punishment seems vindictive, not merciful, in this case. This accords well with the sentiments expressed in Psalm 109:9-15.

### **Job 18:15-21**

In Bildad’s second speech, the comforter assures Job that the wicked will not ultimately prosper:

(15) “Fire dwells in his tent;<sup>183</sup> sulfur is scattered over his dwelling. (16) His roots dry up below, and his branch withers above. (17) His memory perishes from the earth, and he has no name abroad. (18) They thrust him from light into darkness, and from the world they make him flee. (19) He has no offspring or posterity among his people, and there is no survivor in his sojourning places. (20) At his fate<sup>184</sup> earlier ages are appalled and later generations seize with horror.<sup>185</sup> (21) Surely these are the dwellings of the unjust, and this is the place of the one who does not know God” (Job 18:15-21; cf. Job 18:6).

Bildad’s confidence in the ultimate retribution that the wicked will suffer includes consequences for the wicked individual’s family. His tent and dwelling place will both be afflicted with fire and brimstone, and the light will be extinguished in the tent of the wicked (18:6); subsequently, the family that shares these homes with him will also endure hardship. Verses 16-19 seem to insinuate that his offspring will suffer death in

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<sup>183</sup> Dahood argues, on the basis of Ugaritic parallels, that the consonantal Hebrew text is correct but that the vocalization should be changed from *mibb’lî-lô y’zōreh*, “[In his tent there is] nothing for him, [brimstone] is scattered [on his dwelling],” to *mabbēl lîzōreh*, “Fire [is set in his tent, indeed sulfur] is strewn [on his dwelling].” The revocalized term *mabbēl*, then, is the “Hebrew equivalent of Accadian *nablu*, Ethiopic *nabal* and *nabalbāl* and Ugaritic plural *nblat* “fire, flames”, while the final *lô* may be attached to the following verb as a *lamedh* of emphasis.” Mitchell Joseph Dahood, “Some Northwest-Semitic Words in Job,” *Biblica* 38 (1957): 312–313. Gordis proposes *mabbûl*, “flood (of fire),” as an emendation for *mibb’lî-lô*. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 193.

<sup>184</sup> For the translation “fate” for *yômô*, literally, “his day,” see Cf. 1 Sam. 26:10; Jer. 1:27; Ezek. 21:29; Ps. 37:13.

<sup>185</sup> Although *’ah’rônîm w’qadmônîm* could also refer to men of the West and men of the East, Bildad’s focus on the generations suggests that the temporal translation “predecessors and descendants” is preferable. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 194.

order to punish the wicked individual; he will die with no remembrance or posterity.<sup>186</sup> For the wicked to transform into the stump envisioned in verse 16, his family must perish. This type of suffering by the family of the wrongdoer differs from the merciful use of collective punishment. Although the children still suffer for their father's sins, their deaths are meant to cause him suffering, not to alleviate his or to prevent the extinguishing of his line.

**Job 20:10, 26, 28**

Zophar, Job's third comforter, responds to Job's complaint about his utter social isolation in chapter 19 by arguing that the ostensible success of the wicked is only temporary. With the passage of enough time, both the wicked and their unfortunate offspring will eventually suffer:<sup>187</sup> "His sons must redress the poor, and his hands will return his wealth" (Job 20:10). The sinner's children will be forced to compensate those wronged by their father (i.e. the poor whom he crushes in 20:19). Although Gordis argues that "his hands" (*yādāyw*) metaphorically refers to the wrongdoer's children,<sup>188</sup> it seems more likely, based on grammatical considerations,<sup>189</sup> that the wicked will suffer the consequences in his own lifetime and his children will continue to repay the debt of his wickedness even if it leads to their own impoverishment. The desire for a patriarch to amass secure wealth that could be passed on to his children as an inheritance appears throughout the Hebrew Bible (for example, Ruth 4:6; Prov. 19:14; note, however, the

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<sup>186</sup> Newsom, "The Book of Job," 1994, 470.

<sup>187</sup> Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," 49, n.1.

<sup>188</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 215–216.

<sup>189</sup> The grammatical evidence favors this reading. The wicked's sons are plural, but the possessive pronoun in the phrases "his hands" and "his wealth" is singular.

exception in Eccl. 2:18-21).<sup>190</sup> For a father to know that his children would inherit no lasting wealth would likely act as a punishment of the father; the lack of an inheritance would also be a punishment of his children.

The wicked man's greed is so great that "There is no remnant after he eats; therefore his prosperity will not endure" (Job 20:21). Zophar's observation is likely gleaned from lived experience. The *pater familias* who consumes his family's resources in their entirety leaves his offspring in a poor position to continue the family's line and prosperity. However, Zophar envisions not only the natural consequences of financial recklessness as harming the wicked's offspring, but also divine punishment: "Total darkness is stored up for his treasures; a fire not blown (by human activity)<sup>191</sup> will devour him; the survivor in his tent will suffer evil" (Job 20:26). The divine retribution that spills over onto the wicked individual's family continues in verse 28: "The possession of his house will be carried away,<sup>192</sup> torrents on the day of his anger." As these verses make clear, divinely inflicted natural disasters will rob the wicked individual of his possessions, cause his own destruction, and subject his household to great suffering.<sup>193</sup> For Job's comforter, the wicked's children share the consequences of their father's misdeeds, and this fact is evidence of a justly ruled universe.

### **Job 27:14-15**

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<sup>190</sup> Newsom, "The Book of Job," 1994, 484.

<sup>191</sup> Pope considers this poetic term (*ʿēš lōʾ-nuppāh*) to be lightning, a phenomenon attributed to God (Job 1:16; II Kings 1:12). Pope, *Job*, 140.

<sup>192</sup> Habel revocalizes *yigel*, "will be carried away" as *yāgōl*, from *g-l-l*, "roll away:" "A flood will wash away his household, Torrents on the day of God's wrath." This emendation is not necessary, but does emphasize the element of natural disaster present in the preceding verses. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 311–312.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.



Job 27:8-23 presents arguments consistent with those of Job's comforters, and the great difficulty of attributing them to Job himself, as the Masoretic Text appears to do, has prompted most commentators to consider them as part of Zophar's missing final speech.<sup>194</sup> Zophar claims that a sinister fate awaits the children of wrongdoers: "If his sons are many, it is for the sword; and his offspring lack food. Those surviving him are buried by death, and his widows do not weep" (Job 27:14-15). Zophar continues to explain that the wicked's stockpiles of riches will eventually fall into the hands of the righteous (27:16-17, 19), not his children who would normally expect to inherit their father's wealth. Like the impermanence of his possessions, the wicked man's house is "like a nest, like the booth that a guard makes" (27:18). The wicked man's house and household alike are temporary; they will not last more than a short time. If a member of his household should happen to survive a little longer than expected according to the rules of retributive justice, his life will soon be extinguished (27:15). Zophar explains that the presence of many children, usually a sign of divine favor, is in fact the opposite since those children will die unpleasant deaths (27:14). The transgenerational punishment of violent death and impoverishment is, according to Zophar, the punishment due to the wicked, whom the comforter describes as ruthless (27:13). His crimes, then, are likely offenses perpetrated against his community. This contrasts with collective punishment elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible; collective punishment is generally applicable only for grievous covenantal violations committed directly against YHWH himself (treason, blasphemy, idolatry, etc.).<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Pope, *Job*, 172. *The Wisdom Books*, 111. Gordis and Habel regard only vv. 13-23 as part of Zophar's lost speech. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 385. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 294.

<sup>195</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 344.

## Job 31:8

Job's soliloquy in chapter 31 presents a catalogue of sins that he has not committed. As Gordis has pointed out, most of the crimes named are not egregious or even the type that necessarily merit punishment in the legal system. They are almost exclusively ethical concerns relating to the treatment of his fellow humans.<sup>196</sup> Job swears, "If my step has turned away from the path, or my heart has followed my eyes, or a blemish has clung to my hands, then let me sow and another<sup>197</sup> eat; and let my offspring be uprooted" (Job 31:7-8). Job's self-imprecation calls for his children to be cut off. Some commentators prefer to translate "my offspring" (*še'ēšā'āy*) as "my produce" in parallel with the first half of the verse.<sup>198</sup> Although Job has no remaining offspring upon whom YHWH could enforce the consequences of this oath,<sup>199</sup> the same noun is used on three other occasions elsewhere in the book of Job to refer to offspring, not crops (Job 5:25; 21:8; 27:14).

Thus, if Job indeed intends to offer up his offspring as collateral in this oath, one must observe that the crime committed, namely, coveting and perhaps stealing the property of another, is not one that generally merits so strong a punishment as collective

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<sup>196</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 339.

<sup>197</sup> This individual, by contrast with the rest of the verse, must be an outsider to the family.

<sup>198</sup> Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 346.

<sup>199</sup> This appears to be true regardless of whether the dialogues are read within the context of the prose framework. Outside of the prologue and epilogue, several poetic references still make clear that Job is bereft of children (for example, Job 8:4; 29:5)

retribution elsewhere in the Bible.<sup>200</sup> Such punishment is generally reserved, as noted above, for crimes committed directly against God, like apostasy.

### **III. Collective Reward in Job**

Collective reward is not nearly so abundant in the book of Job as collective punishment. Unearned rewards are far less likely to elicit cries of injustice than unmerited punishment (although Jonah 4 presents one notable exception to this). Indeed, Job's efforts to atone for his children's hypothetical, accidental sinful thoughts in 1:15 may suggest that the righteous sufferer known from the prologue would himself be comfortable with his children benefitting from their father's righteousness.

#### **Job 5:24-25**

One hint of collective reward occurs in Job 5:24-25: "You shall know that your tent (*ʾoh<sup>o</sup>leḵ*) is safe, and you will inspect your dwelling (*nāw<sup>o</sup>kā*) and miss nothing. You shall know that your descendants will be many and your offspring like the grass of the earth." These verses are part of a larger unit that begins with v. 17: "Happy is the man whom God reproves; don't reject the discipline of the Almighty." Thus, the righteous individual who accepts God's rebuke and benefits from divine discipline (5:17) will enjoy a life in which he easily conquers troubles. Not only will his offspring, who reside in his tent, be safe during the righteous individual's lifetime (5:24), this benevolent protection will continue into the lifetimes of his descendants, who will multiply with great abundance, a sign of persistent divine favor. Job will later offer a counterargument

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<sup>200</sup> Gordis hypothesizes that Job has in mind movable property rather than land, since it is described as something that can cleave to the hand. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 245.

to this by suggesting that it is the wicked, not the righteous, who enjoy such rewards (Job 21:7-13).

### **Job 22:28-30**

The best evidence for collective reward in the book of Job may appear in Eliphaz's last speech. Eliphaz counsels Job to submit to God so that he may find peace and divine favor once again (Job 22:21). However, Job's acquiescence to God will not only benefit him personally, but also the wicked: "You will decide a matter and it will stand for you; over your ways light shines. When they are abased, you command pride.<sup>201</sup> And he saves the humble. He will deliver even him who is not innocent<sup>202</sup> and he will escape on account of the cleanness of your hands" (Job 22:28-30). These lines are admittedly difficult, but many commentators follow Gordis in understanding them as a promise that repentance will lead to Job's restoration.<sup>203</sup> So great will be his

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>202</sup> Clines rejects Gordis's translation and interpretation of this passage and prefers instead the translation, "He delivers the innocent, and by the cleanness of your hands you will be delivered." His major objection to Gordis' proposal stems from Gordis' rendering of a rare negative particle in the expression  $\text{?n-}n\bar{a}q\bar{i}$ , "not innocent." The particle occurs in only one other place in the Hebrew Bible, in the personal name Ichabod ( $\text{?i-k}\bar{a}b\bar{o}d$ ), for which the following folk etymology is offered: "The glory has departed from Israel" (1 Sam. 4:21), i.e., "No glory." Folk etymologies do not, of course, always reflect the historical linguistic origins of a name. James Barr, "The Symbolism of Names in the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 52 (70 1969): 16. Nevertheless, names do often preserve archaic morphological and semantic features of a language. Scott C. Layton, *Archaic Features of Canaanite Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990). The negative particle in  $\text{?n-}n\bar{a}q\bar{i}$ , "not innocent" is also attested in Ethiopic, Phoenician, rabbinic Hebrew, and possibly in the Lachish ostrakon 2.6. As further evidence that the expression refers to a guilty ("not innocent") individual rather than an innocent one, one must note that "innocent" does not make sense in context. Why should the cleanness of Job's hands have any bearing on the fate of an innocent third party? It is unclear why Job's intercession would be necessary for innocent individuals or why they would need to escape, presumably from a sinister fate. Clines himself admits that the term appears to mean guilty, not innocent, as he translates it, but attributes the problem with his translation to the reasoning of the speaker, Eliphaz. David J. A. Clines, *Job 21-37*, Word Biblical Commentary v. 18A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 547, n. 30, 567–569.

<sup>203</sup> Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*. Gordis, "Corporate Personality in Job." Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 251–252. Pope, *Job*, 152–153. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 343–344.

righteousness that like the heroes Noah and Danel, known from Ezekiel 14:14, 20, his merit can redeem the unrighteous.<sup>204</sup>

In Ezekiel 14, the prophet denies that the righteousness of Noah, Danel, and Job could save a people as faithless as Israel. Ezekiel is careful to clarify that the merits of these great men would save neither the community (v. 14) nor their own offspring (v. 20).<sup>205</sup> The underlying assumption, which Ezekiel denies, is like that of Eliphaz's argument: the merits of great men can bestow collective rewards upon both their communities and their descendants (horizontally/intragenerationally and vertically/transgenerationally, respectively). This same assumption underlies Abraham's bargain with YHWH to spare the population of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of its righteous individuals in Genesis 18:17-33.<sup>206</sup> YHWH concedes that he will not destroy the entire city for the sake of ten righteous individuals (v. 32), but readers, ancient<sup>207</sup> and modern<sup>208</sup> alike, often wonder why Abraham, who has already five times successfully negotiated the necessary number of righteous individuals down from fifty to ten, does not

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<sup>204</sup> In rabbinic tradition, the righteous possessed the ability to intercede on behalf of less righteous individuals so that they might experience YHWH's mercy instead of his justice. *Genesis Rabba* 33:3; *Talmud Babli Tractate Sukka* 14a. Urbach, *The Sages*, 495.

<sup>205</sup> Weiss, *The Story of Job's Beginning*, 16, n. 1.

<sup>206</sup> Pope, *Job*, 152.

<sup>207</sup> For example, Josephus argues that ten would have sufficed to save the city, but not a single righteous individual existed (*Antiquities* I.199). Rabbinic tradition suggests that a *minyan* was required (*Midrash Rabba Bereshit* XLIX 13). Cf. Nahum M Sarna, *Genesis = Be-Reshit: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, 1st ed, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 134. Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 292. According to some interpretive traditions (*Bereshit Rabba* 50.9, *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 25, Jerome, on Gen., 19.14), Lot and his wife had four daughters, with two of them being married and the other two betrothed, so that Lot, his wife, daughters, and (future) sons-in-law numbered ten total. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., [2003 ed.] ed., JPS classic reissues (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 213-214, n. 177.

<sup>208</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982): 123.

take his quest for justice<sup>209</sup> further, all the way down to a single individual. The answer perhaps lies in the fame and merit of the righteous individuals. For an individual as righteous and famous as Noah, Danel, or Job, perhaps YHWH would have spared the entire city.<sup>210</sup> But for a single righteous individual like Lot, whose righteousness is not without folly,<sup>211</sup> YHWH will not employ horizontal reward. Rather, he saves the righteous individual and his family through intergenerational reward (Gen. 19:12). In Job 22:28-30, the collective reward that Eliphaz envisions appears to be horizontal, especially given that Job lacks any offspring who could benefit from intergenerational merit at this point in the plot.<sup>212</sup>

#### **Job 29:4-5**

When Job, afflicted with disease and plagued by great suffering, reflects back on his life prior to YHWH's agreement to allow the Satan to test him, he reckons his family as the recipients of collective reward: "When I was in the days of my autumn, when the counsel<sup>213</sup> of God was upon my tent, when Shaddai was still with me, my children

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<sup>209</sup> Note that Abraham considers sparing the wicked for the sake of the righteous to be justice because it is not just for the righteous to be swept away with the wicked. Compare Genesis 18:23 with Job 9:22. Ibid., 127.

<sup>210</sup> Note that Jeremiah 5:1 and Ezekiel 22:30 suggest that a single righteous individual could save the city. Ibid., 129. In rabbinic traditions, the continued existence of the world depends upon the presence of righteous men. Some sages thought thirty righteous individuals were necessary, while others put the quota as low as a single righteous individual. The merit of the fathers (*zechut avot*), as it is known in rabbinic tradition, functioned not only intergenerationally, but also intragenerationally. The rabbis asserted that proximity to the righteous imparted favor to the neighbors of the righteous. Urbach, *The Sages*, 489–491, 494.

<sup>211</sup> See Gen. 19:8, 16-20, 30-35.

<sup>212</sup> Gordis, "Corporate Personality in Job," 55. Gordis, *The Book of Job*, 251.

<sup>213</sup> The most common meaning for *sôd* in the Hebrew Bible is "counsel." Nevertheless, some commentators have understood this Hebrew term to be a form of the root *y-s-d*, "found, establish," which would indicate that God established Job's house/household. Pope, *Job*, 185. The meaning "protection," associated with the root *s-d-d*, which is known to mean "guard, tend" in Akkadian, has also been connected

surrounded me” (Job 29:4-5). Job associates his time as a recipient of divine favor with his children. His children basked in their father’s divine favor. Not only did they reside in a tent blessed with divine friendship and free from disaster,<sup>214</sup> but they also enjoyed an abundance of milk and oil (v. 6). Job remembers this situation positively and does not consider it evidence of divine injustice.

## **Epilogue**

Job’s submission not only results in his own elevation to a higher status, but it also benefits Eliphaz and his fellow comforters.<sup>215</sup> In the prose epilogue immediately following Job’s concession (Job 42:6),

( 7) YHWH said to Eliphaz the Temanite, ‘My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends for you did not speak of me what is right as my servant Job did. (8) Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job will pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly; for you did not speak of me what is right, as my servant Job did.’ (9) So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what YHWH had told them; and YHWH accepted Job’s prayer. (10) And YHWH restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and YHWH gave Job twice as much as he had before (Job 42:7-10).

Just as Eliphaz had predicted in Job 22:28-30, YHWH restored Job’s fortunes and allowed the abundance of his righteousness to offset the wrongdoings of others. Job’s friends, who wrongfully accused him of sinful behavior, eventually benefit from the

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to *sôd* in this verse. Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job : A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1957), 410. I have opted to follow the most common meaning, which still allows the reader to appreciate the positive sense of Job’s reminiscence. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 483.

<sup>214</sup> Clines, *Job 21-37*, 983.

<sup>215</sup> Gordis, “Corporate Personality in Job,” 55. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 344.

righteous sufferer's good deeds,<sup>216</sup> but Job's request that God make known to him his sins (Job 13:23) remains unanswered. Job does not object to YHWH's act of mercy for his friends. Although Job is not labeled a prophet, he intercedes for his friends in a manner similar to the intercessions of Israel's earliest prophets, Abraham and Moses (see, for example, Gen. 18-20; Exod. 32-34; Numb. 14, etc.). The precise connection between intercession and collective accountability is a topic that merits more study. Unfortunately, such a digression would take this discussion too far afield of the present topic, namely, the use of collective accountability in biblical wisdom literature. Job's intercession for his friend may not be a strong case of collective reward, if it is one at all, but I have included it in my discussion because the two concepts, namely collective reward and intercession, appear to share some degree of conceptual overlap. I hope that future studies can clarify better the nature of their connection.

#### **IV. Rejection of Collective Punishment in Job**

##### **Job 8:4**

Bildad the Shuhite enters the dialogue with Job by suggesting that Job's foregoing speech is "wind" (*rûah*) and that God does not pervert justice (Job 8:2-3).<sup>217</sup> Logically,

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<sup>216</sup> Gordis suggests that the notion of the righteous suffering individual bringing collective reward upon his companions is a transfer from the notion of the suffering servant, presumably representing the collective Israel, found in Second Isaiah. While the suggestion is intriguing, he has not adequately explained the process by which he envisions the vicarious suffering of a collective being transferred to the suffering of the individual. Job's individual suffering perhaps enables him to clear others of iniquity as Eliphaz suggests, but there is a confusion of interrelated ideas (vicarious suffering, righteous suffering, collective accountability, etc.) that must first be disentangled. Gordis, "Corporate Personality in Job," 54. Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, 154.

<sup>217</sup> Bildad's question in 8:3 ("Does God pervert justice (*mišpāṭ*)? Or does Shaddai pervert righteousness?") echoes Abraham's in Genesis 18:25 (Shall not the judge of all the earth do justice (*mišpāṭ*)?). Nevertheless, Abraham and Bildad have different understandings of what justice is. While the former



then, if Job's children suffered a grim fate, this must be the result of justly administered divine retribution for their sins: "Indeed your children sinned against him, and he delivered them into the power of their transgression" (Job 8:4). Bildad's opening response appears to address an unspoken complaint by Job that the loss of his children was an unmerited punishment for so righteous a man as himself. Job nowhere states this opinion directly and will later express the opposite sentiment, namely that individuals should suffer according to their own sins rather than seeing their punishment passed on to their offspring, but his argument is based on the premise that intergenerational punishment is operational (Job 21:19-21). Bildad refutes an argument that Job has not directly stated or defended, but which lies in the background as a possible explanation for the deaths of Job's children. The deaths of Job's children are prominent factors in his suffering, so Bildad sets out to clarify their significance; although their deaths are tragic and inflict suffering on their father, Job should not interpret them as a punishment of himself, but rather of his children.

Curiously, within the same dialogue, Bildad speaks of the households of the wicked perishing (vv. 15 and 22). This would appear to be another example of the simultaneous affirmation of both individual and collective accountability.

### **Job 12:6a**

Part of Job's complaint about divine justice is that the wicked often prosper contrary to conventional wisdom and religious beliefs. Job even suggests that rather than inheriting collective punishment for the sins of their father, the children of the wicked rest comfortably and securely without worry of retribution: "The tents of marauders are

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expects justice to involve the sparing of the wicked for the sake of the righteous, the latter understands justice to be administered individually.

at peace” (Job 12:6a). Although those who destroy homes and villages and pillage valuables should live a life in fear of the law, these brigands and their families instead enjoy the bounty of thievery without threat of retribution, according to Job’s observations.

### **Job 21:7-9, 19-21**

Job denies his comforters’ claims that the wicked eventually suffer a just fate. Rather than losing their property, watching their children suffer, and experiencing destruction themselves, the wicked attain old age while acquiring wealth and power: “Why do the wicked live on, reach old age, and also grow strong with power? Their seed is established before them with them, and their offspring are before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them” (Job 21:7-9).<sup>218</sup> Despite the picture of well being for the offspring of the wicked that Job has painted, he still seems to acknowledge the divine practice of intergenerational punishment. Job protests against the conventional wisdom of his comforters that God punishes the children for the iniquity of their father: “(You say),<sup>219</sup> ‘God stores up his iniquity for his sons.’ Let it be paid back

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<sup>218</sup> This depiction inverts Eliphaz’s description of the fate of the righteous in 5:23-26.

<sup>219</sup> E. Talstra has cautioned against inserting quotation marks into the text without grammatical markers to support the translation. Yet, Talstra’s resulting interpretation lacks coherence. He translates Job 21:19 thus: “Eloah even preserves the wicked’s wealth for his sons. Repay him should He (He should repay him).” Talstra argues that *ʾōnō* should be translated as “his wealth” from *ʾōn*, “wealth, strength” rather than as “his evil/retribution” from *ʾāwen*, “evil, inequity.” His preference for the former is based upon a study of *ʾāwen* in the book of Job, which suggests that the word only refers to the activities of the wicked and not to those of God. For Talstra, the problem with interpreting *ʾōnō* as “his iniquity” is that the translation suggests that God himself stores up punishment or retribution, a divine activity for which the noun *ʾāwen* is not otherwise used in Job. However, the usage of *ʾōno* in Job 21:19 appears comparable to that of *ʾāwōn* in Exodus 34:7 to express the concept of intergenerational punishment. It does not appear to be a theological impossibility that God can store up punishment or iniquity as retribution. Although Talstra’s translation makes sense of one difficult verse, it makes the final term of verse 19 and the next two verses difficult to understand. Talstra omits *wʾyēdāʿ* from his translation of verse 19. As Talstra’s primary interest concerns only the question of “virtual quotations,” he does not provide his own translation of Job 21:20-21, so it is unclear how he makes sense of these verses. He has avoided adding a statement

to him so that he may know it. Let his eyes see his cup (*kîdô*),<sup>220</sup> and let him drink from the wrath of Shaddai. For what is his delight in his house after him when the number of his months is cut off?” (Job 21:19-21).<sup>221</sup>

Job’s quotation of his comforters here does not occur anywhere in the preceding speeches of the comforters in exactly this form, but already all three of his comforters have suggested that the household of the wicked will suffer because of its familial association (Job 5:3-5; 8:22; 18:19; 20:10, 26, 28). However, Job’s accusation is imprecise in another respect. Job quotes his friends as suggesting that God stores up the iniquity of the father for his children alone, when in fact each of his friends suggests that both father and children will suffer for the father’s misdeeds.<sup>222</sup> How do these conflicting perceptions of the mechanics of collective retribution compare with the concept of intergenerational punishment found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible? Both sides in Job have evidence to support their positions. For example, in the case of Achan in Joshua 7, Achan dies alongside his household. However, as noted in the above discussion of the Job prologue, several examples of collective punishment bring negative consequences for only the children of the sinner (1 Kgs. 21:27-29; 2 Kgs. 20:17-19; cf. 2 Sam. 12:13-14).

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indicating a shift in speakers at the cost of ignoring the end of the verse and rendering the subsequent verses incomprehensible. E. Talstra, “Dialogue in Job 21: ‘Virtual Quotations’ or Text Grammatical Markers?,” in *The Book of Job*, ed. W. A. M. Beuken, BETL 114 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 339–340.

<sup>220</sup> “Cup” (*kîdô*) is a *hapax legomenon*. Dahood proposes the meaning “cup, goblet” based on Aramaic, Syriac, Akkadian, and Ugaritic roots that are similar. Dahood, “Some NWS Words in Job,” 316.

<sup>221</sup> Job’s complaint that the sinner’s children bear his punishment actually conflicts with his depiction of the sinner’s safe, prosperous, and happy children in Job 21:8-12.

<sup>222</sup> Newsom, “The Book of Job,” 1994, 493. Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob*, Kommentar Zum Alten Testament Bd. 16 (Guetersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1963), 344.

Neither the divine attribute formula (Exodus 34:6-7) nor the Decalogue (Exod. 20:4-6; Deut. 5:8-10) mentions whether the sinner suffers consequences for his crime.<sup>223</sup>

As explained above, YHWH's punishment of children instead of their sinful father represents an act of mercy. Indeed, from the perspective of the sinner, this is quite merciful. But from the perspective of the righteous sufferer, God's mercy is inappropriate. Job's complaint that the sinner does not experience the consequences of his actions echoes that of the prophet Jonah after YHWH spares the repentant city of Nineveh, "But this seemed very evil<sup>224</sup> to Jonah, and he grew angry. He prayed to YHWH and said, 'O YHWH! Is this not what I said while I was still in my own country? On account of this I fled to Tarshish at the start; for I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishing. And now, O YHWH, take away my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live'" (Jonah 4:1-3). Jonah paraphrases portions of the divine attribute formula (Exod. 34:6-7), but does not mention the portion that describes YHWH as mercifully punishing the children of sinners. Like Job, then, Jonah finds death preferable to enduring an existence in which the wicked benefit from YHWH's mercy. Jonah's unhappiness, like that of Job's, ultimately derives from his own self-righteousness. If Job were not in fact free of guilt, he might be quite thankful that YHWH had killed his children rather than their sinful father, but perspective is a crucial factor that contributes to the attitude one takes toward the issue of collective accountability.

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<sup>223</sup> Levinson, "The Human Voice," 47.

<sup>224</sup> Most translations smooth over the awkwardness of this phrase by using terms like "was very displeasing" (NRSV), but I think "seemed very evil" more adequately conveys the sense of injustice that Jonah perceives in YHWH's act of mercy for the wicked, which is a point that I hope to emphasize in this discussion.

Job's poignant question, "For what is his delight in his house after him when the number of his months is cut off?" (Job 21:21), hints at the potential for human abuse in such a system of punishment. An episode from 2 Kings demonstrates Job's point well: King Hezekiah's response to Isaiah upon hearing the prophecy that YHWH would spare the reigning king but cause his children to suffer after him: "'The word of YHWH that you have spoken is good.' And he said, 'Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?'" (2 Kgs. 20:19). Just as Job has suggested, the spared sinner Hezekiah does not seem to be overly concerned about the fate of the family that succeeds him. Despite Hezekiah's positive reaction to the suffering of his progeny, the Hebrew Bible elsewhere abounds with concern for preserving one's family line. An abundance of children, especially sons, is interpreted as a sign of divine favor, and the desire to continue the family lineage motivates laws, like that of the levirate marriage (Gen. 38:8-10; Deut. 25:5-6), and drives plots, like the tales of Abraham, Rachel, Ruth, etc.

Both textual and archaeological evidence suggests that the dead were in fact believed not only to have concern for their descendants but also to possess influence in the realm of the living. Textually, Saul's encounter with the spirit of Samuel through the Witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28) demonstrates an expectation on the part of the living (Saul) that the dead (Samuel) have both an interest in the living and the power to influence events in the realm of the living.<sup>225</sup> On the archaeological and anthropological level, the recently deceased Samuel's malevolent response to Saul's petition is not unexpected.<sup>226</sup>

Comparing the secondary mortuary practices of other cultures with those of ancient Israel

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<sup>225</sup> Osborne, "Secondary Mortuary Practice," 13–14. Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife," 48.

<sup>226</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of this evidence in ancient Judah, including the use of bench tombs with food vessels, secondary bone repositories, and texts that depict bones as powerful (for example, 2 Kings 23:16-18), see Osborne, "Secondary Mortuary Practice," 6, 13–14.

explains Samuel's malevolence. During the stage in which the corpse of an ancestor undergoes decomposition after its initial burial, his influence over the lives of his descendants was believed to be harmful. However, following the ancestor's final burial, his influence was generally considered beneficial.<sup>227</sup>

Job himself even notes that part of the wicked's prosperity includes his ability to see his children grow and prosper (Job 21:8-12, but contrast with 14:21-22). In one instance, the father of a punished offspring does not consider the death of his son on account of his own crime to be an act of mercy. After Nathan prophesies that David and Bathsheba's illicitly conceived son will die as punishment for his parents' crime, the king fasts and prays until the child dies. He explains his behavior to his servants: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept for I thought, 'Who knows? YHWH may be gracious to me, and the child may live'" (2 Sam. 12:22). For David, divine mercy would have meant sparing the child altogether.

Although the desire to protect one's progeny and secure the family line runs strong in ancient Israel, Job's observation that death eliminates this concern is attested elsewhere. Another sage, Qoheleth, remarks, "The living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything; they no longer have wages and their memory is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their jealousy have already perished; they no longer have a portion in all that is done under the sun" (Eccl. 9:5-6). Job also argues that the death of a father terminates his concern for his progeny, and with this argument Job intends to

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<sup>227</sup> The episodes depicted in 2 Kgs. 23:16-18 and 1 Kgs 13:1-6 demonstrate the benevolent forces associated with humans, which are representative of the deceased individual's spirit following the secondary burial process. *Ibid.*, 14.

demonstrate the importance of the sinner suffering personally.<sup>228</sup> This idea also occurs in his speech in 14:21-22: “His sons are honored, but he [the dead] does not know it; they are brought low, but he does not perceive it. He feels pain only for his own flesh, and his soul mourns only for himself.” Job speaks here of mortals in general, but his point is ultimately the same: neither the wicked nor the righteous know anything of their offspring’s fate after their own deaths, so intergenerational punishment or reward neither harms nor benefits them.

Job’s issue here, considered within the larger framework of the canonical version of the book, reflects back on his habit of offering vicarious sacrifices for the possible unspoken blasphemy of his children (Job 1:5). While his actions likely protected himself from the potential devastation of losing an heir, they also shielded his children from seeing their destruction with their own eyes. Job’s plea, namely that sinners suffer the consequences of their actions themselves, gets at the heart of the Satan’s second bargain with YHWH (Job 2:4-5): the human instinct for self-preservation will cause a man to sacrifice all that he has, including his own family, to save his own life.

According to Kaminsky, Job’s comments about collective accountability in 21:19-21 are not a rejection of the concept but rather a qualification. The righteous sufferer objects to the possibility that a sinner might completely escape punishment himself while his children suffer.<sup>229</sup> Based on his plea for collective punishment in 17:5, Job does not seem to take issue with children suffering *alongside* their wicked father for his sins; rather, he objects to the children suffering *instead* of their father (cf. 14:22). However, to

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<sup>228</sup> Newsom, “The Book of Job,” 1994, 493.

<sup>229</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 136–137.

be fair to Job's comforters, none has suggested that the latter situation will be the case. Rather, they each suggest a threefold course of punishment comparable to that which Job experiences himself: loss of property, suffering of family, and personal suffering (for example, Job 15:28-35).

## **V. The Role of Wisdom Instruction for the Righteous and the Wicked in Job**

Israel's wisdom literature is diverse. As mentioned in the introduction, the book of Job complicates any effort to define the category of biblical wisdom literature,<sup>230</sup> but the form and content of Job compare easily with wisdom texts known from elsewhere in the ancient Near East. Although the book is not primarily composed of sayings, proverbs, maxims, and instructions, its purpose is nevertheless, like all wisdom literature, "the formation of character."<sup>231</sup> Because of its dialogical format and plot concerns, Job's code of ethics does not appear as the instructions of a father to his son, but the text makes clear what society considers wise and righteous and what it considers foolish and wicked (for example, the catalogue of virtues in Job 31).<sup>232</sup> What do the authors of Job consider to be the human capacity for attaining wisdom and righteousness? Can the quest for wisdom save the child of the wicked from collective punishment? Do wicked parents produce only wicked children and righteous parents only righteous children?

Despite Job's claims of relative righteousness compared to the depth of his suffering, his comforters argue that his suffering is not without cause. Job is human and,

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<sup>230</sup> Claus Westermann, "Literary Genre of the Book of Job," in *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Baker Book House, 1992), 51–63.

<sup>231</sup> Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 1998, 3.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



accordingly, incapable of leading a virtuous life completely free of sin. Eliphaz questions Job, “Can a man be righteous before God? Can a man be pure before his maker?” (Job 4:17). The comforter argues, “For iniquity does not come from dust, nor does trouble sprout from the ground; but man is born to trouble just as sparks<sup>233</sup> fly upward” (Job 5:6-7, cf. 14:1). According to this line of reasoning, Job owes his suffering to his sinful human condition. Zophar likewise chastises Job for his claims of innocence, but takes his claim even further: “Know then that God overlooks some of your iniquities” (Job 11:6c). Job is not only deserving of judgment, but God has also mercifully punished him less than he deserves!

Does the sinful nature of humanity in general justify the suffering of the children of the wicked or the suffering of the individual at issue? Do peccadilloes on the part of the sufferer validate the punishment brought down upon them? Job does not suffer for his father’s sin, but like the innocent children of the wicked, he suffers unjustly. In the eyes of Job’s companions, it would appear that any suffering is merited because of humanity’s sinful nature and inability to avoid transgression. This would appear to be the case even when the severity of the suffering far outweighs any sin committed through the inevitability of human wrongdoing. Job, of course, disagrees with his friends and their appeal to traditional wisdom. But with respect to the specific issue of intergenerational punishment, he does not seem to find the suffering of innocent children to be particularly unjust. Rather, he appears to be bothered by the fact that the sinful parent of those innocent children may have escaped suffering entirely (Job 21:19-21). Like Jonah, he

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<sup>233</sup> Alternatively, *ûb<sup>ê</sup>nê-rešep*, “sparks” (= sons of flames), could also be translated, “the sons of Resheph,” (= the god).

sees injustice in YHWH being merciful to the wicked so that they do not suffer the consequences of their own sins.

How can wisdom instruction and discipline help the wise to avoid suffering? Although often regarded as an insertion, the conclusions of Job 28, a poem on the location of wisdom, ring true with the rest of the book: mortals lack easy access to wisdom (Job 28:13), which resides with God (Job 28:23) and is the fear of YHWH (Job 28:28). Although Job's comforters attribute some wisdom to the aged sages of tradition (15:7-10, 18-19; cf. 8:8-10; 12:12; 32:4), Elihu dispels this notion: "I said, 'Let age speak, and may a multitude of years reveal wisdom.' However, truly it is the spirit in a man, the breath of Shaddai, that produces understanding. It is not the old that are wise or the elders who understand justice" (Job 32:7-9). As Elihu later acknowledges: "If he should take back his heart to himself, and gather to himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (Job 34:14-15). God is the source of humanity's ephemeral existence and also of its limited wisdom. Eliphaz argues that God puts no trust in his angels and servants, and even less so in humans (Job 4:18-19), and when those ephemeral beings die, they are devoid of wisdom (4:21).

For Job, God is the ultimate source of wisdom. Those on earth who have wisdom have gained it from God: "With him [God] are wisdom and strength; he has counsel and understanding...He leads counselors away barefoot and makes fools of judges...He turns aside the lips of those who are trusted and takes away the discernment of the elders...He turns aside the mind of the leaders of the people of the earth and makes them wander in chaos without a path. They grope in the dark without light; he makes them stagger like a drunkard" (Job 12:13, 17, 20, 24-25). Although human wisdom is greater than that of

animals (Job 35:11-13), who cannot even properly raise their young because of the paucity of wisdom that God has shared with them (Job 39:16-17), it pales in comparison with divine wisdom. Does God share wisdom with everyone? Do the children of the wicked have access to it?

Elihu, who concedes to Job that wisdom lies with God and not with the aged, argues that God uses dreams to warn humans and to discipline them against bad behavior (Job 33:12-24). As Elihu argues, human nature may limit mankind's ability to be completely righteous (34:14-15), but by being attuned to one's dreams, communications from God, discipline can be gained and retribution avoided. But are these methods of revelation effective for everyone?

Zophar states, "a stupid person will get understanding when a wild ass is born a man" (Job 11:12). In other words, for a certain class of humans, understanding is unattainable. How then can individuals belonging to this group avoid sin? Are they born wicked like their parents? Job himself alludes to a class of people who appear by birth to be sinister. This allusion appears in chapter 30, in which Job laments that although he once enjoyed the height of prominence in his community, he is now derided by sons "whose fathers I would have rejected to set with the dogs of my flock" (Job 30:1). This "senseless, disreputable brood"<sup>234</sup> is shunned by society (Job 30:5-8). This sinful group appears to beget sinful offspring. These scourges of society would have opportunities for wisdom instruction limited to divine revelation in their dreams.

The following verse is put into the mouth of Job: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? No one. Since his days are decided and the number of his months

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<sup>234</sup> Literally, "the sons of a fool, also the sons of one without a name" (*b<sup>e</sup>nê-nābāl gam-b<sup>e</sup>nê ḥ<sup>e</sup>lî-šēm*).

known to you, and you have made the statutes that he cannot pass over, look away from them and desist; let him enjoy his day like a hireling” (Job 14:4-6). The first line is often regarded as misplaced or a marginal notation transferred into the text itself.<sup>235</sup> However, the sentiment expressed—that is, namely, the immutable nature of an object or being—is ancient and accords well with other wisdom sayings suggesting that like begets like (Ezek. 16:44; Luke 6:43; Matt. 7:17-18; Jas. 3:11-12; Deut. 32:32). In this case, Job would appear to be referring to all humans, not any one particular class predetermined for wickedness. As the book of Job makes clear, a wide gulf divides divine wisdom from human wisdom. Although a chasm exists also between the righteous and the wicked, it is not nearly so large as that between man and God because all humans by nature commit sins.

If the language of reproduction in Job 15:35 is understood literally (see discussion of this verse earlier in this chapter), then Eliphaz would appear to be suggesting that the offspring of the wicked are wicked themselves: “They conceive (*hārō*) mischief and bear (*w<sup>ʿ</sup>yālōd*) evil, and his womb (*ûbitnām*) prepares deceit.”<sup>236</sup> Even if the language of childbirth is not understood literally, the saying at the very least suggests the traditional wisdom notion that like begets like.<sup>237</sup> Most of the references to collective retribution in the book of Job promote the concept as just. Job’s comforters appeal to the punishment of the wicked’s children as evidence that God exercises justice in punishing wrongdoers. Job’s complaint in 21:19-21 appears not to reject the idea outright, but rather, as

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<sup>235</sup> E.g., Pope, *Job*, 100.

<sup>236</sup> Clines, *Job 1-20*, 364–365.

<sup>237</sup> Newsom, “The Book of Job,” 1994, 452.

previously noted, to object to situations in which the offspring of the wicked suffer instead of the sinner, rather than in addition to the sinner. Job argues not that God should not punish the children of the wicked, but rather that God must administer punishment immediately in order for the sinner to recognize the correlation between sin and suffering.<sup>238</sup> This would seem to suggest that none of the diverse parties represented in the book of Job finds injustice in the suffering of the children of the wicked. This may result either from their believing the children to be wicked as well or from their not accepting the concept and existence of the righteous sufferer. In support of this latter possibility is the fact that Job's friends do not accept that Job is in fact righteous, a perspective that Job can share only with the omniscient narrator and YHWH himself. That Job, as a righteous sufferer himself, does not sympathize with the (innocent) children of the wicked who suffer for the sins of their father, is curious, especially when one considers that Job's own children were righteous sufferers themselves who died for the sake of a test of their father.

Job's comforters often depict the wicked's posterity as being cut off so that the wicked individual is without remembrance. The wicked and his children perish so that no one remains in his evil line. For example, see Job 15:28-35, 18:14-21, 8:22, 27:14-15. This type of punishment does not strike the reader as an act of divine mercy but rather as a punitive indication of divine displeasure with wickedness. Indeed, as all of the examples cited are used by Job's comforters to argue that YHWH deals justly with the wicked, it is not surprising that they would depict divine punishment as extreme. How can Job's comforters justify this use of intergenerational retribution? Why do they not

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 493.

perceive injustice in the suffering of the children of the wicked? Does the absence of objection to intergenerational retribution indicate that these sages believed the children of the wicked to be wicked themselves, and thus deserving of punishment? Similarly, Job does not seem to be bothered by collective reward. In the case of intergenerational reward, this could suggest that Job believes the children of the righteous to be righteous as well, and so deserving of divine blessing. However, in the case of the intragenerational or horizontal reward that occurs in Job 42:7-10, Job knows the guilt of his friends, who have wrongfully accused him of sinning and have not spoken of YHWH what is right (v. 7), but he does not object to interceding on their behalf so that YHWH will absolve them.

## **VI. Summary of Findings in Job**

The issue of unjust suffering is acute for Job, and although his main concern is not the unjust suffering of innocent children born to wicked parents, the issue of collective accountability does recur throughout the book. The prologue foreshadows Job's later complaint that moral order depends on the wicked suffering for their misdeeds personally. Job's objection to sinners passing their punishment onto their children rather than experiencing it themselves (Job 21:19-21) may represent a modification of notions found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible that intergenerational punishment spared the sinner and brought suffering only on his offspring.

Although the use of intergenerational punishment elsewhere in the Bible often functions as a merciful divine act, the use of this concept by Job's friends is generally meant to defend God against the claim that the wicked do not endure enough suffering

for their wickedness. The comforters suggest, contrary to Job's claim that the wicked prosper, that their suffering extends beyond their own physical well being; witnessing the misfortunes or destruction of their lineage likely inflicted great emotional distress as well (18:15-21; 20:10,26,28; 27:14-15). The crimes of the wicked and the retribution envisioned for their offspring are often vague, but the sages generally expound upon a basic idea that the line of the wicked is cut off. Not only will the wicked suffer and perish himself, but he will lose his possessions and his progeny as well (5:3-5; 15:28-35).

At times, the characters in Job's drama appear to promote and to reject intergenerational punishment simultaneously (compare Job 4:7-9 with 4:10-11, 8:4 with 18:15-21). Even Job himself is inconsistent in his position. This is true in several respects. Firstly, although he ostensibly rejects, or at least modifies, intergenerational retribution in Job 21:19-21, he appears to advocate it in 17:5 and 31:8. Secondly, although Job himself is a righteous sufferer, he appears to be unbothered by the righteous suffering of the children of the wicked. This is evident both in his statement in 17:5 (cf. 31:8) and in the emphasis he places in 21:19-21 on the importance of the wicked experiencing the consequences of their sins themselves, rather than appealing to the injustice of children suffering for the crimes of their father. Finally, Job does not seem to object to collective reward, either horizontal or vertical, even though he finds fault with collective punishment.

Despite the fact that righteous suffering is a very prominent theme of the book of Job, the righteous suffering of the children of the wicked is never lamented. Job does not

sympathize with their ostensibly similar plight,<sup>239</sup> and his comforters often use this theological concept to argue that the wicked do indeed suffer for their sins. Job's friends emphasize God's justice by appealing to the negative fates that await the children of the wicked. Intergenerational punishment looks more like the vindictive punishment called for in Psalm 109 than the merciful punishment depicted in Numbers 14. The comforters also do not intend to warn Job against certain behaviors by depicting wide-reaching consequences as was sometimes the case in Proverbs. Their main interest appears to be proving to Job that the wicked suffer terribly. The suffering of their children, and even the question of their innocence, is ignored in order to make a more important point: God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous.

The activities that merit collective reward are often not specific either. General righteousness can earn rewards like an abundance of offspring (Job 5:24-25). If Job were to repent and cease from charging God with wrongdoing, then his righteousness, according to Eliphaz, could redeem others from their sins (Job 22:28-30). This prediction comes to fruition in the epilogue (Job 42:7-10). Job also recalls a time before the Satan's test afflicted him in which his children benefitted from the divine favor their father received from God (Job 29:4-5). Collective reward does not appear to cause any of the characters in the book of Job to question God's justice.

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<sup>239</sup> It may be noteworthy that none of the comforters proposes that Job's suffering relates to the sins of his parents.



## Chapter Four: Collective Accountability in Qoheleth

### I. Introduction

As mentioned in the first chapter, the concern for the fate of one's offspring weighed heavily on the minds of many of the Israelites depicted in the Hebrew Bible. In order to protect their progeny, well-intentioned parents guided their children with instructions, some of which are preserved in Israel's wisdom literature, intended to steer the student on the path of righteousness so that he might reap the rewards of righteousness and wisdom and avoid the punishments associated with sin and folly. For one notable Israelite, however, the sentiments expressed above do not ring true. Qoheleth,<sup>240</sup> the teacher who takes on the persona of King Solomon in part of the book,<sup>241</sup> subverts conventional wisdom by questioning the absolute truth of such basic tenets as the good will of God toward humanity, the value of life, and any retributive theory that links prosperity or misery to human behavior.

Qoheleth draws upon personal observations to conclude that wisdom and righteousness do not guarantee longevity: "I have seen both in the days of my breath: there is a righteous one who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked one who

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<sup>240</sup> Qoheleth is also known as Ecclesiastes, a Greek translation of the Hebrew term *qōhelet*, which may mean "Teacher" and functions as a title for the speaker of the book. I follow the convention of many commentators in using the Hebrew title, Qoheleth, to refer both to the book and to its author. For the debated meaning of the Hebrew term, see Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O. C. Dean, Hermeneia--A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 41. James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1988), 32–34. Frank Zimmermann, "The Root KAHAL in Some Scriptural Passages," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931): 311–312. Choon Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 18C, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 95–97.

<sup>241</sup> Namely, chapters 1-2.

prolongs his life in his wickedness” (Eccl. 7:15;<sup>242</sup> cf. 8:14). The sage discerns no pattern correlating good behavior with divine favor or bad conduct with divine punishment. In fact, in the course of his philosophizing, he concludes: “All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them is vanity, since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath” (Eccl. 9:1-2). Whether God favors or despises humanity is unknown, and eventually everyone, good or bad, succumbs to the same fate. Trusting in one’s own righteousness or the other traditional trappings of religious worship cannot change the ultimate fate in which all humanity shares, death.<sup>243</sup> Wisdom for Qoheleth, then, is not a set of guidelines<sup>244</sup> that enables one to be righteous and to avoid punishment, but rather a tool by which humanity can understand the limits of its ability to comprehend the divine plan for humanity.<sup>245</sup>

The promise of fame and a lasting legacy does not offset the inequity of humanity’s shared fate, death. According to Qoheleth, “For there is no eternal remembrance of the wise or of the fool; already in the days to come all will have been

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<sup>242</sup> According to later rabbinic interpretation, God prolongs the lives of the wicked “for perchance righteous children may issue from them, for thus we find that He was forbearing with Ahaz and he sired Hezekiah; with Amon, and he begot Josiah; (with) Shimei and Mordecai was descended from him.” *Ecclesiastes Rabba* 7:15, as cited in Urbach, *The Sages*, 491–492.

<sup>243</sup> Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 18C:275–276.

<sup>244</sup> Wisdom does, of course allow Qoheleth to discern a few positive guidelines (e.g., Eccl. 3:13), but this is not its primary function.

<sup>245</sup> Peter Machinist, “Ecclesiastes: Introduction,” in *The Jewish Study Bible: Featuring The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation*, ed. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Consulting Editor: Michael Fishbane (Oxford University Press, 2004), 1604.

forgotten. How can the wise die like the fool?” (Eccl. 2:16). This view contrasts with the position held by traditional sages, which suggests that possession of wisdom ensures the continued remembrance of one’s name (Sir. 37:26) and that a virtuous name cannot be forgotten (Sir. 41:11).<sup>246</sup> However, in Qoheleth’s opinion, even the wise man who uses his wisdom to save the lives of an entire urban population has no lasting remembrance, neither among his own family nor among those whom he saved (Eccl. 9:13-15). The actions of an individual can and do affect the community, but one suspects that Qoheleth laments the unfairness of the group prospering while their savior receives no reward. Concerns that motivate other sages and Israelites, like establishing an enduring legacy or behaving righteously so as to guard one’s life from death, are irrelevant for Qoheleth. Wisdom is a powerful tool, but not powerful enough to raise the status of the one who exercises it among his peers and descendants, who forget his heroic display of wisdom, and certainly not powerful enough to change his divinely decreed fate, which is like that of the rest of humanity.<sup>247</sup>

Qoheleth’s pessimistic approach to wisdom and existence does not permit a notion of divinely administered accountability that is discernible to the human mind.<sup>248</sup> Everyone eventually comes to the same fate, and no patterned correlation exists between

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<sup>246</sup> Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 70.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 178–179.

<sup>248</sup> Eccl. 3:17, 11:9, and 12:14 do in fact affirm the existence of divine judgment. Many commentators regard these ostensibly contradictory passages (with respect to the overall message of the book and its unorthodox teachings) to be the insertions of a later epilogist who sought to tone down Qoheleth’s radical ideas about divine judgment. See, for example, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 102, 184, 192. Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 48. However, it is not necessary to assert that Qoheleth outright rejects the notion of a divine judge. For Qoheleth, God very well may judge humanity, but the pattern of his judgments and the criteria for determining whether one is punished or rewarded are inscrutable to humans. Thus, humans cannot trust in the traditional understanding of divine justice or the rewards and punishments that are typically associated with it. Machinist, “Ecclesiastes: Introduction,” 1604.

one's behavior and one's lot in life. Calamities are not a sign of divine judgment (Eccl. 9:12), nor are blessings a sign of divine favor. If Qoheleth accepted the notion of collective or individual accountability, he might, as Halpern has suggested,<sup>249</sup> have discerned some pattern in the conduct of individuals and the blessings and calamities that mark their lives.<sup>250</sup> However, because both the righteous and the wicked die without any lasting memory, the sage questions the advice of conventional wisdom. Neither collective nor individual retribution appears to be operative in Qoheleth's understanding of divinely ordered reality.

Despite Qoheleth's rejection of divine retribution, the sage still offers some insights into the issues associated with collective accountability among Israel's sages. These include several comments related to an individual's posterity and to the issue of determinism. A closer examination of Qoheleth's view on each of these matters may provide a useful perspective to compare with the results found in the other wisdom books.

## **II. Collective Accountability in Qoheleth**

Although Qoheleth denies any divinely guided system of just retribution that is perceptible to humans (Eccl. 7:15),<sup>251</sup> the sage appears to desire a correspondence between deeds and welfare: "There is a vanity that occurs on earth, which is that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are

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<sup>249</sup> Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages," 15.

<sup>250</sup> Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 70.

<sup>251</sup> See note above concerning passages that suggest that Qoheleth does envision a system of divine justice (Eccl. 3:17, 11:9, 12:14).

wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity” (Eccl. 8:14). Qoheleth observes that no consistently appropriate correspondence exists between conduct and consequences, but he describes this situation as a *hebel*, “vanity.”<sup>252</sup> Qoheleth is fond of using the term *hebel*, “vanity,” which can literally mean “breath, vapor, puff,” to describe the illusory and ephemeral aspects of this world.<sup>253</sup> So, while Qoheleth would like a system of retribution to exist, for reasons that elude the capacity of human wisdom, it does not. Such a concept is vanity because it is unreliable; the pattern of punishment corresponding to sin and of reward corresponding to good deeds is inconsistent and illusory. It may still be worthwhile to ask, however, if a retributive system did exist, would Qoheleth prefer that it be individual or collective? This question is especially pertinent in light of Eccl. 3:17, 11:9, and 12:14, which suggest that Qoheleth did entertain the notion of a world in which retributive justice was operative, even if its pattern is unrecognizable to humans.

Several verses before declaring the lack of correspondence between act and consequence to be *hebel*, “vanity” (Eccl. 8:14), Qoheleth indicates not only a desire for retributive justice, even if only human-administered, but also familiarity with the concept of collective accountability. Qoheleth observes a pattern of human behavior: “As a sentence against a wicked deed is not executed quickly, therefore the mind of mortals is fully set to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11). Qoheleth would prefer a system of retribution in which

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<sup>252</sup> According to Krüger, this regrettable situation in which no act-consequence model is in operation may be the result of human activity. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 162.

<sup>253</sup> For a review of the meaning of *hebel* and the related terms *w<sup>e</sup>rā<sup>c</sup>ā rabbā*, literally “great evil,” and *ûr<sup>e</sup>û<sup>t</sup> rûah*, “chasing after wind,” see Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 27–49.

justice does not delay but instead immediately confronts the wrongdoer.<sup>254</sup> He criticizes justice systems, perhaps human, perhaps divine,<sup>255</sup> in which the penalties are not administered swiftly. Job's comforters frequently appeal to the explanation of delayed punishment to explain that the apparent prosperity of the wicked is temporary. They are responding to a complaint, like the one Qoheleth makes in v. 11, that retribution ought to be immediate. As discussed in the previous chapter, Job himself asks this question in a poignant way that seeks to modify the notion of collective accountability as he understands it, ""(You say),<sup>256</sup> 'God stores up his iniquity for his sons.' Let it be paid back to him so that he may know it. Let his eyes see his cup,<sup>257</sup> and let him drink from the wrath of Shaddai. For what is his delight in his house after him when the number of his months is cut off?" (Job 21:19-21). When collective punishment is understood as an act of divine mercy, the operative principle behind it is not that God expunges the sin completely, but rather that God delays punishment by spreading it out over several generations. Qoheleth, like Job, observes that a delay in the punishment does nothing to punish, and thus also to prevent further, misdeeds.

Qoheleth and Job are not the only wisdom authors to recognize the faults of a retributive system of justice in which punishment is not always immediate. As will be

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<sup>254</sup> W. Sibley Towner, "The Book of Ecclesiastes," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 5 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 337.

<sup>255</sup> Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 154.

<sup>256</sup> Although the Hebrew text does not make explicit that Job is representing his comforter's belief that God exercised intergenerational punishment, I have followed many translators in supplying the words, "You say," because the context makes clear that Job finds fault with this commonly held belief and is thus not promoting it himself. Consequently, it is preferable to understand this speech as a response to an argument put forth by his comforter(s). Pope, *Job*, 145.

<sup>257</sup> "Cup" (*kîdô*) is a *hapax legomenon*. Dahood proposes the meaning "cup, goblet" based on Aramaic, Syriac, Akkadian, and Ugaritic roots that are similar. Dahood, "Some NWS Words in Job," 316.

discussed in the next chapter, Ben Sira deals with the problem created by delayed punishment by denying its existence (Sir. 7:16). Despite this denial, it is clear from other biblical texts that Qoheleth and Job are aware of explanations that use delayed punishment to account for why sinners do not experience immediate punishment for their wrongdoings. For example, in the murmuring scene found in Numbers 14 in which Moses intercedes on behalf of the Israelites who face total annihilation, Moses appeals to God by quoting, in part, the divine attribute formula that God had revealed to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7. In response to Moses' prayer, God relents from his plan to kill the Israelites "as one man" (*k<sup>e</sup>ʾîš ʾehād*) (Numbers 14:15). God agrees to forgive the people (v. 20), but divine forgiveness does not completely expunge the sin. Rather, God delays the deaths of these Israelites until they have reached the edge of the Promised Land. In delaying their punishment, God also subjects the children of these sinners to enduring the punishment of wandering in the wilderness for forty years (vv. 28-35). Although delayed punishment frequently appears intergenerationally, which is to say, as a form of collective accountability,<sup>258</sup> it can also manifest itself as an individual punishment that has been postponed during the course of that individual's lifetime.<sup>259</sup> For example, in Job 13:26, the righteous sufferer accuses God of afflicting him with suffering in his old age for sins committed as a youth.

As Crenshaw has noted, Qoheleth's statement in 8:11 redirects the attention of the reader from the sinner who commits the crime to the authority that should punish sinners

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<sup>258</sup> Muffs, "Who Will Stand?," 19–21.

<sup>259</sup> Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 99.

but delays in such a way that it encourages more crime (v. 11b).<sup>260</sup> Such a criticism would apply both to human justice systems<sup>261</sup> and, on the basis of the prominence of divinely executed collective accountability in the Hebrew Bible, to divine justice. Additionally, Qoheleth's observation may target the claims of sages, like Job's comforters, who explain the ostensible prosperity of the wicked by arguing that God postpones punishment. Delayed punishment (and reward) cannot solve the problem of retributive justice that Qoheleth has observed.

Qoheleth also acknowledges that an individual's offspring can benefit from the conduct of his parents. However, contrary to other fathers in the Hebrew Bible who aspire to leave an inheritance to their children, Qoheleth views the practice less favorably:

(18) I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, that I must leave it to the man who comes after me, (19) and who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will have dominion over everything for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. (20) So I turned and gave my heart up to despair concerning all the toil for which I labored under the sun, (21) for there is the case of the man who toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill, yet to a man who did not labor for it he must give his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. (Eccl. 2:18-21)

Qoheleth resents his toil, the produce of which will benefit his heirs,<sup>262</sup> for several reasons. For the sage, pleasure commends itself, but his labor will produce pleasure for someone other than himself. In addition to this, Qoheleth also objects to the vanity and

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<sup>260</sup> Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 155.

<sup>261</sup> As Krüger has pointed out, a system in which justice is executed immediately would ultimately lead to the end of humankind, which is by nature sinful and corrupt. Had God punished Adam and Eve with immediate death for disobedience in the Garden of Eden, humanity never would have reached its second generation. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 159.

<sup>262</sup> The text does not make clear whether those who inherit the produce of Qoheleth's hard work are his family members or outsiders.



great evil of his heirs, regardless of their wisdom or foolishness, enjoying that for which they did not work.<sup>263</sup> He perhaps also sees vanity in the possibility that, although both a wise heir and a foolish heir would be undeserving of the produce of another's toil, his heirs may be foolish and so squander his toil, and he lacks any control over this situation.

Qoheleth's reasoning reflects beliefs that are relevant to the debate between individual and collective accountability. Although Qoheleth does not embrace the notion of divine retribution, he does nevertheless appear to express the desire for one's behavior to correlate with one's life circumstances, even if the divine plan (*hamma<sup>aa</sup>se*) that determines this correlation is inscrutable to him (Eccl. 3:11).<sup>264</sup> His concern that the individual who produced the pleasures be able to enjoy those pleasures himself suggests that he would prefer individual reward, but he does not ascribe to such a theology because this is not what he has witnessed in the course of his studies. Nevertheless, he would appear to object in principle to the notion of collective reward. Why should someone else enjoy the benefits of another individual's good deeds? One expects that the converse of this sentiment, namely collective punishment, would also ring true for Qoheleth: Why should someone else suffer the consequences of another individual's wicked deeds?

Like the case of the sage who leaves his riches to his heirs after him, the case of a toiling individual with no family is also a vanity. According to Qoheleth, "Again, I saw vanity under the sun: there is a solitary individual, with no one else, neither son nor brother; but there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches.

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<sup>263</sup> Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 187.

<sup>264</sup> Peter Machinist, "Fate, Miqreh, and Reason: Some Reflections on Qohelet and Biblical Thought," in *Solving Riddles and Untying Knots* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 170–173.

‘But for whom am I toiling,’ [he asks,] ‘and depriving myself of pleasure?’ This also is a vanity and an unhappy business” (Eccl. 4:7-8). Although 2:18-21 suggested that gathering riches to be enjoyed by another is vanity, this passage argues that gathering riches even though there is no one else with whom to share them is vanity. Qoheleth puts a poignant question into the mouth of the solitary individual that would presumably elicit a questioning of his activities. Rather than continue to work, the individual should enjoy his riches himself before he dies. Qoheleth suggests that greed compels this foolish toiling (“his eyes are never satisfied with riches”). So, the vanity derives not from the absence of heirs or family with whom to share this wealth, but rather from the failure to stop toiling long enough to enjoy the product of one’s toil.<sup>265</sup> Ben Sira observes the same phenomenon: the miser who hoards wealth while denying himself enjoyment of that wealth will never enjoy the product of his hard toil (Sir. 14:3-5).<sup>266</sup>

Qoheleth also considers a case in which children do likely suffer because of the conduct of their parents: “(12) There is a grievous ill that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owners to their hurt, (13) and those riches were lost in a bad venture; though he fathered a son, he has nothing in his hands” (Eccl. 5:12-13). The son’s suffering is not divinely inflicted<sup>267</sup> but rather the natural consequence of his father’s bad investments. Nevertheless, Qoheleth focuses the tragedy of this situation not simply on the individual who lost his riches, but rather on the bankrupt man’s status as a father to a son, for whom his empty hands cannot provide. Although Israelites generally

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<sup>265</sup> Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 98.

<sup>266</sup> Towner, “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” 312.

<sup>267</sup> This statement is true in so much as humans are able to exercise some measure of free will, although it is possible that human free will is limited in Qoheleth’s worldview.

interpreted the birth of a son as a sign of divine favor,<sup>268</sup> in this case the presence of a son signals the father's negative state. The father has no means of supporting his family during his lifetime and no inheritance to leave to his son once he has passed.

The subject of the statement, "he has nothing in his hands" (v. 13) is ambiguous. Both the father and the son are empty-handed. Similarly, the subject is ambiguous in v. 14, which asserts, "Just as he came forth from the womb of his mother naked, so shall he return again; he will not have anything to show for his toil that he can carry in his hand." While the statement in v. 13 could refer to either the father or his son, Crenshaw has argued that the ambiguity functions deliberately to convey "the common lot of the once-rich father and the poor son."<sup>269</sup> Such an interpretation demonstrates well the reality of intergenerational suffering.

### **III. The Role of Wisdom Instruction for the Righteous and the Wicked in Qoheleth**

Like the book of Job, Qoheleth presents an alternative understanding of wisdom. Although Qoheleth's teachings often overturn the lessons of traditional wisdom sayings, the sage is not so pessimistic that he sees no value in the human endeavor to attain wisdom for oneself and to instill that quest in others, which Qoheleth himself does through his role as a teacher. The inescapable nature of death for all humans prompts Qoheleth to reject any notion of divine retribution that is intelligible to humans, but even without this, human reason remains for the philosopher an important standard of

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<sup>268</sup> Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 122–123.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 123. Krüger, *Qoheleth*, 121.

judgment (Eccl. 1:13, 21; 7:23).<sup>270</sup> Thus it is worth investigating Qoheleth's understanding of human nature and the ability of wisdom to benefit the pupil who studies it.

Qoheleth's claim in 2:19 that he cannot know whether his heirs will be wise or foolish speaks to the possibility that wise parents can produce foolish children. The inadequacies of human wisdom would appear to be such that, in the mind of Qoheleth, providing wisdom instruction to one's children cannot guarantee that all of one's descendants will be wise like their progenitor. According to Qoheleth's philosophical position, the successful student of wisdom understands wisdom's limits. Even living a righteous life according to the traditional standards of wisdom cannot guarantee longevity and prosperity because humans cannot observe any pattern that correlates behavior to consequences.

Like Job's comforters, Qoheleth views humanity as inherently incapable of perfect righteousness: "Surely there is no man on earth so righteous that he does good without ever sinning" (Eccl. 7:20). The human inability to escape sin entirely, according to Qoheleth, originates with human activity, not divine creation: "See, this alone I found, that God made humankind upright, but they have devised many schemes" (Eccl. 7:29). Humans, though sinful by nature, can control their level of righteousness; however, perfect righteousness and extreme wickedness should be avoided (7:16-18). Qoheleth provides examples of individuals who can change their status through wisdom or lack thereof (i.e., Eccl. 4:14). However, other statements take a more predetermined outlook: "What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted" (Eccl.

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<sup>270</sup> Machinist, "Fate," 172-173.

1:15). Applied to human nature, such a worldview suggests that humans cannot change whether they are wise or foolish, righteous or wicked. It is unclear from these contradictory views whether or not it is fruitful to educate a foolish child to attain wisdom. It would appear, however, on the basis of passages like 4:14 and 2:18 that the sage recognized that parents do not necessarily produce children like themselves with respect to righteousness and wisdom. That Qoheleth cannot venture a guess as to whether his own descendants will be wise or foolish does not express much confidence in the ability of wisdom instructions to produce wise offspring.<sup>271</sup> Wisdom can help the human to discern the limits of human wisdom to elucidate the divine plan, but nothing in this ephemeral world, not even wisdom, can guarantee success for oneself or one's offspring.

According to 2:26, "For to the man who pleases him [God] gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind." The sage seems to observe that God bestows wisdom upon those who please him. Just how they please him is not clear to the human, but the contrast with the sinner whom God preoccupies with work may suggest that the wise are pleasing to God because, despite not yet having the wisdom that directs one to heed God's laws, these pleasing people are righteous. However, the sage's judgment that this situation is vanity complicates the issue. One possible interpretation of the passage is that wisdom originates with God, and

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<sup>271</sup> It should be noted that Eccl. 12:12, though likely a secondary addition, does address "my son," which suggests that the book was intended for the education of youth if not in the time of its original author, then by some community at another point.

humans do not choose whether to be “pleasing” or a “sinner.”<sup>272</sup> The futility of the situation is that while a divine plan may underlie who pleases God and receives wisdom and who does not, the human cannot discern this plan or pattern.

Humans, according to Qoheleth, ultimately lack any control over an arbitrary world ruled by an inscrutable deity.<sup>273</sup> Wisdom is no guarantee because despite its superiority over foolishness in most situations, it cannot produce success in every situation and it cannot prevent death, the ultimate fate of the wise and the fool alike.<sup>274</sup> Human efforts to control this divinely appointed fate are, for Qoheleth, *hebel*, “vanity.”<sup>275</sup>

#### **IV. Summary of Findings in Qoheleth**

Although Qoheleth does not make any direct statements concerning collective accountability, several passages from this collection of wisdom touch on related issues. While caution is necessary in extrapolating from these passages a sense of Qoheleth’s stance on the debate between collective and individual accountability, the sage would appear likely, on the basis of passages like Eccl. 2:18-21 and 8:11, to favor individual accountability if he were to accept traditional notions of divine retribution at all. Despite his apparent preference for individual accountability, he does acknowledge the impact that a father’s choices can have on his offspring (5:12-13).

Like Israel’s other sages examined so far, he does not present a systematic picture of his notion of determinism. The tension between fate, whether it is fixed by God or

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<sup>272</sup> Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 18C:157–158.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 18C:55.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 18C:52.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 18C:59.

manifests itself as some impersonal force, and moralism is problematic not only for Israel's sages, but also for the Hebrew Bible and religious systems more generally.<sup>276</sup> As von Rad has noted, determinism is a prominent strand of thought in the Hebrew Bible, but it cannot be philosophically rigorous because of the tensions created when an older tradition comes into contact with new modes of understanding. Nevertheless, these tensions, which are evident only when the older tradition is reinterpreted in light of newer ideas, rarely affect the free will of the individual to choose to behave according to the morals taught by Israel's sages.<sup>277</sup>

Rudman has argued that Qoheleth does not allow for human will independent from God's will. Thus, in Rudman's understanding of Qoheleth, if humankind is capable of an action, it is divinely sanctioned. Accordingly, Qoheleth can commend pleasure because it is possible, and therefore God has approved it (Eccl. 9:7).<sup>278</sup> Human free will, then, has rather severe limits in Rudman's view.<sup>279</sup>

However, it is also possible to understand Qoheleth's endorsement of pleasure in a manner that does not constrain human free will. The divine plan is inscrutable to humans; they cannot control it anymore than they can understand it. All that humans can know of the divine plan is that death is a great leveler of all moral and social classes. Life after death and the endurance of one's wealth and lineage are not reliable solutions to the permanence of death. Consequently, enjoying one's existence is the only worthwhile activity that remains for humans since the other activities with which they

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<sup>276</sup> Machinist, "Fate," 164.

<sup>277</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1970), 338.

<sup>278</sup> Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, 69.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 142–143.

preoccupy themselves can neither stave off death nor guarantee eternal existence for one's family.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Machinist, "Ecclesiastes: Introduction," 1604.



## Chapter Five: Collective Accountability in the Wisdom of Ben Sira<sup>281</sup>

### I. Introduction

For the sage Ben Sira, collective notions hold importance. Immortality, unachievable for individuals, is attainable through the community:<sup>282</sup> “The life of a man is a number of days, but the life of the people of Israel is days without numbers” (Sir. 37:25). Wisdom instruction functioned as a crucial parental activity because, although the individual parent could not live forever, his lineage could endure if his offspring learned the valuable life-affirming lessons imparted through traditional wisdom instruction.<sup>283</sup>

The presence of a sage within ancient Israelite communities was beneficial for everyone belonging to the group. According to the Greek translation of Ben Sira, “A wise person instructs his own people, and the fruits of his intelligence are reliable” (Sir. 37:23). Not only does the sage earn honor for himself on account of his wisdom, but his wisdom also provides a lasting contribution to his community.<sup>284</sup> The entire community, which includes both contemporaries and later generations, benefits because of the wise individual. Wisdom has a profound communal impact. Although neither example considered above treats the case of a reward directly administered by YHWH himself,

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<sup>281</sup> Unless otherwise noted, I have primarily relied on Francesco Vattioni’s Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Syriac edition of Ben Sira. Francesco Vattioni, *Ecclesiastico: Testo Ebraico con Apparato Critico e Versioni Greca, Latina e Siriaca* (Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 1968).

<sup>282</sup> G.H. Box and W. O. E. Oesterley, “The Book of Sirach,” in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, ed. R. H Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 447.

<sup>283</sup> Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel*, 3.

<sup>284</sup> Alexander A. Di Lella and Patrick William Skehan, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes*, Anchor Bible 39 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 437.

both cases indicate a sapiential appreciation of communal thinking and of the power of the individual to have a pronounced impact on his entire community.

This chapter will explore the notion of collective accountability in the wisdom of Ben Sira. First, it will present the verses relating to collective punishment (II), followed by those relating to collective reward (III). Then it will consider examples in which collective accountability appears to be rejected (IV). Next, it will investigate the ability of wisdom instruction to help the pupil avoid or attain the fate of his forebears (V). The chapter will conclude with a summary of its findings (VI).

## **II. Collective Punishment in Ben Sira**

### **Ben Sira 40:15**

According to the Greek translation of Sir. 40:15, “The offspring of the ungodly will not multiply branches; they are unclean roots on a steep rock.”<sup>285</sup> Here the sage suggests that the ungodly will not achieve familial longevity, an individual’s best hope for immortality, through the proliferation of his offspring. Producing abundant offspring was a goal for most ancient Israelites, and the righteous individual who merited God’s favor is often blessed with numerous descendants (consider, for example, Abraham, who is promised offspring more numerous than the stars). However, the offspring of the ungodly, according to Ben Sira, will not attain this goal. Rather, the children of the wicked are in a precarious situation and unlikely to produce many children, if they produce any at all. The text does not mention any wrongdoing on the part of the ungodly

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<sup>285</sup> For the variation between the synonyms *šwr*, “rock,” and *slʿ*, “rock,” in the Hebrew manuscripts, Beentjes offers the explanation that an original *šwr* was changed to *slʿ* in order to create language more parallel to that of Job 39:28b. Pancratius Cornelis Beentjes, “The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: Preliminary Remarks Towards a New Text Edition and Synopsis,” in *Happy the One Who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14,20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 288.

man's offspring and does not appear to find their failure to thrive because of their father's misconduct to be theologically troubling. The verse seems to offer comfort to the righteous individual who sees the ungodly producing offspring, generally considered a sign of divine favor,<sup>286</sup> and wonders why such a person should receive a divine blessing instead of punishment. Ben Sira's imagery is reminiscent of Job 8:11-12, in which one of Job's comforters assures the righteous sufferer that the success of the wicked is only temporary.

The imagery of "roots on sheer rock" (v. 15b) recalls Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew 13; the seeds that fall on rocky ground flourish rapidly, a result which some might interpret to mean that God had blessed them; but, on the contrary, they lack durability because of the poor soil (Matt. 13:5; cf. 13:21). Though the seeds seem to prosper, they cannot weather any storm and their success is only fleeting. One must consider the entire life cycle of the plant to extrapolate any meaning from its progress because to consider only its early success would produce a false interpretation of its divine favor.<sup>287</sup> Patience, then, is a necessary condition for observing the expected pattern of divine punishment for the wicked and divine blessing for the righteous.

### **Ben Sira 41:5-10**

Ben Sira offers a relatively lengthy discussion concerning the children of the wicked:

(5) Abominable children are the children of sinners, and they live among the lodgings of the ungodly. (6) An inheritance is lost by the children of sinners, and disgrace continues with their offspring. (7) Children blame an ungodly father, for on account of him they will be reproached. (8) Woe

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<sup>286</sup> Leo G. Perdue, "The Household, Old Testament Theology, and Contemporary Hermeneutics," in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 226–227.

<sup>287</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 471.

to you, godless men, who forsake the law of God Most High! (9) And if you beget (children), you will have begotten them for cursing; and if you die, you will be allotted a curse. (10) Everything that is from earth will return to earth, thus the ungodly will go from curse to ruin. (Sir. 41:5-10)

The curses awaiting the children of sinners are numerous: a bad reputation, loss of wealth, shame, and contempt for their father. The association of children of sinners with other ungodly individuals invites even more negative consequences, as Sir. 22:13<sup>288</sup> suggests, because the troubles of the wicked seem to be contagious for those who associate with them (for a full discussion of this verse, see below). The intragenerational consequences of this will be explored below in connection with Sir. 22:13, but it is important to note in the discussion of Sir. 41:5-10 that the children of the ungodly face insuperable odds in avoiding the retribution incurred by their parents. The passage suggests that the children of sinners are by their very nature detestable.<sup>289</sup> That they dwell among the ungodly could be a case either of like attracting like or of the unbreakable cycle of wickedness; because the child's father is wicked and exposes his son to his wicked accomplices, the child inherits the negative consequences of his father's actions and associations.

The adverse situation of the children of the wicked is not necessarily the result of direct divine retribution, but it may certainly reflect reality as Ben Sira, and the sages upon whom he builds, observed it. As creator of the universe, God may ultimately claim responsibility for ordering reality in this manner, but his role in the wicked nature of the

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<sup>288</sup> “Do not multiply words with a fool and do not go to the one without understanding. Guard yourself from him lest you have trouble, and do not be defiled when he shakes himself off. Turn away from him and you will find rest and you will not be grieved by his madness.”

<sup>289</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem: A Biblical Guide to Living Wisely* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 123.

children of the wicked is indirect. The children, after all, blame their father, not God, for their unfortunate lot. The notice that the children blame their father for their suffering does not appear to be an observation of injustice but rather a warning to the would-be sinner that his name will not be remembered for good purposes among any progeny that he manages to leave behind. This is significant for Ben Sira because he considers a good name to enable a man to achieve eternity (Sir. 41:11-13).<sup>290</sup>

### **Ben Sira 47:20, 22-23**

As will become evident as this chapter progresses, Ben Sira frequently reflects on historic examples of collective accountability. One such historical reference occurs in the sage's Praise of the Ancestors, an historical reflection on the heroic figures of Israel's past that appears in the book's conclusion. In addressing King Solomon, Ben Sira does not focus solely on the merits of the acclaimed wise man:

(20) You put a blemish on your glory and profaned your couch; anger is upon your offspring and sighing upon your bed...(22) God will not turn back from his loving kindness (*hsd*), and his words will not fall to the earth. He [will not blot out] the offspring, and he will not destroy the posterity of the one who loves him (*[w<sup>2</sup>w]hbyw*). He gave to Jacob...and to David...(23) And Solomon lay down in despair and he left behind

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<sup>290</sup> Jack T. Sanders, "Wisdom, Theodicy, Death, and the Evolution of Intellectual Traditions," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 36 (2005): 271–272. Harrington considers Ben Sira's reflections in 41:1-13 to be a warning against relying upon one's descendants to achieve immortality. Harrington argues that the sage challenges the traditional notion of attaining immortality through one's lineage because one's success "depends too much on the moral quality of one's children." Harrington perceives a contrast between achieving immortality through one's descendants and achieving it through a good name (v. 11-13). However, while God or the community may also preserve the name of an honorable man, children generally are responsible for the remembrance of their ancestors' names. Furthermore, one point of 41:5-10 is that the children of sinners will not perform the usual duties of a child, namely bringing honor to their parents and preserving their lineage. These verses are meant to discourage the wicked individual, who thinks he has found God's favor because he has begotten children, from trusting in the certainty that those children will remember his name forever. This will only happen if the father in fact has a good name to preserve; otherwise, the children will curse their father (v. 6). Harrington's interpretation that Ben Sira discourages reliance upon one's descendants for attaining immortality is true insofar as it goes, but could be more precise. His wisdom is meant to discourage the wicked father who has produced offspring from thinking that his children are evidence of divine favor and the permanence of his lineage. The sage is not suggesting that righteous men cannot rely on their offspring to preserve their remembrance (see Sir. 30:1-6). Harrington, *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem*, 123–124.

him...one wide in folly and lacking in understanding, Rehoboam; he neglected the counsel of the people. Jeroboam son of Nebat sinned and caused Israel to sin and set before Ephraim a stumbling block. (Sir. 47:20, 22-23)

Solomon, whose name was synonymous with wisdom in ancient Israel,<sup>291</sup> violates his covenantal fidelity to YHWH by marrying foreign women whose foreign religious practices lead him astray. According to the biblical account of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 11:11-13), his actions bring divine wrath upon his children.<sup>292</sup> Di Lella notes that this results from his children having a foreign mother, one incapable of teaching them the fear of YHWH and normative practices of Israelite religion (cf. Ezra 9:2; Mal 2:15; Wis 3:16-19).<sup>293</sup> This explanation is both likely and pragmatic, but one should also observe the clustered terminology used in the passage to describe God's mercy. Verse 22 will be discussed later with respect to collective reward, but it is worth noting in anticipation of that discussion that it draws on terminology that is prominent in the divine attribute formula in Exodus 34:6-7, which attests to YHWH's use of collective accountability.

Solomon's heir, Rehoboam, lacks his father's wisdom and loses control over the unity of his father's kingdom. Unlike the text of 1 Kings, which foretells the division of the kingdom under Rehoboam because of his father's sins, Ben Sira's recollection of history does not suggest Rehoboam's political missteps are punishment for Solomon's sins. Nevertheless, it is clear from Ben Sira's portrayal that this particular offspring of a sinner does not prosper. Di Lella suggests that the "sighing" upon Solomon's bed is an

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<sup>291</sup> The fame of Solomon's wisdom extends beyond the borders of Israel, according to the biblical account.

<sup>292</sup> Interestingly, although Solomon's wives numbered in the hundreds, the Bible records only three offspring known to have resulted from these unions: Rehoboam and his two (half?) sisters, Taphath and Basemath. See 1 Kings 4:11, 15; 14:31; 1 Chr. 3:10.

<sup>293</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 528.

allusion to the groans of the people of Israel who were denied their request for lightening their burden under Rehoboam (1 Kings 12).<sup>294</sup> The Book of Kings indicates that the division of the kingdom, a punishment that only Solomon's offspring must endure and not the king himself, is divine retribution for Solomon's idolatry (1 Kings 11:9-13). Surprisingly, however, Ben Sira does not connect the punishment endured by Rehoboam to the actions of his father. It is not clear whether or not this is a meaningful omission or a simple oversight in summarizing the deeds of Solomon.

### **Ben Sira 3:9b**

Ben Sira has gained considerable notoriety among modern biblical scholars for his negative depiction of women.<sup>295</sup> The sage notes that, in contrast to a father's good deeds, a mother's transgressions can produce negative consequences for her offspring:<sup>296</sup> "The blessing of a father strengthens the root, but the curse of a mother uproots a plant" (Sir. 3:9). Ben Sira associates "blessing" with the male parent and "curse" with his female counterpart, but it seems probable that each parental example is representative of the impact that a parent of either gender can have on his or her progeny. In other words, the blessing of either a father or a mother can produce benefits for one's children, and the curse of either parent can produce negative consequences. One ought to choose a spouse carefully, however, because the passage may suggest that the failings of one parent can counteract the successes of the other.

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Warren Charles Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View of Women: A Literary Analysis* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

<sup>296</sup> Cf. Psalm 109.

The use of plant imagery to discuss progeny is familiar from other passages within this book (see, e.g., 40:15, discussed above, and 23:24-27, discussed below) and from Job (e.g., Job 15:28-35). A curse incurred by a mother leads to the end of the lineage, a serious repercussion, as the plant metaphor suggests.

### **Ben Sira 23:24-27**

Although not extant in Hebrew, Sir. 23:24-27 reflects on the fate of the children of an adulterous woman:

(24) She herself will be brought out to the assembly, and to her children the punishment will extend. (25) Her children will not spread roots, and her branches will not bear fruit. (26) She will leave behind her cursed memory, and her disgrace will never be wiped out. (27) And those who survive her will recognize that nothing is better than the fear of the Lord and nothing is sweeter than to heed the commandments of the Lord. (Sir. 23:24-27)

The children in question appear to be those produced by a prohibited sexual union (Sir. 23:22-23). Ben Sira mentions public punishment as the fate of the adulterer (v. 21), but the children of the adulteress are his as well, so presumably the same wisdom applies to the offspring of the adulterous man.<sup>297</sup> Their punishment is public, and though the adulteress's sinful actions produced children, who were otherwise understood to be a divine blessing, they will not prosper or endure. They will suffer punishment like their mother. The use of plant imagery again resurfaces in connection with collective punishment. This imagery is used not only in wisdom literature but also in the Hebrew Bible more generally (for example, Isa 37:31; Mal 3:19).

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<sup>297</sup> The father of such illegitimate children is not necessarily married himself. Nevertheless, if the father has also violated his marriage covenant, Ben Sira is not concerned about the offense he has committed against his wife. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 69.



According to rabbinic tradition, the children of an adulteress were excluded from the community of Israel.<sup>298</sup> Ben Sira's use of collective punishment in the case of the adulteress woman, then, may point to his observation of adultery-produced children suffering exclusion from the community.<sup>299</sup> The illegitimate children complicate the inheritance plans of the adulterers and their spouses,<sup>300</sup> so excluding illegitimate children from the community offers a practical solution to the economic problems caused by an adulterous affair that produces offspring. Although God's role in the punishment of the offspring of adulterers appears indirect, the perceived origin of a mandate to exclude the offspring of prohibited sexual unions is likely divine revelation,<sup>301</sup> so God is ultimately responsible for this punishment of the children of an adulteress.

While Ben Sira's use of collective punishment in this instance may indicate a practical reality, theological and educational goals are also factors. As Collins has pointed out, the punishment of the adulteress' children for their parents' sin is reminiscent of Ezra's banishing foreign wives and their children in Ezra 10 because of their fathers' acting unfaithfully against God and marrying foreign women (Ezra 10:2). Although the children's suffering in Ezra is human-inflicted, Ben Sira seems to envision a divine punishment that guarantees that the fruit of an unlawful sexual union will not

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<sup>298</sup> Babylonian Talmud *Qiddushin* 78b. Cf. Box and Oesterley, "The Book of Sirach," 396. Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 325–326.

<sup>299</sup> The biblical law commanding death for adulterers likely did not inform legal practice during the time of Ben Sira. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 70.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>301</sup> Deut. 23. Cf. Sir. 23:23.

prosper. The adulteress's disgrace, for Ben Sira, serves as "a moral lesson that it is better to keep the Law."<sup>302</sup>

### **Ben Sira 25:24**

The early chapters of Genesis, especially the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, are important to Ben Sira and his understanding of creation (cf. Sir. 15:15; 17:7; 33:10-13), even if his interpretations of the biblical text at times stray from the original.<sup>303</sup> The sage alludes to Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden:<sup>304</sup> "From woman is the beginning of sin/iniquity, and because of her, we die together."<sup>305</sup> The passage occurs in the midst of Ben Sira's discussion of the evils associated with a wicked woman and the benefits of a virtuous wife.

Levison doubts that the woman in question does indeed refer to Eve.<sup>306</sup> He proposes instead that the reference is to the wicked woman examined in Sir. 25:13-23 because elsewhere the sage attributes the origins of death to divine design (17:1-2) and nowhere else associates concepts like sin and death with the events of Genesis 2-3.<sup>307</sup> For example, the view of death in 25:24 contrasts with Ben Sira's later allusion to Adam in 40:1ff in which he does not describe Adam's role as a tiller of the soil as punishment for

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<sup>302</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 70.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>305</sup> Although some commentators regard this verse as a secondary interpolation, I agree with Collins, who sees no reason to doubt its authenticity. Ibid., 68, 81.

<sup>306</sup> Jack Levison, "Is Eve to Blame? A Contextual Analysis of Sirach 25:24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 617-623.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 622.

sin.<sup>308</sup> Not only does the sage ignore Adam's sin, but he also elevates the status of Adam over all other life (Sir. 49:16b).

However, as Collins has noted, Ben Sira is often contextual in his positions, rather than strictly logical.<sup>309</sup> That is, although the sage does not elsewhere envision death as a punishment for human sin (Sir. 17; 41:3-4), he is not always consistent in his teachings and may favor a particular belief when it suits his goals. When searching for a suitable explanation for the origins of evil in a world created and governed by a benevolent deity, blaming human wrongdoing, especially when the human in question is the highly esteemed man whom the sage elevates over every other figure in Israel's illustrious history (Sir. 49:16b), seemed less appropriate to the sage. By contrast, when attempting to drive home the wickedness that women bring into the lives of those around them—a favorite theme of the sage—he repeats one possible explanation that may have been in circulation in popular circles,<sup>310</sup> because it suits his tone, even if it is philosophically inconsistent. It is worth noting that the sage's decision to blame Eve, rather than Adam, does bring a certain amount of consistency with respect to his attitudes toward the figure of Adam and women in general. Although later attributions of the origins of sin will point to Adam and not his female counterpart, some commentators have suggested that the notion that woman is the origin of sin may refer to the chronological order in which

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<sup>308</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 59. Note, however, that Gen. 2:15 describes YHWH placing Adam in the garden as a tiller of soil prior to his sin.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>310</sup> The notion that sin and death derive from Adam appears in the written record in the first century C.E., significantly later than Ben Sira's time, but this does not preclude the possibility that it was in circulation before then. See Rom. 15:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22; Wis. 2:23-24; 4 Ezra 4:30; 2 Bar. 17:3. John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1988).

the pair sin in the Garden of Eden (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14).<sup>311</sup> This explanation, however, is not wholly satisfactory because the context of Sir. 25:24 is generally critical of women and the negative consequences that they can bring upon their husbands.

### **Ben Sira 22:8**

Preserved only in the Syriac edition of Ben Sira, Sir. 22:8 suggests that wicked children can bring negative consequences upon their families as well: “Children whose pride is in scornful misconduct besmirch the nobility of their own family.” Misbehaved children hurt the honor of their family. Although this passage may not be original to Ben Sira, the wisdom reflects a concern among the communities that studied (and added) to the sage’s teachings for intergenerational punishment that was capable of operating bidirectionally. Sir. 22:8 must be balanced, however, with the preceding verse, preserved only in Syriac and the second Greek recension, that a child born into a family of shame can overcome his ignoble origins.

### **Ben Sira 22:13**

Ben Sira advises his pupils, “Do not multiply words with a fool and do not go to the one without understanding. Guard yourself from him lest you have trouble, and do not be defiled when he shakes himself off. Turn away from him and you will find rest and you will not be grieved by his madness” (Sir. 22:13). Essentially, the sage counsels his students to avoid association with fools. To a certain extent, the notion that the sinful actions of such individuals are bad influences upon the individual seeking wisdom and righteousness must underlie this advice. A foolish person can entice his companions to engage in foolish and sinful behavior as well, and thus bring punishment upon his

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<sup>311</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 348.

associates in addition to himself (cf. Prov. 12:26). However, the sage suggests that the fool's wickedness is contagious, like a pig spattering mud when it shakes itself off.<sup>312</sup>

Such an interpretation of the fool's sinful state as contagious has a precedent in the Hebrew Bible. In his work on collective punishment, Kaminsky has investigated the overlapping notions that underlie the ancient Israelite conception of this type of divine retribution. One difficult example of collective punishment for scholars to make sense of has been Joshua 7, the story of Achan's theft of *hērem* and Israel's subsequent defeat at Ai. Israelite notions of holiness required that the people be holy like their God so as to enable his immanence in the land of Israel and its cultic centers. According to Kaminsky,

It would be fair to describe holiness as analogous to an electrical charge that can be quite useful when channeled properly and quite dangerous when handled improperly. Neither electricity nor holiness will act any differently simply on the basis of one's interior state or intentions. Just as a person might unawares come into contact with a live electrical charge and accidentally receive a severe or even fatal shock, so too, one could offend God's holiness in an accidental or unconscious manner (Lev. 4).<sup>313</sup>

For Ben Sira, it may be that associating with a fool is like knowingly approaching a live electrical charge (cf. Sir. 16:6). The companion of a fool risks dangerous consequences by involving himself with someone whose behavior is likely to attract the wrath of God, a wrath that can spread to those rendered impure by interaction with a sinner, just as Achan's family and property suffered death because of their proximity to Achan and the stolen plunder.

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<sup>312</sup> This interpretation, found in the second Greek recension of the text of Ben Sira, relies on the Syriac reading of "pig" for "one without understanding," which may be the preferred reading. Rudolf Smend, *Die Weisheit Des Jesus Sirach* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1906), 199. Box and Oesterley, "The Book of Sirach," 391.

<sup>313</sup> Kaminsky, "Joshua 7," 340.

It is, of course, not strictly necessary to interpret Sir. 22:13 in the manner outlined above. The metaphorical language of the sinner shaking himself off may refer simply to the reality that keeping company with sinners leads to bad consequences (for example, sinners might feel no compunction about lying in a legal proceeding in order to save themselves while their associates suffer the repercussions of the sinners' actions). However, because of the act-consequence model upon which the divinely structured universe was built, the fate suffered by the sinner's associates is divinely sanctioned (for a fuller discussion of the act-consequence model, see chapter seven). This verse does not deal with punishment in a strict legal sense, but given the sage's worldview, the negative results that follow from associating with sinners function as divinely created punishments for and/or deterrents to "multiply[ing] words with a fool" or "go[ing] to one without understanding."

### **III. Collective Reward in Ben Sira**

#### **Ben Sira 3:8-9**

Sir. 3:8-9 has already been discussed above with respect to its comment on collective punishment, but it also expresses the notion of collective reward: "My son, with your word and your deed honor your father so that all blessings will come upon you. The blessing of a father strengthens the root, but the curse of a mother uproots a plant." Children coveted a father's blessing in ancient Israel, as several stories in Genesis indicate (cf. Gen. 9:27; 27:27-38; 28:1, 6; 48:15-16; 49:25-26).<sup>314</sup> Such a blessing "strengthens the root," a metaphor for preserving and nurturing the father's lineage.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 155.

## Ben Sira 26:19-21

Although not extant in the Hebrew text,<sup>316</sup> Sir. 26:19-21 offers insight into Israel's wisdom tradition's understanding of collective reward: "My child, keep sound the bloom of your youth, and do not give your strength to strangers. Seek a fertile field within the whole plain, and sow it with your own seed, trusting in your fine stock. So your offspring will prosper, and, having confidence in their good descent, will grow great." Ben Sira's advice metaphorically discourages exogamy. The offspring produced by an endogamous marriage enjoy success and have assurance in their lineage. Biblical justification for Ben Sira's advice is compelling. Figures as illustrious and as wise as Solomon find their downfall in marriage to foreign women, under whose influence their children turn away from exclusive worship of YHWH. Tales such as that of Dinah and Shechem in Gen. 34 or Zimri and the Midianite woman in Numb. 25 deal unfavorably with the issue of exogamy, and didactic legal materials, like Deut. 7:3-4, make clear the perils of intermarriage with non-Israelites. Although several stories—like those of Tamar in Gen. 38, Ruth in the Book of Ruth, and Rahab in Josh. 6—depict heroic and righteous foreign women who intermarry with Israelite men to help preserve the lineage of the Davidic line, the issue remained a divisive one in ancient Israel, as evidenced by Persian-period texts like Ezra 10 and Neh. 10:30; 13:25. Joseph Blenkinsopp has proposed that

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>316</sup> Di Lella and Skehan regard the passage as original, nonetheless. Ibid., 346, 351. Di Lella, Alexander and Patrick William Skehan. *Das Buch Jesus Sirach Oder Ecclesiasticus Übersetzt Und Erklärt* (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorff Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1913), 218.

the Persian period constitutes a likely background for the long discourse on the dangers of the “Outsider Woman” in Prov. 1-9.<sup>317</sup>

The issue remained pertinent also in Ben Sira’s era when Judean culture traded customs and ideas with the Hellenistic world. Like the Israelite wisdom preceding it, the advice found in Sir. 26:19-21 for the pupil facing these pressures is to marry within one’s own social group so as to produce benefits for his offspring.

### **Ben Sira 26:26c**

Although Ben Sira frequently expresses negative judgments about women and their deleterious effects on men, he does acknowledge and praise the benefits of a virtuous wife: “...Happy is the husband of a good wife; for the number of his years will be doubled.” To judge from the surrounding discourse, which primarily focuses on women who are social outcasts, the virtuous wife’s merits lie in her modesty and ability to bring honor to her husband (v. 26a-b). The man who marries a virtuous woman will ensure for himself longevity. Ben Sira clearly envisions a great reward for the man wise enough to attach himself to a good woman, but the mechanism through which this reward is achieved is not explicit. If Ben Sira’s advice is meant to be a practical observation of observed reality, it is not at all clear how a wife whose modesty and social graces bring her husband honor could also physically extend his life. The sage’s wisdom may be considered hyperbolic and pedagogical. Great benefits await the one who chooses his wife wisely. The nature of this reward is not a divine gift but rather the natural consequence of close association with a person of good character.

### **Ben Sira 37:12**

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<sup>317</sup> Blenkinsopp, “The Social Context of the ‘Outsider Woman’ in Proverbs 1-9,” 461.



As in the previous two examples discussed, Ben Sira 37:12 acknowledges again the possibility of intragenerational accountability in which a group or individual prospers through association with one meritorious individual: “Only associate with the one who is fearing continually, who you know keeps the commandments, who in his heart is like your heart. If you stumble, he will strike you.” The Hebrew text preserves two textual variants for the final colon of this verse, one of which is supported by the Greek: “If you stumble, he will suffer with you.” The Hebrew reading does not unambiguously convey a notion of reward, but the point of both readings seems to be that a person can benefit in some way from associating with righteous, pious individuals. As Di Lella notes, Ben Sira’s description of such a person implies that the pupil should surround himself with those who provide wise counsel.<sup>318</sup> Here the notion of collective accountability seems quite practical; if the student associates only with those who provide wise counsel, he will benefit from the application of sage advice to his own life.<sup>319</sup>

### **Ben Sira 44:8-13**

In his Praise of the Ancestors, Ben Sira offers several insights into his understanding of collective reward. He suggests that the descendants of righteous men will benefit because of their ancestors’ merits:

- (8) There are some of them who have left a name to gaze on their portion.
- (9) There are some of them for whom there is no remembrance; they ceased as though they never existed, along with their children after them.
- (10) However, these were men of loving kindness/mercy (*hsd*), and their righteousness will not be cut off.
- (11) With their seed their goodness (wealth) is trusted, and their inheritance is for their children’s children.
- (12) In their covenant their descendants stand, and their offspring, for their

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<sup>318</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 433.

<sup>319</sup> This calls to mind the case of Rehoboam, which Ben Sira also recalls in 47:23. The young king had access to wise counsel but chose instead to follow the advice of his peers, who lacked the wisdom of his elders (1 Kings 12).

sake. (13) Their seed will stand forever and their glory will not be wiped away. (Sir. 44:8-13)

Although the identity of the men with no remembrance may be ambiguous,<sup>320</sup> the rewards awaiting individuals of lovingkindness are great. “Lovingkindness,” *hesed*, is a characteristic that YHWH uses to define his own character in Exodus 34:6-7. As Exodus 34:7 promises, YHWH keeps his *hesed*, “lovingkindness” to the thousandth generation, or forever. Likewise, as vv. 12-13 observe, God will keep his *hesed*, “lovingkindness,” for the descendants of these righteous men forever. Fidelity to the covenant and emulation of a divine attribute ensure the continuance of one’s lineage.

#### **Ben Sira 44:17-22**

Noah is among the first named forefathers praised in Ben Sira’s hymn:

(17) Noah was found righteous and perfect; in the time of destruction he was the continuation. On account of him there was a remnant, and by his covenant, the flood ceased. (18) An eternal sign was cut with him never to destroy all flesh. (Sir. 44:17-18)

According to the sage, Noah’s righteousness produced the remnant from which all of humanity descends. All humans owe their existence to God’s intergenerational rewarding of Noah’s righteousness, and they are protected against future catastrophic

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<sup>320</sup> Box and Oesterley understand the verse to refer to “godless kings, doubtless of the northern kingdom.” Box and Oesterley, “The Book of Sirach,” 481. Ben Sira’s concern elsewhere for the preservation of one’s name may suggest that v. 9 refers to ungodly men of whom there is no memory. However, this is unlikely because it requires multiple awkward shifts in subject. Pancratius C. Beentjes, “The ‘Praise of the Famous’ and Its Prologue,” in *Happy the One Who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14,20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006), 126–127. Harrington, *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem*, 59–60. Di Lella suggests that the passage refers to pious men whose names have been forgotten due to the frailty of human memory but whose deeds persist in divine memory. Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 501. If vv. 8-9 are to be understood as referring to great men whose names have been forgotten, the verses may compare to the notion expressed in Wisdom 3:1-3. Jeremy Corley, “Sirach 44:1-15 as Introduction to the Praise of the Ancestors,” in *Studies in the Book of Ben Sira: Papers of the Third International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, Shime’on Centre, Pápa, Hungary, 18-20 May, 2006*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits and József Zsengellér (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 171.

devastation because of the intergenerational nature of the covenant formed between God and Noah. Abraham also produces intergenerational benefits for his descendants:

(19) Abraham was the father of a multitude of nations, and none has been found like him in glory. (20) He kept the law of the Most High and entered into a covenant with him. With his flesh he made the covenant, and when he was tested, he was found faithful. (21) Therefore, with the swearing of an oath he assured him that he would bless the nations through his seed, that they would inherit from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth. (22) Also to Isaac he assured (a son) for the sake of Abraham his father. He has given him the covenant of all the ancestors. (Sir. 44:19-22)

In addition to the Abrahamic blessing of the nations through Abraham's seed, Isaac, also benefits for the sake of his father. Ben Sira recounts historical episodes of collective reward when praising the forefathers. Their merits continue to have lasting benefits hundreds of generations later, just as YHWH promises in Exodus 34:6-7.

#### **Ben Sira 47:22**

In his presentation of Solomon's kingship, Ben Sira notes the king's changed fortunes. Although he "overflowed like the Nile with understanding" in his youth (Sir. 47:14), he later falls victim to activities characteristic of a fool:

(19) But you gave your loins to women, and through your body you were ruled. (20) You put a stain upon your honor and you stained your couch, so that you brought anger upon your offspring and sighing upon your bed. (21) Your kingdom became two tribes, and from Ephraim came a kingdom of violence. (Sir. 47:19-21)

Although his kingdom is initially glorious, Solomon's behavior is worthy of punishment, and so his kingdom is divided and his offspring now suffer. Nevertheless, Ben Sira takes a long view of political history:

But the Lord will not forsake his mercy, and he will not destroy any of his words, and he will not wipe out his chosen offspring, and the seed of one loving him he will not remove. To Jacob he gave a remnant and to David one of his own root. And Solomon rested with his fathers, and he left after

him one of his seed, foolish and lacking in understanding, Rehoboam, who removed the people from his counsel. (Sir. 47:22)

Solomon is indebted to God's favoring of his father David for his own peaceful reign over a united monarchy despite his sins (Sir. 47:12).<sup>321</sup> Although Solomon's offspring suffer on account of his love of foreign women, the Davidic line persists because of YHWH's covenantal fidelity to Solomon's father.<sup>322</sup> As he promised in Exodus 34:6-7 to Moses, YHWH will reward to the thousandth generation the offspring of the one who loves him, like David. Likewise, although the Northern Kingdom will suffer on account of continual political upheaval in royal succession, the southern kingdom will have a remnant on account of YHWH's promise to the eponymous ancestors of the kingdom.

#### **IV. Rejection of Collective Punishment in Ben Sira**

##### **Ben Sira 40:1**

Ben Sira appeals to historical memory in ways that sometimes suggest a rejection of the concept of collective accountability. For example, the sage presents the punishment incurred by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in a new manner: "God apportioned hard work and a heavy yoke for the sons of Adam from the day of his coming out of his mother's womb until the day of his return to the mother of all the living."<sup>323</sup> According to Gen. 3:17-19, YHWH curses the ground so that Adam must

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<sup>321</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 104.

<sup>322</sup> According to Beentjes, Ben Sira denigrates Solomon's leadership on the basis of the "Law of the King" in Deut. 17:14-20 in order to elevate the status of the Aaronide priesthood. Pancratius C. Beentjes, "'The Countries Marvelled at You': King Solomon in Ben Sira 47,12-22," in *Happy the One Who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14:20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 142-143.

<sup>323</sup> The reference to the "mother of all the living" is an allusion to the etymology provided for Eve's name in Gen. 3:20.

perform difficult labor all the days of his life in order to make the earth bear fruit for his consumption. The story functions as an etiology that explains the origins of the human condition; because of Eve's sin, all women suffer pain in childbirth (Gen 3:16); because of Adam's sin, all humans toil laboriously throughout their lives to cultivate food. Although Ben Sira clearly alludes to this creation narrative,<sup>324</sup> he does not suggest that the heavy yoke placed upon Adam's descendants is the result of intergenerational punishment. Rather, he suggests that God apportioned hard labor for everyone as though this decision were part of an original divine plan and not a punitive reaction to the exercise of human free will.<sup>325</sup> By ignoring the etiological implications of Gen. 2-3, Ben Sira seems to reject an explanation of intergenerational punishment for the human condition. Such a position could be explained by the fact that Exod. 34:6-7 (cf. the Decalogue) limits intergenerational divine retribution to only three to four generations, in contrast to divine reward, which lasts to the thousandth generation. If the laborious nature of the human condition were attributed to punishment for the sin of Adam, God's wrath would fail to be limited as other biblical sources suggest it is. However, Ben Sira's statement in 16:12, to be discussed below, militates against this interpretation.

### **Ben Sira 16:7-12**

In another example of historical remembrance, Ben Sira alludes to several episodes from the Pentateuch in order to suggest that God punishes individuals for their sins.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 469.

<sup>325</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 59. Smend, *Die Weisheit des Jesus Sirach*, 367.

<sup>326</sup> Harrington, *Jesus Ben Sira of Jerusalem*, 40–41.

(7) He did not forgive the princes of old, the ones rebelling in their might. (8) He did not pity the neighbors of Lot, who were angering him with their pride. (9) He did not pity the nations devoted to the ban, the ones trampled because of their iniquity, (10) or the six hundred thousand foot soldiers gathered in the pride of their heart. (11) Indeed, if there were one stiff-necked person, it would be a wonder if he remained unpunished (*ynqh*). For mercy (*rhymym*) and wrath are with him; he bears [sin] (*wnws<sup>2</sup>*) and forgives, but on the wicked he pours out his anger. (12) As great as his mercy, so is his reproof; he will judge each man according to his works. (Sir. 16:7-12)

This passage begins with an allusion to the enigmatic Nephilim mentioned in Gen. 6:4 whose existence results from the fraternization of the sons of God with human women; it immediately precedes the notice that God perceives all of humanity, with the exception of Noah, to be wicked and deserving of annihilation through a flood. As Ben Sira notes, God did not show them mercy, which may be the original function of collective accountability as it is described in Exod. 34:6-7.<sup>327</sup> Rather, God exercised mostly individual justice. All of humanity was extinguished with the exception of one righteous man. Of course, Noah's family survives the deluge through collective reward, but this is a practical matter that explains the perpetuation of the human race and is not the focus of Ben Sira's discussion.

Ben Sira's reference to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah appeals to a case in which YHWH exercises a mix of collective and individual punishment, despite Abraham's best efforts to compel "the judge of all the earth [to] do justice" (Gen. 18:25) and to "forgive the whole place for their [fifty righteous individuals'] sake" (Gen. 18:26). Although Abraham suggests that "justice" is pardoning the group for the sake of the individual,<sup>328</sup> YHWH's messengers cannot find the requisite number of righteous

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<sup>327</sup> For an explanation of the merciful origins of collective punishment, see Chapter 3.

<sup>328</sup> In this case, the pardon comes finally for the sake of ten individuals.

individuals on whose account the city can be spared. God promises Abraham that he will execute collective justice on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but he ultimately exercises a hybrid of collective and individual punishment. On the side of collective accountability, Lot is spared even though his behavior in response to the divine warnings of impending doom is foolish.<sup>329</sup> While one might object that YHWH spares Lot because he righteously did not participate in the acts of inhospitality that his neighbors perpetrated, YHWH had already planned to destroy Lot along with his wicked neighbors, except in the event that he could find ten righteous individuals, which he obviously did not. The text suggests that Lot is spared for Abraham's sake (Gen. 19:29). Lot's family is granted safe passage out of the doomed city because of their associations with Lot. On the side of individual accountability, the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, among whom God's messengers could find no righteous men, suffer destruction. Ben Sira's focus is not on the fate of Lot but on that of his neighbors. He emphasizes individual accountability in his interpretation of a text that involves both individual and collective accountability.

Ben Sira's reference to the six hundred thousand foot soldiers in 16:10 alludes to the Israelites themselves during their wilderness sojourn. The sage recalls the numerous episodes of the people murmuring against God and his chosen leaders. According to the various versions preserved in the biblical account, God punishes the entire community

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<sup>329</sup> Although Lot's actions to welcome the strangers are commendable (Gen. 19:3), he also demonstrates foolish behavior (Gen. 19:16, 19, 33), and v. 29 notes that God spared Lot not because he was righteous but because God "remembered Abraham." However, later traditions, namely 2 Peter 2:7-8 and Wis. 2:6, remember Lot as a righteous man. Jubilees, however, suggests that God spares Lot for Abraham's sake. Jubilees' interpretation does not mention any righteousness on the part of Lot and describes the sin he committed with his daughters as the greatest sin on earth since the time of Adam. Jubilees 16:7-8.

with the exceptions of Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.<sup>330</sup> Moses prevents the destruction of the entire community with an intercessory prayer in Numb. 14:18 that recycles elements of Exod. 34:6-7. Dozeman has argued that the author of Numbers is attempting to controvert the traditional notion that God punishes the group on account of the individual sinner.<sup>331</sup> Ben Sira's interpretation of this episode here appears to agree with Dozeman's interpretation of Numbers 14 because he remarks that no sinner will go unpunished (Sir. 16:11).<sup>332</sup> Such a statement appears to reject the notion that God rewards the group for the sake of the individual.

## **V. The Role of Wisdom Instruction for the Righteous and the Wicked in Ben Sira**

As discussed in previous chapters, the effectiveness of wisdom instruction for enabling a child to reap the benefits of wisdom and righteousness and to avoid the dangers of folly and sin is an important factor to consider in understanding a sage's conception of collective accountability. To what extent are the children of the wicked destined to suffer the same fate as their parents and what power do they have to create a different life for themselves through the exercise of free will and wisdom?

The crucial passage for understanding Ben Sira's view of free will is Sir. 15:14-17, which seems to address the issue directly. In response to the sinner who blames God

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<sup>330</sup> The various Pentateuchal sources preserve different traditions regarding whom God will spare. God promises to spare only Moses in Exodus 32:10-14 on account of the Golden Calf and again in Numbers 14:12. Both Moses and Aaron are to be spared in Numb. 16:21, 45. Caleb alone will be spared in Numb. 14:23, and both Caleb and Joshua will be spared according to 14:30, 38.

<sup>331</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Abingdon Press, 1994), 125.

<sup>332</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 274.



for his wrongdoings (Sir. 15:11-12; cf. Jas. 1:13-16), the sage explains that humans choose their own actions:

(14) God in the beginning created humankind and set him in the power of his own free choice. (15) If you choose you can keep the commandment, and to act faithfully is his choice. (16) He pours out before you fire and water, from which you will choose to send your hand. (17) Before humankind are life and death, whichever he chooses will be given to him. (Sir. 15:14-17)

These verses emphasize the power of human choice and, thus, suggest that humankind exercises free will.<sup>333</sup> The logical conclusion that one would draw from this passage alone is that if the children of the wicked suffer, they have their own actions and choices to blame for their situation.

Nevertheless, in reflecting on God's creation of humankind, the sage suggests that something other than human free will controls their ultimate destinies.<sup>334</sup> "A vessel of clay, and from the dust was formed humankind. The knowledge of the Lord separated them, and he set them to dwell on the earth and he changed their ways. And some of them he blessed...and made them low...and expelled from their works" (Sir. 33:10-12). This passage contains an allusion to the Canaanites ("made them low"), and Ben Sira suggests that God predetermined their fate. According to the biblical account, the Canaanites are not allotted a lowly position from the beginning of creation. Rather, the actions of the father (Ham) of their eponymous ancestor (Canaan) results in Noah cursing Canaan: "Cursed be Canaan. Lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers" (Gen. 9:25). Noah, who punishes the child (Canaan) for his father's (Ham's) sin, does not make explicit that this curse is to extend to all Canaanites, but the etiological function of the

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 271–272.

<sup>334</sup> John J. Collins, "Ecclesiasticus, or The Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach," in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 688.

story suggests as much.<sup>335</sup> Whereas the account in Genesis explains the Canaanites' status as the result of an intergenerational curse merited by sexual misconduct (Gen. 9:22), Ben Sira omits any historical reason for it and instead proposes that their lowly status is part of a divine plan. Other Second Temple interpretations of this story<sup>336</sup> are concerned to explain why Canaan should be cursed for his father's sin.<sup>337</sup> Ben Sira is unique in resolving this issue by denying that the curse is the result of any human action at all. The Canaanites are by their very creation lower in status than the Israelites.

This contrasts with an earlier comment by the sage that human pride is the impetus for God's decision to elevate some while humbling others (Sir. 10:7-18).<sup>338</sup> The reader is left to wonder whether the Canaanites are to blame for their lowly status. Could they have chosen, in Ben Sira's worldview, to keep the commandments and thus reap the rewards of wisdom and righteousness? Ben Sira allows context (God's role in human sin in Sir. 15 and divine omnipotence in Sir. 33) to dictate his views on the tension between determinism and free will.<sup>339</sup> Although this unresolved tension is philosophically unsatisfying, it reflects the very tensions that prompted Israelites to question the notion of

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<sup>335</sup> As Katell Berthelot has pointed out, if this etiology is meant to explain the later attempt to annihilate the Canaanites in Joshua, it does not express this thought clearly since the Israelites undertake a pogrom of utter destruction, not enslavement as Genesis 9 would seem to suggest, against the Canaanites. Katell Berthelot, "The Original Sin of the Canaanites," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, ed. Daniel C Harlow (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2011), 50.

<sup>336</sup> See 4Q252; Philo's *Quaestiones in Genesim* 2.65, 70, 77 and *De Sobrietate* 30-69; Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* 1.120-147; *Genesis Rabbah* 36.2, 36.7, 61.7, 84.17, *Jubilees* 7-10, Wisdom of Solomon 12:3-11. Berthelot omits Ben Sira from her discussion of Second Temple interpretations of the Canaanites, but this is most likely because Ben Sira makes only a vague allusion and not a direct reference to them. Berthelot, "The Original Sin of the Canaanites."

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>338</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 400-401.

<sup>339</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 83.

collective accountability that appears in such prominent places as Exodus 34:6-7 and the Decalogue (Exod. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:9-10).

If Muffs is correct that the original purpose of collective accountability, in terms both of reward and of punishment, is merciful,<sup>340</sup> then this form of divine retribution only appears merciful or fair from one perspective, that of the sinner. From the perspective of the righteous individual who suffers on account of others, collective accountability is neither fair nor merciful. For Israel's sages, suggesting that the pupil lacks any power to avoid the consequences of sin, or the sin of another, would undermine the very goal of wisdom literature. So, with respect to the issue of collective accountability, Ben Sira embraces human free will when the power to control one's own fate can empower the child of a sinner to choose wisdom over folly, but when his concern is to discourage a father from wicked behavior, determinism and its consequences for collective accountability are effective threats.

Like other sages examined so far, Ben Sira presents a mixed picture on the character of the wicked and their children. In his discussion on the children of sinners (41:5-10), the sage suggests that the offspring of an apostate father will not be a blessing to their father, as children were generally considered to be, but rather will be a curse (Sir. 41:9). Ben Sira seems to promote the familiar adage that like begets like: "Everything from the end returns to the end. Thus the ungodly go from chaos to chaos" (Sir. 41:10). Sinners beget detestable children who deserve punishment themselves.

Similarly, Ben Sira suggests that a wise and virtuous father will produce a son like himself. In Sir. 30:1-13, the sage advises that a good father should discipline his son

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<sup>340</sup> Muffs, "Who Will Stand?," 21-22.

with physical rebuke, and these actions will produce an offspring worthy of praise and boasting, so much so that “When the father dies, it will be as if he did not die. For he has left behind a son who is like himself” (v. 4; cf. Tob. 9:6).<sup>341</sup> A father could achieve immortality through properly disciplining his son and thus avoid having his posterity cut off; in this way the father would abide by the conventional wisdom that spoiling a child will produce shame and sorrow.<sup>342</sup>

Despite the advice to train one’s child properly so that the wise parent can reap the benefits of producing a child like oneself, Ben Sira also seems to acknowledge that a good father can produce children who are not like himself. For example, the sage counsels his students,

(1) Do not desire the form of children of emptiness, and do not rejoice in sons of iniquity. (2) Even if they multiply, do not rejoice in them if the fear of the Lord is not in them. (3) Do not trust in their lives or rely on their footprints, for there will not be for them a good end. For one making favor is better than a thousand, and to die childless is better than to have many children of iniquity. (4) Through a childless one with the fear of God a city can dwell, but through families acting treacherously it becomes wasted. (Sir. 16:1-4)

Not all children, even perhaps for the righteous, are a blessing that will provide their father with immortality. All people are not equally capable of appreciating and practicing wisdom. As Ben Sira notes, “The one teaching a fool is like one gluing together potsherds or one waking a sleeping person from a deep sleep” (Sir. 22:9). Trying to impart wisdom to a fool is futile (cf. Prov. 1:7; 27:22).<sup>343</sup> Wisdom, it would appear, does

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<sup>341</sup> According to Urbach, the Tanna considered only a son who studied Torah to provide a living memorial for his deceased father. By studying the Torah, the son was able to atone for his father’s sins and to earn him merit, and this constituted a continuation of his father’s life. Urbach, *The Sages*, 511.

<sup>342</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 376.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

not have the power to benefit everyone. Ben Sira's saying, "For not everything is good for everyone, for not everyone delights in everything. Not every soul chooses every kind" (Sir. 37:28), may be relevant here as well.

Despite the possibility that wisdom instruction may not benefit every child, Ben Sira nonetheless warns his students: "The shame of a father is in uneducated offspring; a daughter is born as a defect. A wise daughter will inherit her own husband, and the one who acts shamefully is a grief to the one who begot her. An insolent woman shames father and husband and dishonors both" (Sir. 22:3-5; cf. 22:8).<sup>344</sup> When a child—presumably either male or female, but here Ben Sira focuses on the female—acts disgracefully, she brings grief and shame to her father because her actions make evident that he has not successfully educated and disciplined her.<sup>345</sup> In his Praise of the Ancestors, Ben Sira draws attention to the fact that Solomon's son Rehoboam is "foolish and lacking in understanding" (Sir. 47:23). Although Solomon is celebrated for his wisdom, he produces a child who lacks it, and this situation, for Ben Sira, likely reflects poorly on the status of the monarch. Both Solomon and Rehoboam differ from the founder of their monarchy, King David. Ben Sira suggests in 47:22 that despite the shortcomings of Solomon and his offspring, YHWH's faithfulness to David persists; in the case of the Davidic line, intergenerational reward appears to skip generations and fall only on those descendants who are deserving of divine favor. Sinful descendants of David benefit only from not being destroyed for David's sake.

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<sup>344</sup> Not extant in Hebrew.

<sup>345</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 312. Box and Oesterley, "The Book of Sirach," 390.

## VI. Summary of Findings in Ben Sira

The preceding discussion of collective accountability has observed both continuities and innovations, with respect both to the other wisdom literature examined so far and to the Hebrew Bible more generally. Ben Sira's treatment of intergenerational punishment yields explanations similar to those found in the other wisdom books. For example, the notion that the children of the wicked do not prosper often functions pedagogically. It can also comfort the righteous individual grappling with the ostensibly unjust situation of a wicked individual producing numerous offspring, which are generally regarded as blessings in ancient Israel (i.e. Sir. 40:15). Additionally, the notion can also discourage the pupil, who desires to preserve his lineage and only hope of immortality in an ephemeral world, from rejecting wisdom and choosing evil (i.e., Sir. 23:24-27, 41:5-10). Likewise, collective reward at times also functions pedagogically to encourage behavior that comports with the sage's priorities. For example, Ben Sira advises his students that endogamy will produce rewards for their offspring (Sir. 26:19-21). This advice is both pedagogical and pragmatic since the sage's goal is enculturation,<sup>346</sup> and he cannot succeed in this task if the child's parents hail from different cultures with different values that they both wish to inculcate in their shared offspring.

In addition to at times being pragmatic, Ben Sira's comments on collective accountability often appear to be rooted in experience. For example, the claim that the offspring of the adulteress are cut off and suffer like their mother (Sir. 23:24-27) may reflect the historical legal practice of excluding illegitimate children from the community.

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<sup>346</sup> Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 130.

If God plays a role in the punishment of the children of an adulteress, Ben Sira does not make this explicit. As creator of the universe and the progenitor of Israelite law, the sage may have considered intergenerational consequences to be divine will, but he rarely points directly to God's role in executing intergenerational punishment. However, in the case of intergenerational reward, such as the continuation of the Davidic line despite the missteps of Solomon and Rehoboam (Sir. 47:18-23), Ben Sira does directly attribute the intergenerational consequences to God directly. While both divinely administered consequences and those that result from the act-consequence model derive from God ultimately, the sage strongly favors the latter in his descriptions of deeds that produce consequences for the families and associates of the individual performing the deed. For Ben Sira, who is likely responding to Qoheleth's subversion of traditional notions of retribution,<sup>347</sup> the suffering and prospering of those related to sinners and do-gooders, respectively, fits into a consistent act-consequence system of retribution. Critics of traditional wisdom teachings, like Qoheleth, observed that God does not consistently reward the righteous and punish the wicked; Ben Sira points out to his students that the natural consequences of an individual's actions can affect those around him (i.e., Sir. 3:9, 22:13, 23:24-27, etc.). God's direct role in bringing about these consequences may not be observable, but reality nevertheless confirms the lesson taught by generations of wisdom teachers about the existence of an orderly schema of retribution.

A woman's role in providing benefits or curses to her family and offspring appears repeatedly in Proverbs (Prov. 12:4, 13:20, 14:1, 31:10-31), and Ben Sira expands upon this line of thinking. He notes that a mother's curse can lead to the end of one's

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<sup>347</sup> Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 154.

lineage (Sir. 3:9b), and thus encourages careful wife selection with the promise of doubling the life of a good wife's husband (Sir. 25:24). Although possibly not original to Ben Sira himself, the notion that woman is the source of sin and death, a likely reference to Eve, suggests that at least one case of sinning led to punishment that lasted forever and was not limited to only three or four generations.<sup>348</sup>

In addition to his wife, any member of a man's family can produce collective consequences for the father and his family. Properly trained children preserve a father's lineage and bring him great pride, whereas an undisciplined child will cause his parents grief (Sir. 30:1-13; cf. 22:8). Thus, intergenerational punishment operates bidirectionally for Ben Sira, just as it does for other sages and Israelite lawmakers (Deut. 21:18-21).

More than any other sage, Ben Sira considers the phenomenon of intragenerational accountability. Association with fools produces negative consequences. The sage's advice on this topic largely appears to be pragmatic and not directly attributable to divine will (i.e. Sir. 22:13, 37:12). Nevertheless, some vestigial notion of the contagious nature of sin like that found in Joshua 7 may form part of the sage's understanding of this concept.

Historical considerations and forces play a strong role in Ben Sira's conception of collective accountability. For example, his rejection of Solomon and claim that a remnant will persist for David's sake may betray his desire to elevate the Aaronide priesthood of his time (see Sir. 45:6-22 and 50, especially vv. 13-16, for the sage's vision of the prominence of Aaron's descendants). In several cases in which Ben Sira appeals to historical examples to make his point, he seems to make an implicit rejection of

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<sup>348</sup> Cf. Sir. 16:12.



collective punishment. For example, he does not describe the yoke placed on Adam and his descendants as a punishment (Sir. 40:1). He also singles out several examples of group punishments in which a single righteous individual is spared (Sir. 16:7-11). Although this would seem to suggest that God does not reward the group for the sake of the righteous individual, other examples, like the remembrance of figures like Noah and Abraham (Sir. 44:17-22), suggest that future generations can benefit from their righteous ancestors.

With respect to the ability of the sinner's offspring to avoid the negative consequences of his parent's actions, Ben Sira presents a mixed picture, much like other sages. For Ben Sira, humans have free will (15:14-17), but the child does not always appear to have the power to change his fate from that of his parents (i.e. 41:5-10).

As James Crenshaw has noted, theodicy was a primary concern for Ben Sira. Ben Sira employs the debate formula (*ʿal-tōʿmar*, “Do not say...”) to refute arguments put forth by other sages (for example, Sir. 5:3-7) concerning the nature of God's justice.<sup>349</sup> According to Crenshaw, “While we cannot identify these antagonists, we can discern the basic thrust of their attack. In essence they argue that God's boundless mercy bestows upon his devotees license to sin, that his blessings in material wealth give security, that his power robs man of the freedom to act decisively to avoid sinful conduct, and that his blindness makes evil profitable, especially when the perfidious deed can be concealed from humans eyes as well.”<sup>350</sup> The tension between God's merciful and punishing

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<sup>349</sup> James L. Crenshaw, “Problem of Theodicy in Sirach: On Human Bondage,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 47.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

natures lies at the heart of Ben Sira's theological conundrum,<sup>351</sup> and this same tension has great relevance to the biblical notion of collective accountability in which God metes out mercy by punishing the children of sinners to only the third or fourth generation while rewarding the children of the righteous to the thousandth generation (Exod. 34:6-7). The sage must, then, interact on some level with biblical notions of collective accountability. In 16:12-14, he asserts: "As great as his mercy, so is his reproof. He judges a man according to his deeds. The unjust will not escape with plunder, and the hope<sup>352</sup> of the righteous will never cease. For everyone doing righteousness there are wages, and every man goes out before him according to his deeds." Here Ben Sira suggests a notion of individual accountability in which justice is fairly executed based on individual merits.<sup>353</sup>

Furthermore, he alters the notion of mercy found in the divine attribute formula in Exodus 34:6-7. Whereas God's mercy far exceeds his vengeance in Exod. 34:6-7, Ben Sira suggests that the two are equal. He reminds his students: "Do not enroll in the ranks of sinners; remember that retribution will not skip over" (Sir. 7:16). The Greek translation of *yit'abbēr*, "skip over," reads *chroniei*, "delay." In either case, the statement seems to relate to notions of intergenerational punishment in which the punishment is thought to pass from the sinner on to his children or to be delayed until the sinner's children can bear the burden of the punishment.

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<sup>351</sup> According to Beentjes, the fact that text-critical issues plague numerous passages in Ben Sira that contain the Hebrew root *r-h-m*, "mercy," suggests that the theological issue was not only divisive for Ben Sira and the sages with whom he was engaging, but also for the scribes who copied and transmitted this text. Pancratius Cornelis Beentjes, "God's Mercy: 'Racham' (pi.), 'Rachum', and 'Rachamim' in the Book of Ben Sira," in *Happy the One Who Meditates on Wisdom* (Sir. 14,20): *Collected Essays on the Book of Ben Sira* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2006), 244.

<sup>352</sup> Emended from *ta'wat*, "desire," to *tiqwat*, "hope" on the basis of the Greek. Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 270, 274.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

Two trends occur in Ben Sira that are relevant for understanding the diachronic developments that emerge within Israel's biblical wisdom tradition and its treatment of collective accountability. Firstly, Ben Sira engages with philosophical traditions from neighboring cultures to a far greater extent than his predecessors. Although the sage does not accept notions of judgment after death or an eternal soul, he seems to set the stage for the great shift that will appear in the Wisdom of Solomon with respect to this issue. Secondly, Ben Sira incorporates biblical references and allusions into his teachings in a manner and to an extent not previously seen in the biblical wisdom corpus. His engagement with the writings of the Hebrew Bible introduces reflections on and rewritings of historical examples of collective accountability to the wisdom tradition. This trend will carry forward into the Wisdom of Solomon.

## Chapter Six: Collective Accountability in the Wisdom of Solomon

### I. Introduction

The Wisdom of Solomon, a Greek work likely composed in Alexandria in the first century CE,<sup>354</sup> addresses an audience that identifies with the children of Israel.<sup>355</sup> For example, the sage recalls in Wis. 12:21 that God gave “oaths and covenants full of good promises” to his ancestors and to the ancestors of his students. Though separated from these ancestors by centuries, the sage believes his community to be the continued recipient of those promises. Collective thinking underlies the sage’s understanding of himself and his community as well as his understanding of God, whom he believes to have a special relationship with his community (for example, Wis. 12:20-22) because of its ancestry.

This chapter will examine the use of collective accountability in the Wisdom of Solomon. First it will consider the verses related to collective punishment (II) and then those related to collective reward (III). Next, it will consider examples in which the sage rejects collective accountability (IV). Then it will focus on the sage’s positions on human free will and divine determinism so as to determine whether or not the sage holds out any hope for the children of the wicked to reverse the fate brought upon them by their sinful parents (V). This chapter will conclude with a summary of its findings (VI).

### II. Collective Punishment in the Wisdom of Solomon

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<sup>354</sup> David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 20–25. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 178–179.

<sup>355</sup> It should, however, be noted that the sage identifies his audience as rulers, kings, and judges of the earth (Wis. 1:1, 6:1ff).

### Wisdom of Solomon 3:12-19

According to the Wisdom of Solomon, the ungodly suffer punishment for their failings (Wis. 3:10). All their labors are in vain (3:11), and even producing children seems to offer them no benefit because their families are evil and accursed: “Their wives are foolish and their children wicked; cursed are their offspring” (Wis. 3:12). Traditionally, ancient Israelites regarded the father of many children as the recipient of divine favor: “Sons are an inheritance from YHWH, the fruit of the womb a reward” (Ps. 127: 3, cf. v. 5).<sup>356</sup>

Wis. 3:12-13, however, contrasts the fates of the doomed family of the wicked with the incorporeal benefits that await a righteous woman without children: “For blessed is the barren woman who is undefiled, who has not known a bed in trespass; she will have fruit in the examination of the soul” (3:13).<sup>357</sup> The fruit in question here is not offspring but rather virtues, like wisdom, which will benefit the women in the final judgment. The comparison suggests that the sage is addressing a difficult problem for the righteous members of his community, a problem that recurs as a motif in numerous biblical narratives about the mothers of Israel’s great heroes (for example, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Hannah, etc.).<sup>358</sup> Like the concern of other sages for vindicating theodicy, Wis. must address observed reality, which sometimes seems to contradict the notion of justice

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<sup>356</sup> Ernest G Clarke, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1973), 33.

<sup>357</sup> The notion that good deeds can help the righteous individual to bear fruit preferable to children also appears in the rabbinic tradition. *Ibid.*, 33–34. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 132.

<sup>358</sup> Hans Hübner, *Die Weisheit Salomos: Liber Sapientiae Salomonis*, Alte Testament Deutsch Bd. 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 57.

whereby God rewards the righteous with an abundance of children but punishes the wicked with barrenness (cf. Ps. 37:28).<sup>359</sup>

In agreement with Wis., Job's comforters and Ben Sira offer the solution that the children of the wicked suffer and do not prosper on account of their father's wrongdoings (Job 18:15-21; Sir. 15:34-35, 40:15). By contrast, however, the earlier sages assure their audiences that the righteous will be rewarded with numerous and prosperous descendants (Job 5:24-25; Sir. 3:8-9). The Wisdom of Solomon does not guarantee the eventual reward of children to the righteous, but rather assures the barren woman that she need not worry about trying to attain immortality through her lineage because of her eternal soul, which will fare well in the final judgment.<sup>360</sup> Despite the continuity of message with earlier wisdom writings, Wisdom's innovative solution demonstrates development in the wisdom tradition's understanding of death and immortality.

The use of the image of "fruit" recalls the plant imagery so often used to depict how the children of the wicked are cut off (for example, Job 5:3, 15:30-33, 18:16; Sir. 3:9, 23:24-27). Plant imagery resurfaces in 3:15 in connection with the barren woman and the eunuch because they are righteous. The righteous woman incapable of bearing the metaphorical fruit that frequently refers to children, will bear a different kind of metaphorical fruit, namely, virtues like wisdom that will protect her immortal soul from becoming defiled. Likewise, the righteous eunuch who cannot reproduce will also bear

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<sup>359</sup> Lester L. Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon*, Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 49.

<sup>360</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Die Weisheit Salomos: Übersetzt, eingeleitet und durch biblische und ausserbiblische Parallelen erläutert* (Stuttgart: Radius, 2010), 57–58.

“fruit,” even if that fruit does not metaphorically refer to children (Wis. 3:14).<sup>361</sup> The author of Wis. has replaced a successful lineage with an eternal soul as ephemeral humanity’s hope for immortality (for Wisdom’s perspective on immortality, see Wis. 3:4; 8:13, 17; 15:3).<sup>362</sup> Centuries of shifting attitudes and the growth of apocalyptic notions likely contributed to the sage’s ability to draw on an idea rejected by earlier sages, like Qoheleth and Ben Sira (Eccl. 3:18-22; Sir. 40:1-41:13).<sup>363</sup> In addition to this, the author of Wis. has knowledge of Greek notions of the immortal soul, like Plato’s idea of the preexistent soul (cf. Wis. 8:19-20), that do not appear to have been familiar to Ben Sira.<sup>364</sup> Moreover, whereas the sage’s forebears in the biblical wisdom tradition had rejected the notion of an afterlife (for example, Eccl. 9:5), the Wisdom of Solomon criticizes those who illogically reason that life ends when the physical body dies (Wis. 2:1-5).

The Wisdom of Solomon’s forebears did not appeal to notions about the immortality of the soul to vindicate theodicy, although they were likely aware of arguments in favor of divine judgment after death.<sup>365</sup> Eliphaz assures Job that God

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<sup>361</sup> Hübner, *Weisheit Salomos*, 57.

<sup>362</sup> The existence of a shift in the understanding of immortality as something attained by a community to something attained by an individual should be noted, although this fact does not mean that the communal context is no longer relevant to the transcendence of death. John Joseph Collins, “Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (Ja 1974): 30.

<sup>363</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, “Transcending Death: The Reasoning of the ‘Others’ and Afterlife Hopes in Wisdom 1-6,” in *The “Other” in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, ed. Daniel C. Harlow et al. (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 214–215.

<sup>364</sup> Philo offers another Hellenistic Jewish example of the use of Plato’s preexistent soul. Philo, *On the Giants* 6-14. For a fuller discussion of the points of similarity and difference between Wisdom’s soul and that of Plato, see Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 25–32, 198. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition*, 271. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 185. Kaiser, *Die Weisheit Salomos*, 65.

<sup>365</sup> 4Q218 offers the only evidence for belief in eternal life in wisdom literature composed in Hebrew. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 183.

punishes the wicked by cursing their children (Job 5:3-5, cf. 8:22) and blesses the righteous with abundant offspring (Job 5:24-25). Job, however, does not find these traditional arguments convincing. He objects that the wicked are blessed with abundant offspring who live in prosperity and peace (Job 12:6a; 21:7-3). It seems unlikely that Job would have found satisfaction in Wisdom's solution since he rejects the notion of human immortality (Job 14), but Wisdom's new proposal nevertheless demonstrates an attempt to explain why observed reality does not always match the sage's advice.

Wis. 3:12 presents the children of the wicked as wicked themselves.<sup>366</sup> In Wis. 3:13, the barren woman, who will bear fruit in her final judgment, "has not known a bed in trespass." In contrast to the sexual morality of the barren women, vv. 16-19 deal specifically with the children produced through adultery: "But the children of adulterers will not reach maturity, and offspring from an illicit bed will perish. For even if they are long-lived, as nobody they will be counted, and finally in their old age they will be dishonored. If they die quickly, they will not have hope or comfort on the day of judgment. For the end of an unrighteous generation is harsh." The children of adulterers are evil because of the immorality of the act that created them.<sup>367</sup> The children are accused of no other crime, yet they live under a curse. In this case, like begets like (cf. 4 Ezra 9:17) inasmuch as an act of sin produced a sinner. Although the children did not, of

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<sup>366</sup> Hübner, *Weisheit Salomos*, 55. Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 49.

<sup>367</sup> Clarke argues that vv. 17-18 represent an argument in favor of hereditary sin, although he considers this position to be modified by 12:23. I do not find the concept of hereditary sin to be a useful designation since the child could not have participated in the sin. Rather, the child is evidence of the sin. Hereditary guilt could be a preferable term, but this does not appear to be an unambiguous case of hereditary guilt either since the sage's purpose is to console the childless, not to reform the children of adulterers. In other words, the sage uses the child as an example of a punishment that affects the wicked (parents). The child is not punished strictly for the child's own sake, but rather to demonstrate to his wicked parents and to the righteous yet childless individual that sin carries negative consequences, even if at first it appears to provide a blessing (a child) to the sinner. Clarke, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 34.



course, choose to be born to sinners, their fate appears fair to the sage because they are wicked like their parents.

The notion that children produced through an adulterous affair will suffer for their parents' wrongdoing also occurs in Sir. 23:24-27. In both passages, the children of adulterers do not reproduce or leave any persisting legacy. Both sages understand that such illicitly produced children will endure disgrace. In spite of their affirmations that such children will perish, both sages also address the possibility that the adulteress's lineage might not disappear completely or immediately. Ben Sira suggests that any child that does not perish will understand from his dishonor that observance of divine law could have prevented his suffering (Sir. 24:27). In the Wisdom of Solomon, however, the sage does not necessarily distinguish between immediate death and delayed death for the child of adulterers. In either case, the child's end is final and there is no hope for his soul. Whether death comes quickly or not only determines the amount of time spent suffering.

Because the rewards promised to the barren woman and to the eunuch come from God, one is inclined to understand the fate of the children as divinely determined. The text, however, does not make this explicit. Given the passage's context within a discussion of theodicy, it seems probable that the sage understands the fate that befalls the children of adulterers to be a part of divine justice, and thus perceives some divine role, even if indirect, in this example of intergenerational punishment.<sup>368</sup> Very likely the shame suffered by the children of adulterers was observed reality for the sage, and their failure to prosper the natural result of the punishment inflicted upon their parents by the

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

human justice system and societal norms. The observation of natural consequences and the operation of divine causality are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

### **Wisdom of Solomon 4:3-6**

Using plant imagery familiar from both Job and Ben Sira,<sup>369</sup> Wis. 4:3-6 also assures those who witness the wicked producing an abundance of children that this is not evidence of divine blessing:

(3) The fertile abundance of the ungodly will not be profitable, and none of their illegitimate seedlings will produce a root with depth or settle in a safe foundation. (4) For even if he sprouted with branches for a while, standing insecurely, they will be shaken by the wind, and by the violence of the wind they will be uprooted. (5) Their branches will be broken off while still immature, and their fruit will be worthless, not ripe for eating, and useless to everyone. (6) For children begotten through lawless sleep are witnesses of wickedness against their parents in their trial.

The sage metaphorically suggests that no lasting benefit will come to an ungodly person who begets children because they will also suffer ill fates on account of their parents' actions. This position contradicts the popular notion that children are a divine reward. Although they serve no beneficial purpose for their parents, children produced through unlawful sexual relationships will provide them with one crucial disservice; they will serve as evidence against their parents when God judges them (v. 6).<sup>370</sup> As in the references to intergenerational punishment in 3:12-13 and 3:16-19, this passage validates theodicy. So, although God remains unmentioned, the act-consequence system of the divinely created universe is just, according to this sage.

### **Wisdom of Solomon 18:5**

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<sup>369</sup> Outside the wisdom books, Ps. 1:4-5 and Mark 4:3ff (cf. 11:13ff) may represent other instances of plant imagery used to express the notion that wickedness does not bear fruit. *Ibid.*, 36–37.

<sup>370</sup> Armin Schmitt, *Das Buch der Weisheit: Ein Kommentar* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1986), 63.

In Wisdom 18:5, the sage recalls the Pharaoh's plan to annihilate all the male Hebrew babies and the divine punishment of the Egyptians through the Passover: "When they had planned to kill the children of your holy ones, and one child had been exposed and saved, as reproof you took away the multitude of their children, and you destroyed them of one accord with violent water" (cf. Wis. 11:7).<sup>371</sup> The sage readily acknowledges that God punished children for the wrongdoings of their parents, in this case the Egyptians who obeyed Pharaoh's command to throw male Hebrew babies into the Nile (Exod. 1:22). Given the context of the Passover, which freed the Israelites from the yoke of slavery, the sage praises God for punishing innocent children.

However, the sage has a specific motive for this method of punishment in mind, and it does not originate in God's character as intergenerational punishment does elsewhere (i.e. Exod. 34:6-7): "For in the same way by which you punished our enemies, summoning us you glorified us" (Wis. 18:8). God punishes the Egyptians with the death of their children, which was the very offense that they had committed against God and the Israelites.<sup>372</sup> By comparison, the sage also notes that God used animals in the wilderness to punish the wandering Israelites, who themselves had sinned by worshipping animals (Wis. 11:15), "so that they might know that by the things by which one sins he is punished" (Wis. 11:16). In other words, the author of Wisdom has observed that, in accordance with the principle of *lex talionis*, one's punishment resembles one's crime.<sup>373</sup> Prov. 17:13 recognizes this same principle in the act-consequence model that governs the

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>372</sup> Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 314.

<sup>373</sup> Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?," 59–60. Clarke, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 73.

universe: “As for the one returning evil for good, evil will not depart from his house” (cf. Josh. 7:25).<sup>374</sup> Rather than understanding the punishment of children to reflect God’s character as revealed in Exodus 34:6-7, the sage attributes this form of punishment to his understanding of divine retribution as taking on the form of the sin being punished.

Whereas Proverbs 17:13 relies upon vague language to describe the act-consequence model that causes a sinner to suffer in a manner similar to the suffering he inflicted on others, Wis. appeals to an historical example. Although Ben Sira also made use of historical examples, Wisdom’s use of them is not entirely parallel. Whereas Ben Sira often transforms historical examples of collective accountability into cases of individual punishment, Wis. 18:5 refers to a prominent historical example of divine punishment of children for the sins of their parents. Interestingly, the punished children and their parents are Egyptians and do not have a covenantal relationship with God.<sup>375</sup>

### **Wisdom of Solomon 18:20**

The sage contrasts the plague of the firstborn sons of Egypt with a plague that threatened the Israelites in the desert following Korah’s rebellion (Numb. 16:46). As Wis. recounts the story, it notes the intragenerational nature of the punishment: “The experience of death touched the righteous also, and a plague came upon the multitude in the desert, but the wrath did not stay long” (Wis. 18:20). The narrative in Numbers 16 suggests that the entire Israelite congregation participated in the rebellion against Aaron and Moses that caused YHWH to punish the community with a plague (Numb. 16:41). Despite the appearance that all of the Israelites are guilty, the sage suggests that some of

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<sup>374</sup> Note, however, that Proverbs 17:13 envisions the punishment as more severe than the crime since it involves not only the sinner, but also his household.

<sup>375</sup> Moyna McGlynn, *Divine Judgement and Divine Benevolence in the Book of Wisdom*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 139 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 207.

those afflicted by the plague were righteous, or, in other words, innocent sufferers being punished for the actions of a subset of their group. Wis. appears to revise history ever so slightly to suggest that God exercised intragenerational punishment in an historical event that otherwise appears to have involved individual punishment, albeit of an entire community.

This example of intragenerational punishment asserts more strongly than the example of intragenerational punishment found in Sir. 22:13 (“Do not multiply words with a fool and do not go to the one without understanding. Guard yourself from him lest you have trouble, and do not be defiled when he shakes himself off. Turn away from him and you will find rest and you will not be grieved by his madness”)<sup>376</sup> the notion of collective punishment as contagious wrath that spreads beyond the boundaries of the wicked to affect those near them. In contrast to Sir. 22:13, the sage here seems to see this not as a natural consequence of human actions but rather as a consequence of divine wrath. The divergence may owe to the fact that Wis. is dependent upon an historical narrative for its example of intragenerational punishment, whereas Sir. 22:13 draws not upon history, but rather personal experience.

### **III. Collective Reward in the Wisdom of Solomon**

#### **Wisdom of Solomon 18:21-25**

In the last example of collective punishment examined above (Wis. 18:20), the sage recalls an episode from Israel’s journey through the wilderness. The divine wrath

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<sup>376</sup> This verse is not extant in Hebrew. See Chapter 5 for a full discussion of it.

that produced this intragenerational punishment does not last long, according to the sage, because of human intercession:

(21) For a blameless man hastened to serve as a champion; he brought the shield of his ministry, prayer and propitiation by incense; he opposed the anger and put an end to the calamity, showing that he was your servant. (22) He conquered the wrath not by strength of body, not by action of weapons, but by his word he subdued the punisher, by reminding him of the oaths and covenants given to our ancestors. (23) For as the dead had already fallen on one another in heaps, he meanwhile stood and drove back the wrath, and cut off its way to the living. (24) For on his long robe was the whole world, and the glories of the fathers were on four rows of carved stones, and your majesty was on the crown on his head. (25) From these the destroyer withdrew; these he feared; for a test only of wrath was sufficient. (Wis. 18:21-25)

The reference, of course, is to Aaron's cultic efforts to stop the plague in Numbers 16.<sup>377</sup> In its original context following Korah's rebellion, in which several Israelites challenge Moses and Aaron's control of divine communications, the episode proves that God has chosen Aaron and his descendants to control the cult. In describing Aaron as "blameless" (Wis. 18:21), the sage ignores the priest's role in the Golden Calf incident, his most egregious sin among other shortcomings.<sup>378</sup> The effect of this effort to sweep Aaron's sins under the rug is that the priest's righteousness, rather than simply his cultic actions or chosenness, becomes a factor in his ability to turn back God's wrath. This would seem to suggest that the sage understands Aaron's intercession as a form of intragenerational reward in which the deeds of the righteous result in mercy for sinners.

In v. 22, the sage explicitly credits Aaron's words, a reminder about God's covenants with the ancestors, with stopping the spread of divine wrath. This version of

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<sup>377</sup> Udo Schwenk-Bressler, *Sapientia Salomonis als ein Beispiel frühjüdischer Textauslegung: die Auslegung des Buches Genesis, Exodus 1-15 und Teilen der Wüstentradiation in Sap 10-19* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1993), 283.

<sup>378</sup> The characterization of ancient Israel's first high priest, Aaron, as blameless may owe to his role in the Day of Atonement. McGlynn, *Divine Judgement and Divine Benevolence in the Book of Wisdom*, 210.

events does not agree with the depiction of Aaron's intercession in Numbers 16. The biblical account mentions Aaron's manipulating incense, making atonement, and standing between the dead and the living (Numb. 16:47-48). The narrator mentions no speech at all by Aaron, let alone a specific invocation of a divine covenant with his ancestors. Why, then, does Wis. offer this explanation for Aaron's successful termination of the plague?

The story of Aaron's intercession in the Pentateuch is the culmination of a succession of intercession stories that involve Moses and/or Aaron. In Exodus 32-34, Aaron leads the Israelites into sin by creating a golden calf for the people to worship, and this provokes YHWH's anger so that he plans to destroy the Israelites and to create a new nation from Moses alone. Moses intercedes by appealing to YHWH's reputation among the nations and promises to the Israelites' forefathers (Exod. 32:12-13). During this episode, the Levites earn for themselves a special place in the service of YHWH (32:29).

A rebellion against Moses in Numbers 14 results in another divine attempt to destroy the Israelites and to create a new nation with Moses. Moses again offers an intercessory prayer. Moses points out the negative effect that such a plan would have on YHWH's honor among the nations (Numb. 14:11ff), and YHWH relents from his plan.

Following the presentation of legal materials designed to prevent innocent communities from suffering the effects of contagious divine wrath provoked by an individual's unintentional sin (Numbers 15), the next opportunity for YHWH to resolve to destroy all Israel occurs in Numbers 16 when several Israelites lead a group in protesting against Moses and Aaron's leadership. Their complaint is that since all Israelites are holy, then they should all have equal access to divine interaction, especially

those interactions achieved through cultic means. The rebels challenge Aaron and Moses to a cultic contest; when the rebels lose and Moses and Aaron are vindicated, YHWH resolves to destroy the entire population except Moses and Aaron (Numb. 16:20-21). Moses and Aaron intercede: “They fell on their faces and said, “O God, the God the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin and you become angry with the whole congregation?” (Numb. 16:22). YHWH responds positively to their request not to exercise collective punishment (Numb. 16:32-33).<sup>379</sup>

The final intercession in this series (Numb. 16:41) is the one to which Wis. 18:21-25 alludes. Even though the punishment of Korah and his associates was intended to confirm Aaron and his descendants as the divinely sanctioned protectorates of the cult (Numb. 14:40), this final rebellion prompts YHWH to make Aaron’s chosen status unmistakably clear by causing Aaron’s staff to sprout (Numb. 17:1-10). The Israelites, roused to rebellion by Korah and his companions’ complaint that all Israelites are holy and should have cultic access, finally acknowledge the danger of the cult (Numb. 17:12-13). When YHWH charges Aaron with the priesthood, he suggests that Aaron’s and his descendants’ role is to prevent the innocent from suffering the effects of contagious divine wrath: ““You yourselves will perform the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, so that wrath will not again come upon the sons of Israel”” (Numb. 18:5). Although the priesthood certainly brings advantages, Aaron commits to endangering his life and the lives of his descendants so that they can offer cultic intercession for the

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<sup>379</sup> The executed punishment is not entirely individual. Numb. 16:32-33 notes that the earth also swallowed the families of the sinners. However, Numb. 26:11 suggests that, at least in the case of Korah, the children were not punished.



Israelites and prevent intragenerational punishment by appeasing divine wrath before it breaks out upon the innocent.

Although one may question whether Aaron is to be understood as a prophet or a priest and whether his intercession is prophetic or cultic,<sup>380</sup> the similarities among all these stories suggest that it is appropriate to consider the connection between intercession, prophetic or otherwise, and collective accountability. Abraham expresses very concisely the interceding prophet's expectation about collective accountability when he bargains with YHWH to spare Sodom and Gomorrah: "Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you indeed sweep away the place and not forgive it for the sake of fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do this thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked! Far be it from you for the righteous to fare like the wicked! Will not the judge of all the earth do justice?" (Gen. 18:24-25). Justice, in the mind of the intercessor, is not individual accountability. Justice is not merely the absence of collective punishment. Justice, Abraham argues, is collective reward. He expects YHWH to spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous.

In his article, "Who Will Stand in the Breach? A Study of Prophetic Intercession," Muffs argues that willingness to stand between YHWH's wrath and the Israelites distinguishes a true prophet from a false one.<sup>381</sup> Because YHWH shares his plans to destroy the people with his prophets prior to annihilating them, ancient

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<sup>380</sup> Schwenk-Bressler notes that Aaron's intercession extends beyond his priestly function and mimics the prophetic role usually played by Moses. This functions to highlight Aaron's great power and service to YHWH as similar to Moses'. Both prophet and priest can perform an intercession with equal success. Schwenk-Bressler, *Sapientia Salmonis*, 285.

<sup>381</sup> Muffs, "Who Will Stand?," 31. Cf. Blenkinsopp, "Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom," 131.

interpreters understood that he sought a prophet who would stand up for the Israelites.<sup>382</sup> In the book of Ezekiel, YHWH describes searching in vain “for anyone among them [the Israelites] who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezek. 22:30).<sup>383</sup> With no one to intercede, he resolves to allow his wrath to consume the people (v. 31). In a case of extreme divine wrath, YHWH asks Jeremiah not to intercede for the Israelites (Jer. 7:16, 14:11-12), even though the prophet persists. Jeremiah, although presumably an innocent individual, identifies with the people and their sins in an effort to turn back YHWH’s anger (Jer. 14:7).<sup>384</sup> Psalm 106 recalls the Exodus and offers an explanation for how Moses averted YHWH’s wrath after the Golden Calf: “Therefore he swore to destroy them except that Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to turn away his wrath from destroying” (Ps. 106:23).

Kaminsky has observed that conceptions of contagious divine wrath underlie the understanding of collective accountability in the Deuteronomistic History,<sup>385</sup> and this may also be true for the author of Wisdom (Wis. 18:21-25). Human actions provoke divine anger, which results in negative consequences even for people who played no role in producing God’s rage. Because YHWH does not desire to destroy his people, he raises up a prophet who can intercede for the people on the brink of destruction, and through collective reward, this prophet can prevent the impending doom.

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<sup>382</sup> Note Amos 7:2, 5: “Who will stand (for) Jacob? He is so small!” In rabbinic tradition, God cries when Moses dies because he has lost a true prophet willing to oppose his wrath. Muffs, “Who Will Stand?,” 32–35.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>385</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 65.

In cases of prophetic intercession, the actions of the individual save the group. The biblical accounts do not make clear if the mechanism that successfully achieves a collective pardon for sinners is the prophet's innocence, the logic of his argument, his prostration, or his use of a specific prayer. Perhaps it may be the very act of a guilt-free individual jeopardizing his own safety to protect his people from destruction. Wisdom, then, attempts to clarify the mechanism through which an individual intercessor saves an entire group. Wisdom's portrayal of Aaron's intercession in Numbers 16 seems to understand that one individual's intercession results in an unmerited reward for the entire group. A false prophet, especially the kind that offers only hopeful messages, may fail to see the breach or may see it but refuse to stand in it as Moses does so successfully.<sup>386</sup> This notion of false prophecy suggests that the false prophet's refusal to stand in the breach perhaps owes to the fact that he must risk his own life by throwing his lot in with the doomed people that he is trying to save. Moses repeatedly refuses YHWH's offers to make a great and mighty nation through him alone. Moses' life and lineage are already secure without sacrificing his own glory to preserve the lives and lineages of his people. Likewise, Wisdom 18:21-25 remembers Aaron jeopardizing his own life in order to place himself between YHWH's contagious rage and the Israelites. His intercession enables the lives of those who rebelled to continue.

### **Wisdom of Solomon 12:20-22**

Although it is certainly not overt, Wis. 12:20-22 may hint at the notion that the sage considers the Israelites to be the beneficiaries of collective reward:

(20) For if you punished the enemies of your children and those destined for death with such great attention and deliberation and gave them time and

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<sup>386</sup> Muffs, "Who Will Stand?," 35.

opportunity so that they might put away their wickedness, (21) then with how much strictness you have judged your own sons, to whose forefathers you gave oaths and covenants of good promises! (22) Though we have been disciplined, you whip our enemies ten thousand times more, so that when we judge, we can reflect on your goodness, and when we are judged, we may expect mercy.

Israel's enemies receive God's justice, although he spreads out his punishment so as to provide them with the possibility of saving themselves through repentance and reform. This delay in punishment to Israel's enemies is a form of mercy, although the sinful nature of these people cannot prevent the inevitable fate of an unrepentant sinner. Likewise, the sage views the punishment experienced by Israel as a form of mercy even greater than the mercy shown to her enemies.<sup>387</sup> God judges his people strictly (v. 21), yet the sage asserts that Israel can expect mercy (v. 22). The only intervening observation between the claim that God judges Israel strictly, which would normally seem to preclude mercy, and the claim that Israel can expect mercy is the recollection of promises made to Israel's ancestors (v. 21). The divine remembrance of these promises as an act of intergenerational reward is not explicit, but it is reminiscent of the discussion of David and Solomon in Ben Sira's Praise of the Ancestors. In Sir. 47:12, the sage notes that Solomon lives in security because of the merit of his father, David, with whom God formed a covenant (v. 11). Although Solomon's sins deserve punishment, God has mercy upon his lineage for the sake of covenants formed with his ancestors:

But the Lord will not forsake his mercy, and he will not destroy any of his words, and he will not wipe out his chosen offspring, and the seed of one loving him he will not remove. To Jacob he gave a remnant and to David one of his own root. And Solomon rested with his fathers, and he left after him one of his seed, foolish and lacking in understanding, Rehoboam, who removed the people from his counsel. (Sir. 47:22)

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<sup>387</sup> Schwenk-Bressler, *Sapientia Salmonis*, 165.

Both passages speak of mercy and loyalty to promises made to Israel's forefathers. It seems possible that the sage who produced Wis. 12:20-22 understood the divine mercy bestowed upon Israel to be the result of intergenerational reward earned through the merits of the ancestors.

#### **IV. Rejection of Collective Accountability in the Wisdom of Solomon**

##### **Wisdom of Solomon 10:6-8**

Given the previous discussion of the role of collective accountability involved in prophetic intercession, it is now appropriate to consider Wisdom's presentation of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In contrast to the examples of intercession in which Moses and Aaron attempt to save their own people, Abraham intercedes for a population of non-Israelites in Gen. 18:16ff. Residing among those Israelites is Abraham's nephew, Lot. Although Abraham argues and YHWH agrees that he should spare the wicked inhabitants for the sake of ten righteous individuals, his divine messengers cannot fill this quota and so the plan to destroy the cities proceeds. According to the biblical account, YHWH spares Lot—who repeatedly demonstrates foolish behavior—because he “remembered Abraham” (Gen. 19:29). The recounting of Lot's survival plays out differently in Wisdom of Solomon 10:6-8.<sup>388</sup>

(6) As the ungodly were perishing, it [wisdom] delivered a righteous man, fleeing the fire descending on the Five Cities, (7) which are still a witness to the wickedness: a continually smoking wasteland, plants bringing forth fruit that does not ripen, a pillar of salt standing as a monument to the unbelieving soul. (8) For wisdom passing by them, not only were they hindered from knowing the good, but also it left behind for humankind a memorial of its foolishness, so that their failings could not be forgotten.

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 74.

Although Lot behaves foolishly in the Genesis account (Gen. 19:16, 19, 33), the sage of Wisdom of Solomon credits Wisdom with being his salvation. Instead of being the recipient of divine favor for the sake of another righteous man, the sage describes Lot as being righteous himself in contrast to his neighbors.<sup>389</sup> In other words, the story is no longer a tale of a prophet pleading for collective reward for a city of sinners and having to settle for the collective reward of only those family members who were at least wise enough to heed the divine instruction to flee the city; rather the sage transforms<sup>390</sup> it into a case of individual accountability in which the wicked reap just punishment and the righteous escapes through the exercise of wisdom.

Ben Sira also points out that YHWH did not show mercy to Sodom and Gomorrah as Abraham had wanted (Sir. 16:8), but he does not go so far as the Wisdom of Solomon to assert that Lot is blameless or guided by wisdom. It is possible that the depiction of Lot as righteous owes to the sage's need for examples of righteous individuals to fit his schema. The sage does not attribute Lot's salvation to God as both the Genesis account and Ben Sira do. Rather, the operation of wisdom in the world saves Lot from the fate of his neighbors (Wis. 10:6).<sup>391</sup>

### **Wisdom 16:5-9**

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> It is possible that, rather than actually transforming the biblical tradition, the sage is drawing upon other traditions about Sodom and Gomorrah that are unknown to modern scholars. The fact that the sage's Pentapolis may include Zoar, a city spared in the Genesis account, may point toward this conclusion. At the very least, the sage appears to be drawing upon details of Sodom and Gomorrah known not from Gen. 18-19, but rather from other biblical allusions to the cities (Deut. 29:22). Ibid., 74–75.

<sup>391</sup> John Joseph Collins, "Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age," *History of Religions* 17, no. 2 (1977): 127.

Wis. 16:5-14, which recounts the episode in Num. 21:4-9 in which God punishes the complaining Israelites with poisonous snakes, contrasts with the depiction of prophetic intercession in Wis. 18:21-25, which credits the righteous Aaron with saving the Israelites. In Numbers 21, the people repent and ask Moses to intercede (Numb. 21:7). YHWH then instructs Moses to make a bronze serpent to cure the people (v. 8). In Wisdom's interpretation of this instance of prophetic intercession, the sage avoids mentioning Moses' role. Although he recognizes that God's "wrath did not last until the end" (Wis. 16:5), the sage credits not Moses but rather God's mercy with rescuing the people (v. 10). In this manner, the salvation of the community is achieved through God's grace, not his merciful sparing of a group for the sake of one of its members. The absence of Moses and his intercessory efforts from Wisdom's account of this wilderness episode appears deliberate. So, although any comment on collective accountability in the passage would certainly be subtle, the replacement of collective salvation through the actions of an intercessor with direct divine healing may suggest some discomfort with the presence of collective accountability in this narrative.

In describing the salvation of the people in this episode, the sage elaborates on the mechanism of healing in v. 12: "For neither herb nor medicine healed them, but it was your word, O Lord, healing all." YHWH's only speech in the Numbers narrative is his instruction for Moses to create a serpent to heal those afflicted with venom. While this speech may be the words to which the sage refers, he omits Moses' role in executing the divine command, which is necessary for YHWH's words to be effective in ending the outbreak of his wrath. The sage emphasizes divine sanction in this story because it bears a resemblance to the creation and worship of idols, the very topic that leads him to

discuss this historical allusion. However, given the continuous interplay between wrath/punishment (vv. 5, 9, 13) and mercy/kindness (vv. 5, 7, 10, 11, 12), it is possible that the saving words envisioned by the sage are those that YHWH himself revealed to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7 and that Moses later reuses in Num. 14:18 to ask for mercy.

### **Wisdom of Solomon 12:10-11**

Another example of the sage transforming an historical example of collective accountability into something else occurs in Wis. 12:3-18, a reflection on the fate of the Canaanites and theodicy.<sup>392</sup> Confronted with the biblical depiction of the Canaanites as an abominable people that the Israelites could not successfully uproot from the land with a single swift military campaign despite having divine help on their side, the sage explains how the Canaanites' continued presence in the land results from God's mercy rather than from his inability to help the Israelites eradicate them:

(10) But judging them in small increments, you provided an opportunity for repentance, though you were not unaware that their origin was evil and their wickedness inborn, and that their reasoning would never change.  
(11) For they were an accursed seed from the beginning, and it was not out of reverence for anyone that you left them unpunished for their sins. (Wis. 12:10-11)

According to the sage, God exercises delayed punishment for a lineage that is innately wicked. The sage is concerned with defending theodicy; against the charge that God unjustly annihilated the Canaanites (vv. 12-15), Wis. 12:10 makes clear that they were free to repent and that the opportunity for repentance came at God's expense. God bears iniquities that are not punished immediately; this is characteristic of his mercy according to Exod. 34:6-7.

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<sup>392</sup> Schwenk-Bressler suggests that this passage serves the pedagogical purpose of demonstrating the educational intention behind divine punishment. For Schwenk-Bressler, pedagogy and theodicy need not be mutually exclusive. Schwenk-Bressler, *Sapientia Salmonis*, 159, 162–163.



In response to the suggestion that the utter destruction God commanded for the Canaanites is unjust, the sage implies that the total annihilation of the population is justified because every last Canaanite, even the young children, was individually guilty. The sage appeals to their inborn nature to explain how he knows that every Canaanite was deserving of punishment (v. 10). Ben Sira similarly depicts the Canaanites as having been evil from creation (Sir. 33:10-12).<sup>393</sup> Both sages diverge from the biblical depiction of the Canaanites inheriting their inferiority from the punishment of their eponymous ancestor, Canaan, for a sin committed by his father, Ham (Gen. 9:22-27).<sup>394</sup> The biblical depiction explains the status of the Canaanites as an intergenerational punishment for human sin. The author of the Wisdom of Solomon explains it as a feature of creation. This explanation seems to be a response to claims that God's punishment of total annihilation was unjust (see Wis. 12:12ff). By building their evil nature into creation, God's justice is vindicated, unless, of course one questions why he would have created an innately wicked people. God, who the sage claims is merciful to all (Wis. 11:23), also loves all of his creations and would not have made anything that he hated (v. 24). The sage's logic does not hold up to scrutiny since God appears to hate the Canaanites from the beginning of their creation, but this explains the sage's need to exculpate God by demonstrating that he held out mercy to the Canaanites even if they were too morally corrupt to take advantage of it (Wis. 12:10-11).

Because the logic is not at all convincing, one must question whether the sage really intends to overturn the biblical depiction of the Canaanite's status as a punishment

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<sup>393</sup> For Ben Sira's allusion to the Canaanites in Sir. 33:10-12, see Chapter 5.

<sup>394</sup> It is possible that the language of cursing in Wis. 12:11 refers to the Genesis account of Noah's cursing of Canaan. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 241.

that resulted from human sin rather than as a feature of the divine plan. The cursing of Canaan in Gen. 9 represents an etiology that attempts to explain the inferior status of all present-day Canaanites. Wis. 12:3-18 agrees with the biblical author in its assessment that all Canaanites, by nature of their peoplehood or descent from the eponymous ancestor Canaan, are innately evil and hated by God. The sage of Wisdom uses a different explanation, one perhaps more palatable to an audience that might question the justice of punishing children for the sins of their fathers, for how it came to be that all Canaanites deserved the wrath of God, but his main purpose is the same as that of the author of Genesis 9. All Canaanites are inferior to Israelites and deserve their ultimate fate.

#### **V. The Role of Wisdom Instruction for the Righteous and the Wicked in the Wisdom of Solomon**

Like every wisdom book considered so far, the Wisdom of Solomon presents a conflicting picture of the roles of free will and divine determinism in the world. Although several verses suggest that the student who desires wisdom can attain it through discipline and instruction (Wis. 6:14-15, 6:17, 8:18), other passages acknowledge that Wisdom chooses her students (6:16). Even the sage, who represents himself as Solomon and recognizes that he was endowed at his creation with natural gifts and goodness (Wis. 8:19-20), understands that he owes his attainment of wisdom to divine grace (Wis. 8:21; cf. 9:6).

The case of the Canaanites captures this enigma. Although God gives them the opportunity to repent and find mercy, he also created them innately evil so that they are not able to take advantage of this opportunity (Wis. 12:10-11; cf., e.g., the case of God

hardening Pharaoh's heart in the plague narrative in Exodus and the associated question of Pharaoh's culpability).<sup>395</sup> The opportunity exists not for the sake of the Canaanites, but only in order to validate theodicy to those whom God does not hate. As long as one does not consider the perspective of the Canaanites, who were condemned to their fate without the choice or opportunity to change it yet who also no longer exist and likely would not be concerned with the theodicy of Israel's God if they did, no contradiction between determinism and human free will exists.

The Wisdom of Solomon has many points of contact with the thinking of Greek philosophical traditions, like Platonism and Stoicism.<sup>396</sup> Although it has been suggested that Wisdom's use of Hellenistic philosophy reflects only a superficial understanding of the various schools,<sup>397</sup> it appears more likely that the sage was familiar with the world of Middle Platonism, a philosophical tradition that combined Stoic and Platonic concepts in order to make better sense of Plato.<sup>398</sup> Nevertheless, the book still represents wisdom literature and not a philosophical treatise because "it does not pursue its (philosophical) analyses in a rigorous or sustained way."<sup>399</sup> Although the modern reader of the Wisdom of Solomon finds the coexistence of divine determinism with human free will to be

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<sup>395</sup> Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 62.

<sup>396</sup> For a brief overview of the manner in which Wisdom of Solomon draws upon Hellenistic philosophy, see Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 229–232.

<sup>397</sup> C. Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la sagesse*, Études Bibliques (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre; J. Gabalda, 1969), 235–236.

<sup>398</sup> Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 33–34. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 200–201.

<sup>399</sup> Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 223.

illogical, the ancient reader did not seem to object to it.<sup>400</sup> The sage can affirm that humans have absolute free will because from the human perspective, they do. From the divine perspective, of course, human free will is only relative. Humans believe that they act freely, and this is part of the divine plan, but God ultimately controls the fates of humans. Divine determinism and human free will only come into conflict when humans attempt to have insight into the divine perspective, which, by the very nature of the gulf between God and humans, they cannot, of course, successfully apprehend in its entirety.<sup>401</sup> As long as humans believe in the power of choosing good over evil and trust in the goodness of the divine plan, free will and determinism can coexist.

## **VI. Summary of Findings in the Wisdom of Solomon**

Collective accountability in the Wisdom of Solomon has both continuities and discontinuities with collective accountability in other wisdom books. Like other sages, the author of Wisdom uses collective accountability to vindicate divine justice and is generally unconcerned with the perspective of the suffering children, whom the sage seems to regard as being wicked themselves (Wis. 4:3-6). In some historical cases (e.g., Wis. 18:5), God's role in exercising collective accountability is explicit, but in other instances of collective accountability (e.g., Wis. 4:3-6) it is only implicit. The sins that merit collective punishment range from quite specific, like adultery, to somewhat vague,

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<sup>400</sup> Grabbe argues that the sage "did not comprehend the problems created by his various statements" about divine determinism and human free will." Grabbe, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 63. Such a position is convenient and offers a straightforward explanation for the data, but it would seem to shortchange the author's attempt to merge Jewish wisdom with the Greek philosophical tradition. The sage studied the philosophies of two different cultures, so it would be surprising if he did not notice or could not understand that his positions on divine determinism and human free appear contradictory.

<sup>401</sup> Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 57–58.

like being ungodly. For the children of the wicked, their punishment is general. They will be cut off, a fate often depicted with plant imagery. The focus of the punishment is not so much on what specifically the children will endure but what their parents will suffer. Their souls will not enjoy the immortality that the sage associates with the uncorrupted righteous soul. Both through the loss of the immortality of a righteous soul and through the loss of their progeny, the wicked's hope for immortality is crushed. The acceptance of the notion of an immortal soul and judgment after death marks a remarkable departure from earlier wisdom literature.

Observations about punishment are not generally based on revelation (like Exod. 34:6-7) but rather on the structure of the universe.<sup>402</sup> The sinner is punished with the very thing by which he sinned. Only in historical examples does intragenerational punishment appear to be embraced not as a natural consequence of human action but rather by the contagious nature of divine wrath (Wis. 18:20). This contrasts with Ben Sira's example of intragenerational punishment in which the logical consequences of associating with the wrong crowd are to bring judgment upon oneself as well.

In Wisdom's depiction of collective reward, an intercessor, Aaron, prevents God's wrath from destroying his people (Wis. 18:21-25). The author describes Aaron as righteous, which may suggest that an individual's righteousness can bring a reward (or lack of punishment) upon a group of sinners.

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<sup>402</sup> This statement is true inasmuch as Exodus 34:6-7 offers a revelation of the divine nature. The sage's observations of the act-consequence model at times are rooted in his understanding of the divine nature, but this understanding is not always based upon biblical revelation. At times it aligns with the Platonic teachings. The sage's discussion of punishment and mercy in Wis. 12:1-10 may reflect an effort to combine notions of the merciful divine nature known from Exod. 34:6-7 with principles known from Hellenistic philosophy. McGlynn, *Divine Judgement and Divine Benevolence in the Book of Wisdom*, 42-43.

Like other sages,<sup>403</sup> the author of Wisdom does not clearly favor either determinism or free will, but uses both to explain his understanding of the world. In Wis. 4:3-6, the sage seems to regard the children and wife of the wicked as also being wicked. This alleviates one moral concern by making clear that the children are not unjustly punished. The availability of YHWH's mercy and his tendency to judge slowly (Wis. 12:10-11) perhaps also helps to justify their punishment because it is clear that they have had opportunity to repent, even if they are innately incapable of repentance and righteousness. As his perspective is not that of the child or wife, the sage's main purpose is not to highlight the moral problems that intergenerational punishment creates.

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<sup>403</sup> See Section IV of Chapter 2, Section V of Chapter 3, Section III of Chapter 4, and Section IV of Chapter 5.

## Chapter Seven: Collective Accountability, Wisdom Sayings, and the Divine Attribute Formula

### I. Introduction

Any study of collective accountability in the Hebrew Bible as a whole would necessarily consider two prominent sayings about the topic: Exodus 34:6-7 (or its reiterations) and the sour grapes proverb cited in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 18. This chapter will examine these two formulaic sayings, each of which has proposed origins in the realm of wisdom, about intergenerational accountability and their connections to the wisdom tradition. It will explore the nature of the relationship between the credo of Exodus 34:6-7 and wisdom literature, on the one hand, and between the proverb cited by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the wisdom tradition, on the other.

Exodus 34:6-7 constitutes a formulaic expression in which YHWH describes himself as visiting the sins of the father upon the sons; it is reiterated in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:9-10).<sup>404</sup> Although this passage is quoted in various ways in many places in the Bible,<sup>405</sup> none of the wisdom books quotes it directly. Nevertheless, some scholars have posited a connection between Exodus 34:6-7 and the wisdom tradition because of overlapping language and shared values.<sup>406</sup> Is this formula a product of the wisdom tradition? What role, if any, did the worldview of Israelite wisdom literature play in the creation and likely liturgical use of this formula describing YHWH as a deity

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<sup>404</sup> See note below for the sequencing and dependence of these passages on Exod. 34:6-7 or traditions similar to it.

<sup>405</sup> Exod. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:9-10, 7:9-10; Numb. 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:2-3; Mic. 7:18-20; Jer. 32:18; Neh. 9:17; 2 Chron. 30:9; Ps. 25:10, 78:38, 86:5, 103:8-10, 111:4, 112:4.

<sup>406</sup> Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," 48.

who executes collective punishment and reward?

Jeremiah and Ezekiel both use a form of traditional wisdom literature, namely a proverb, to overturn the previously dominant notion that God is punishing the generation of the Babylonian exile for its ancestors' sins. Ezekiel 18 delivers an oracle on the issue of collective responsibility that first challenges the theological concept and then provides examples of a righteous parent producing an unrighteous child who in turn begets a righteous child. For Ezekiel, one's own nature can differ from that of his parent or child, and so the individual is not accountable for the sins of another. Jeremiah employs the same proverb in an extended consolation that promises the restoration of the people Israel in their homeland (Jer. 31:29). Whereas Ezekiel speaks of people ceasing to repeat the proverb in the present tense, Jeremiah suggests that it will occur in the near future (Jer. 31:27, 29). The Jeremiah text then focuses on the future creation of a new covenant between God and Israel, one that differs from the one God created with their ancestors, whose sins the current generation blames for their punishment.

Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah refer to what appears to be a traditional wisdom proverb in order to refute the doctrine of collective accountability: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2, Jer. 31:29). What is the relationship between this proverb and Israel's wisdom literature? Do Ezekiel and Jeremiah use this proverb, a product of human wisdom, in order to avoid contradicting a more sacred text (*i.e.*, Exod. 34:6-7 or the Decalogue),<sup>407</sup> or does their use of the proverb reflect an underlying connection between the concept of collective responsibility and traditional wisdom? If this proverb did originate in wisdom circles,

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<sup>407</sup> Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel*, 87.



does the wisdom tradition reject the notion expressed in the proverb, just as these two prophets do?

This chapter will first review the use of Exodus 34:6-7 in the Hebrew Bible in order to demonstrate how it is reused, recycled, and transformed to suit the needs of later communities grappling to understand divine justice and mercy (II.a.). This discussion will provide a framework through which can be understood the recurrence of the language and themes from Exodus 34:6-7 in Israel's wisdom books. After considering how Israel's wisdom literature interacts with and incorporates the language and themes of a popular liturgical formula about intergenerational punishment found in non-wisdom biblical literature (II.b.), this chapter will then focus on the use of a wisdom saying, namely a proverb about intergenerational punishment in the Hebrew Bible (Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 18), to engage with the notion of intergenerational punishment (III). In other words, the two main halves of this chapter, the discussion of Exodus 34:6-7, on the one hand, and Jeremiah 31:29 and Ezekiel 18, on the other, are complementary. The first half, the discussion of Exodus 34:6-7, focuses on the use of a formulaic statement about intergenerational punishment known from outside Israel's wisdom literature in Israel's wisdom literature. The second half, the discussion of Jeremiah 31:29 and Ezekiel 18, focuses on the use of a literary form borrowed from the realm of wisdom, the proverb, in non-wisdom literature to engage with the concept of intergenerational punishment. The chapter will conclude with a summary of its findings (IV).

## **II.a. The Reuse of Exodus 34:6-7 in the Biblical Tradition (Excluding Wisdom Literature)**

What is the relationship between the notion of YHWH's mercy and justice as expressed in Exodus 34:6-7 and the wisdom literature? Based on a study of the frequency of terminology familiar from Exodus 34:6-7 in other corpora of the Hebrew Bible, Dentan has concluded that the same sages responsible for producing Israel's wisdom literature also produced the description of YHWH in Exodus 34:6-7:

The literary affinities with the Wisdom literature are so definite that one can assert with confidence that the entire formula is a product of the School of the Wise Men. Once this conclusion has been tentatively drawn on the basis of vocabulary and style, a renewed examination of form and content can only confirm the judgment. As already noted, the passage stands out from its context and from most of the theological formularies of the OT by its 'proposition' nature. It is not kerygmatic, but descriptive; it is concerned not with God's acts, but with His character. There is no mention of Israel; the spirit is universalistic; the concern is not with Israelite man, but with man as such. God's basic attributes are love, patience, graciousness, willingness to forgive—qualities particularly esteemed by the Wise Men; there is nothing here of the militant, jealous and holy deity of early Hebrew religion. Yahweh's concern for ethical conduct is indubitable, but even this is stated in negative, almost diffident terms: 'He will not leave (the guilty) unpunished'. The inescapable fact that children commonly suffer for the failings of their parents is adduced (somewhat harshly, to later taste) as evidence that sin does not flourish unrequited. In the entire formula, the only trace of the conception of Yahweh as the stern judge is to be found in the statement that he 'visits iniquity', and it is significant that this is the one point at which the formula is dependent upon the prophetic literature.<sup>408</sup>

Dentan is certainly correct to observe affinities between the language of Exodus 34:6-7 and the clustering of its terminology in several wisdom books.<sup>409</sup> However, no evidence

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<sup>408</sup> Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," 48–49.

<sup>409</sup> Dentan breaks down Exodus 34:6-7 into its component parts and looks for the occurrence of these parts in other biblical corpora. He frequently excludes from his analysis their occurrences in certain texts on the basis of usage or literary dependence on Exod. 34:6-7. While I cannot agree with every instance in which he excludes the occurrence of Exod. 34:6-7 terminology from consideration, I present here a sampling of the evidence that he provides for the literary affinities between Exod. 34:6-7 and the wisdom books: The root *h-n-n* occurs in Prov. 14:21, 14:31, 19:17, 28:8. The expression *'erek 'appayim* occurs only in Exod. 34:6-7, passages dependent on it, and Prov. 14:29, 15:18; 16:32; cf. Eccl. 7:8. The phrase *hesed we<sup>c</sup>met* occurs in Prov. 3:3, 14:22, 16:6, and 20:28. Thirty of the 61 biblical occurrences of *nōšēr* are in Proverbs

points to the unambiguous conclusion that Israel's sages produced Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>410</sup> In order to reach the conclusion that terminology from Exod. 34:6-7 is clustered only in Israel's wisdom literature, Dentan must first exclude from the pool of evidence any passage that he considers to be dependent on Exod. 34:6-7. While he considers quotations and paraphrases of Exod. 34:6-7 in other parts of the Bible to be dependent on Exod. 34:6-7, he starts with the assumption that the occurrence of this terminology in Israel's wisdom literature is not dependent on Exod. 34:6-7 (or the liturgical tradition that produced this text). However, it is equally likely that the occurrence of terminology from Exod. 34:6-7 in wisdom literature reflects an effort by Israel's sages to interpret a famous liturgical statement about the nature of God. In fact, on the basis of the frequency with which other biblical authors interact, reinterpret, and recycle Exodus 34:6-7 for their own theological purposes,<sup>411</sup> it seems more probable that the clustering of terminology from

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(20) and Job (10). The expression *lō' y'naqqeh* occurs seven times in Proverbs. Job 9:28 and 10:14 also use this expression in the *pi'el*. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

<sup>410</sup> For Dentan's theory to hold water, one would require clear evidence that Israel's wisdom literature, or the traditions underlying it, predates the composition of Exodus 34:6-7, or the traditions underlying it. However, while prophetic quotations of Exod. 34:6-7 suggest that the credo was in (re)use relatively early in Israel's literary tradition, most of Israel's wisdom literature dates to the post-exilic era. Raymond Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Bernard Brandon Scott (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 32.

<sup>411</sup> These texts will be discussed below. I understand Exodus 34:6-7 to be the base text for all other allusions to it because it is the fullest form of the formula. Despite the fact that traditions tend to accrete new elements over time, in this case, the length of the formula in Exodus 34:6-7 appears to demonstrate its primacy. Without a full statement that includes a description of both YHWH's mercy and punishment, one must rely on circuitous methods to explain how the other forms of the quotation, which cite only parts of the entire formula, came into existence. In order to make sense of the dialogue between Nahum and Jonah, each of whom relies on different parts of the formula, one must posit the existence of a formula that united each of the elements used by the prophets. Most scholars agree in considering Exod. 34:6-7 to be the base text, although Levinson is one notable abstention. He considers the formula as it appears in the second commandment, Exod. 20:4-6, to be the most nearly original. Levinson's preference for the Decalogue's version is likely owing to the fact that he sees the origins of intergenerational punishment in the sphere of international treaties. Finding the passage originally situated in a legal context that draws upon ancient Near Eastern treaty formulae supports his case. However, the formula that appears in the second commandment describes YHWH's actions (he punishes and rewards intergenerationally on the basis of

Exodus 34:6-7 in wisdom literature represents a sapiential attempt to reinterpret the formula. Furthermore, Dentan's conclusion that these two verses from Exodus 34 share the same universal outlook as wisdom literature cannot be substantiated with such a minute sample size, and, as the discussion below will demonstrate, wisdom literature does not emphasize the merciful connotations of Exodus 34:6-7 to the exclusion of its associations with justice. While I agree that Israel's wisdom literature shares terminology with Exodus 34:6-7, I cannot agree with Dentan's conclusion that this overlapping of terminology results from Israel's sages playing a role in the composition of Exod. 34:6-7.

In order to understand the wisdom tradition's interaction with Exodus 34:6-7, it is first necessary to review briefly the popularity of this passage among ancient biblical authors. The point here is to demonstrate that the liturgical formula created a theological problem with which many of ancient Israel's greatest thinkers engaged themselves. This process of inner-biblical exegesis has produced numerous passages in every corner of the Bible that draw on the language and themes of Exodus 34:6-7 but reformulate them so as to serve their own objectives.<sup>412</sup> Even its appearance in Exod. 34:6-7 may be secondary. The final redaction of Exodus 34 portrays the formula as a divine self-description, words

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covenant fidelity), but not his character (merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in faithfulness) with the exception of describing him as jealous, an attribute not mentioned in Exod. 34:6-7. While many interpretations of the formula likely are engaging the formula's appearance in the Decalogue, they also appear to be aware of Exod. 34:6-7. For example, Deut. 7:9 looks very similar to the second commandment, but it describes YHWH as faithful, a term used in Exod. 34:6-7 but not the Decalogue. Nevertheless, it is clear that not all later reformulations draw on Exodus 34:6-7 alone. For example, the description of YHWH as a jealous God (*ʔēl qannāʔ*) appears in the Decalogue, but not Exod. 34:6-7. Nahum 1:2 describes YHWH as jealous, but Nahum 1:3 draws on terminology, namely "slow to anger" (*ʔerek ʔappayim*) present in Exod. 34:6-7 but not the Decalogue. The author of Nahum either draws on both texts or is familiar with another form of the formula not preserved in the Bible that includes all these elements. Levinson, "The Human Voice," 46–47.

<sup>412</sup> Fishbane, Michael, "Torah and Tradition," in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 281.

that YHWH speaks about himself. However, apart from the literary framework that introduces YHWH as the speaker, the passage is written in the third person, which may suggest that the formula originated as a human description of YHWH.<sup>413</sup>

Within the Pentateuch, the formula from Exodus 34:6-7 recurs in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:9-10), in the parenetic materials of Moses' farewell address (Deut. 7:9-10), and in another case of prophetic intercession in the wilderness (Numbers 14:18). The second commandment prohibits the creation and worship of idols. YHWH provides an explanation for this law: "For I, YHWH, your God am a jealous (*qannā*) God, visiting (*pōqēd*) the iniquity (*ʿwōn*) of the fathers upon the sons to the third or fourth generation of those who hate me (*l'šōn'āy*), but showing steadfast love (*ʿōseh ḥesed*)<sup>414</sup> to the thousandth generation of those who love me (*l'ōh'ābay*) and keep (*ūl'šōm'rê*) my commandments" (Exod. 20:5b-6; cf. Deut. 5:9b-10). Although more concise in some aspects than the formula that appears in Exodus 34:6-7, the second commandment agrees with the liturgical formula and codifies this liturgical formula in ancient Israel's most sacred legal materials. By using this description of YHWH's nature as a rationale for the commandment against idolatry, the author of the Decalogue suggests that this aspect of God's nature does not apply to all human sin, but rather is limited to cases of covenant infidelity, that is, treason against YHWH.<sup>415</sup> The Decalogue introduces covenantal

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<sup>413</sup> Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," 37.

<sup>414</sup> Another good translation for *ḥesed* is "loyalty." This rendering captures the covenantal and legalistic associations of the term.

<sup>415</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 344.

language<sup>416</sup> to the formula by clarifying that YHWH exercises intergenerational punishment on those who “hate” him but rewards those who “love” him.<sup>417</sup>

When Moses paraphrases the liturgical formula as part of his hortatory speech to the Israelites on the brink of entering a land already inhabited by other peoples, he omits the part of the formula that refers to intergenerational punishment and replaces it with an affirmation of individual divine retribution: “Know that YHWH your God is God, the faithful (*hannē<sup>c</sup>mān*) God who keeps the covenant and steadfast love (*w<sup>e</sup>haḥesed*) to those who love him (*l<sup>e</sup>ōh<sup>a</sup>bāyw*) and keep (*ūl<sup>e</sup>šōm<sup>e</sup>rê*) his commandments to the thousandth generation and who repays those who reject him (*l<sup>e</sup>šōn<sup>e</sup>āyw*) in their own person. He does not delay but repays in their own person those who reject him (*l<sup>e</sup>šōn<sup>e</sup>ō*)” (Deut. 7:9-10). In paraphrasing the second commandment using its familiar terminology, Moses introduces a drastic change into the formula’s meaning. Rather than identifying YHWH as a God who punishes children for the sins of their parents, the passage asserts the opposite, namely that God executes individual, not collective, punishment.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> It should be noted, however, that while these covenantal terms do not appear in Exod. 34:6-7, Exod. 34:10 casts the passage in a covenantal context. For a discussion of the covenantal connotations of this terminology, see William L. Moran, “Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963): 77–87.

<sup>417</sup> According to Blenkinsopp, the Deuteronomic editor modifies the meaning of the formula with the addition of this covenantal terminology by suggesting that the children are like their ancestor in fidelity or infidelity. If this is the case, this meaning is certainly not unambiguous. Furthermore, Blenkinsopp does not explain what role the Deuteronomic editor played in the appearance of this same terminology of the second commandment as it appears in Exodus 20:5-6. In its present form, the version of the Decalogue that appears in Exodus 20 shows affinities to the Priestly theology. Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J.S. Bowden, Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1962), 163. *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible v. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 81, 317. Blenkinsopp, “Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom,” 124. Cf. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 335, 343–344. Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*, trans. S. M. Cupitt (New York: Scribner, 1969), 47. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 130–131.

<sup>418</sup> Levinson, “The Human Voice,” 54. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 343.

In an act of intercession to prevent an angry deity from destroying the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, Moses partially quotes YHWH's self-description: "YHWH is slow to anger (*ʿerek ʿappayim*), abounding in steadfast love (*w<sup>e</sup>rab-ḥesed*), forgiving (*nōšēʿ*) iniquity (*ʿāwōn*) and transgression (*wāpāšaʿ*), but by no means clearing the guilty (*w<sup>e</sup>naqqê lōʾ y<sup>e</sup>naqqeh*), visiting (*pōqēd*) the iniquity (*ʿwōn*) of the fathers upon the sons to the third or fourth generation" (Numb. 14:18). Moses omits the portion of the formula that mentions rewarding those who love YHWH and keep his commandments because a prayer for reward when the people have sinned would be inappropriate.

According to Dozeman, Moses's partial quotation of Exodus 34:6-7 in Numbers 14:18 does not alter the meaning of the original formula, but the subsequent verses do.<sup>419</sup> In Numbers 14:20-24 YHWH agrees to Moses' request for mercy, but rather than punishing the progeny of the sinners to the third or fourth generation, YHWH punishes only the guilty generation directly by preventing it from entering the land. YHWH defers its punishment, but the delay does not surpass the boundaries of the wicked generation's lifetime. Once that generation has died in the wilderness, YHWH would permit its offspring to enter the land promised to its ancestors.<sup>420</sup> The priestly writer responsible for this episode emphasizes individual responsibility.

Among Israel's literary prophets, the liturgical formula appears in Micah, Joel, Nahum, Jonah, and Jeremiah.<sup>421</sup> Each of these prophets reinterprets Exodus 34:6-7 in

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<sup>419</sup> Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," 125. Cf. Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32-34 and Numbers 13-14* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 7.

<sup>420</sup> Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," 125.

<sup>421</sup> Van Leeuwen also includes Hosea in this list because the names of his children play upon YHWH's nature as revealed in Exodus 34:6-7 (*Lōʾ Ruḥāmâ*, "Not-Pitied") and upon YHWH's ownership of his

light of his historical context, and in many cases, the prophets also engage with the interpretations of this passage that other prophets have offered. Joel quotes the first line of the liturgical formula and adds the phrase “and he relents from evil:” “For he is gracious (*ḥannûn*) and merciful (*w<sup>e</sup>rahûm*), slow to anger (*ʿerek ʿappayim*), and abounding in steadfast love (*w<sup>e</sup>rab-ḥesed*), and he relents (*w<sup>e</sup>niḥām*) from evil (*ʿal-hārāʿâ*)” (Joel 2:13ab-b). The context in which Joel uses this formula is an oracle against Judah. By reminding his audience of YHWH’s merciful nature, and even expanding upon his mercy, the prophet encourages repentance as a means of averting impending divine wrath. Like Moses’ acts of intercession in Exodus 32:12 and Numbers 14:13-16, Joel 2:17 also appeals to YHWH’s honor and reputation among the nations as further justification, in addition to the reminder about the divine nature, for God to spare his people, who otherwise deserve punishment.

Jonah, according to Dozeman, draws upon this notion of YHWH’s reputation among the nations to satiric effect.<sup>422</sup> Jonah, who delivers an oracle of doom to the people of Nineveh without identifying the divine source of the impending destruction or the promise that repentance holds for averting it, grows angry when the people respond by repenting and receiving divine mercy. So Jonah quotes the first line of the divine attribute formula with the same addition that Joel makes, “and he relents from evil,” *w<sup>e</sup>niḥām ʿal-hārāʿa* (Jonah 4:2b). However, in its new narrative context, the prophet uses the quotation to complain about God’s nature! In so doing, Dozeman argues, Jonah

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people in his dialogue with Moses following the Golden Calf incident (*Lōʾ ʿAmmî*, “Not-My-People”). Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 35.

<sup>422</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh’s Gracious and Compassionate Character,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 213–214.



reverses Joel's usage of the formula and thereby focuses the satire on himself, a prophet whose role as intercessor includes using this formula to obtain divine pardon.<sup>423</sup> The author of Jonah frees the liturgical formula from its covenantal moorings and thereby suggests that YHWH's gracious character extends beyond the boundaries of YHWH's chosen people.

Jonah is not only in dialogue with Joel, but also with Nahum, a prophet whose writings detail the fall of Nineveh. Nahum opens his prophecy with a statement laced with terminology from Exodus 34:6-7 and the Decalogue and a partial quotation of the liturgical formula that focuses on divine wrath and judgment, rather than mercy: "A jealous (*qannô*) and avenging God is YHWH, YHWH is avenging and wrathful; YHWH takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies. YHWH is long in anger (*ʿerek ʿappayim*), and great in strength, and YHWH by no means will clear the guilty (*wʿnaqqê lōʾ yʿnaqqeh*)" (Nah. 1:2-3a). Nahum transforms a liturgical formula about YHWH's gracious nature into a promise of punishment for YHWH's (and the prophet's) enemies.<sup>424</sup> The prophet cleverly accomplishes this by subtly reworking language from Exod. 34:6-7: YHWH is "great in strength" (*gʿdôl-kôah*) instead of "abounding in steadfast love" (*rab-ḥesed*), "long in anger" (*ʿerek ʿappayim*) instead of "slow to anger" (*ʿerek ʿappayim*), and "raging (*nôṭēr*) against his enemies" instead of "keeping steadfast love" (*nōṣēr ḥesed*).<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 215–216.

<sup>424</sup> Fishbane, Michael, "Torah and Tradition," 280–281. Machinist, "The Fall of Assyria," 182.

<sup>425</sup> Fishbane, Michael, "Torah and Tradition," 280–281.

Whereas the description of YHWH's nature as it appears in the Decalogue restricts YHWH's punitive measures to cases of covenant infidelity by the Israelites, Nahum extends divine vengeance to YHWH's chosen people's human enemies, who have no covenantal relationship with YHWH. In contrast to Nahum, who focuses solely on the hostile aspects of YHWH's nature and the benefits that they hold for Israelites who had endured Assyria's military wrath, Jonah focuses solely on his compassionate attributes and their negative implications for justice. As several scholars have noted, the editor of the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets may have used the inner-biblical prophetic dialogue concerning Exod. 34:6-7 as a means of uniting the collection with "hermeneutical patches."<sup>426</sup>

Many scholars regard Micah 7:18-20, which also recycles terminology from Exodus 34:6-7, as secondary to the eighth century prophet.<sup>427</sup> In contrast with Nahum and his emphasis on vengeance, but similar to Jonah, Micah emphasizes only the merciful aspects of God's nature.<sup>428</sup> "Who is a God like you, bearing (*nōšē'*) iniquity (*āwōn*) and passing over transgression (*peša'*) of the remnant of his inheritance? He does not keep his anger (*ʿappō*) forever, for he delights in steadfast love (*hesed*). He will again have compassion on us (*yeraḥmēnû*); he will cleanse our iniquities (*ʿwōnōtēnû*). You will cast into the depths of the sea all our sins. You will show faithfulness (*ʿmet*) to Jacob and steadfast love (*hesed*) to Abraham as you swore to our ancestors from the days of

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<sup>426</sup> Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," 32. This notion is also inchoate in Fishbane's study of the reuse of the divine attribute formula. Fishbane, Michael, "Torah and Tradition," 280.

<sup>427</sup> For example, see Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah: A Commentary*, trans. Gary Stansell (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1990), xxvii–xxxvi.

<sup>428</sup> Fishbane, Michael, "Torah and Tradition," 279–80.

old” (Micah 7:18-20). The secondary nature of this allusion to Exod. 34:6-7 may support Van Leeuwen’s thesis that the editor of the Book of the Twelve used these interactions with Exod. 34:6-7 as a deliberate organizational method. Likewise, the allusion to Exod. 34:6-7 in Nahum 1:2 interrupts an acrostic poem and is thus also likely to be secondary. Furthermore, the editorial insertion at the conclusion of Hosea (14:10) may betray the hand of an editor with a particular concern for wisdom. The distinctions between prophetic and wisdom circles, if they ever firmly existed, become very blurry in later biblical periods.<sup>429</sup>

Jeremiah represents another prophetic tradition engaging with the liturgical formula from Exodus 34:6-7. However, in contrast to the prophetic transformations and subversions discussed so far, Jeremiah does not rely on the first line of the formula, which lists YHWH’s attributes, but rather repeats language and ideas familiar from the second half of the formula, the part that focuses on intergenerational accountability: “You show (*’ōśeh*) steadfast love (*hesed*) to the thousandth generation, but repay the iniquity (*’wōn*) of the fathers into the laps of their sons after them, Oh great and mighty God, whose name is YHWH of hosts” (Jer. 32:18). Yet, despite acknowledging this aspect of YHWH’s nature, Jeremiah rejects the continued use of the proverb, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the sons’ teeth are set on edge” (Jer. 31:29).<sup>430</sup> As

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<sup>429</sup> Andrew Teeter, private communication. Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” 36.

<sup>430</sup> The verse following Jeremiah’s affirmation of YHWH as a deity who practices intergenerational punishment and reward suggests that the prophet also held that the same God punished and rewarded on the basis of individual merit (Jer. 32:19). Jeremiah appears to be juggling two conflicting theologies about the nature of YHWH, but it is important to note that although they seem to conflict, Jeremiah likely holds both theologies. Collective accountability is generally limited to instances of covenant infidelity, so it could not exist alone since individual accountability was necessary to explain the punishment of all other sins. By cutting off the complaints of the innocent sufferers who repeat the sour grapes proverb in Jer. 31:29-30, the

Kaminsky has demonstrated, however, the theological point behind the prophet's rejection of this proverb is not that God's nature has changed. Jeremiah does not suggest that God's previous manner of collective punishment was unjust and will become just when he executes individual punishment. Rather, the prophet foresees a change in human understanding of the divine nature. Those who suffered divine punishment at the hands of the Babylonians will accept responsibility for their role in earning the punishment that came upon Jerusalem and thus will no longer accuse God of unfairly punishing them when they lacked the power to change the situation or to appease him.<sup>431</sup>

In the postexilic era, Ezra alludes to Exodus 34:6-7 when he leads the Israelites, who have just separated themselves from foreigners, in a prayer that recounts YHWH's mighty deeds: "They refused to obey [your commandments], and they did not remember the wonders that you performed among them; they stiffened their necks and determined to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious (*ḥannûn*) and merciful (*w<sup>e</sup>rahûm*), slow to anger (*ʔerek-ʔappayim*), and abounding in steadfast love (*w<sup>e</sup>rab-w<sup>e</sup>ḥesed*), and you did not forsake them" (Neh. 9:17). Speaking to a people for whom the memory of collective punishment is fresh, Ezra has no need to remind his audience of YHWH's vengeful and punishing nature. Before the prayer culminates in a request for compassion, Ezra reminds God of his nature in language familiar from

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prophet shifts his audience's focus away from the perceived injustice of YHWH's nature as one who punishes intergenerationally to his nature as one who punishes according to individual deeds. Belief in individual retribution for most sins does not necessitate disbelief in collective retribution for sins against YHWH. Indeed, it is probable that in the periods preceding Jeremiah and Ezekiel's negation of the sour grapes proverb that individual retribution was already a commonly held belief in addition to the widespread acceptance of collective retribution. The two concepts, collective and individual retribution, can coexist because they apply to different classes of sins. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 150.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 151.

Exodus 34:6-7: “Nevertheless, in your great mercies (*ûb<sup>e</sup>rah<sup>a</sup>mêkâ*) you did not make an end of them or forsake them for you are a gracious (*ḥannûn*) and merciful (*w<sup>e</sup>rahûm*) God” (9:31).

The Chronicler also recycles the familiar language from the liturgical formula. In describing Hezekiah’s reform, the Chronicler tells of an effort to send messengers throughout Israel and Judah to encourage the people to observe the Passover. In order to motivate the people to return to proper observance of divine law, the messengers describe YHWH’s merciful nature: “For when you return to YHWH, your kindred and your children will find compassion (*l<sup>e</sup>rah<sup>a</sup>mîm*) with their captors and return to this land. For YHWH your God is gracious (*ḥannûn*) and merciful (*w<sup>e</sup>rahûm*), and he will not turn his face from you if you return to him” (2 Chron. 30:9). In this context, the author emphasizes the importance of repentance to the divine exercise of mercy. Likewise, Ezra’s prayer only seeks mercy after acknowledging the people’s many shortcomings. YHWH’s people are already familiar with his punishing side (2 Chron. 30:7-8); to witness YHWH’s merciful side, the people must turn away from their wrongdoings.

Within the Psalter, numerous psalms reuse Exodus 34:6-7. For example, in Psalm 78, the psalmist recalls Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness and God’s merciful response: “Yet he, being compassionate (*rahûm*), forgave their iniquity (*‘āwōn*) and did not destroy [them]; he often restrained his anger (*‘appô*) and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were flesh, a wind that passes and does not come again” (Psalm 78:38-39). In addition to emphasizing God’s mercy over his judgment, the psalmist also explains God’s mercy as a response to ephemeral human nature. In a world governed by strict justice, humans, who are by nature incapable of avoiding sin (Ge. 8:21; 1 Kgs 8:46;

cf. 2 Chron 6:36; Ezek. 20:44; Ps. 51:3; Eccl. 7:20; Job 15:14), would quickly cease to exist (Ps. 130:3).<sup>432</sup> The motif of divine mercy in response to human nature recurs in Psalm 103, which contrasts the impermanence of humanity (Psa. 103:14-16) with God's eternally merciful nature (v. 17). Psalm 103, in contrast to Exodus 34:6-7,<sup>433</sup> considers only YHWH's mercy and largely ignores his punishing nature: "YHWH is merciful (*rahûm*) and gracious (*w<sup>e</sup>hannûn*), slow to anger (*'erek 'appayim*) and abounding in steadfast love (*w<sup>e</sup>rab-hāsed*). He will not always accuse, nor will he keep (*yittôr*)<sup>434</sup> [his anger] forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor does he repay us according to our iniquities" (Psa. 103:8-10). This psalm implies that God does not punish as much as he could or should, and this idea is familiar from Jonah, although in this context the psalmist is not complaining about, but rather praising, God's mercy. Although God is merciful because of human frailty according to Psalms 78 and 103, Psalm 112 builds upon Psalm 111, which identifies God's nature as gracious and merciful (v. 4b), by describing the righteous as humans possessing these same divine attributes (112:4b).<sup>435</sup> Psalm 25 suggests, "All the paths of YHWH are steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*w<sup>e</sup>met*) for those who keep (*l'nōs'rê*) his covenant and his decrees" (v. 10). The psalmist implores YHWH, "Cause me to know your ways, O YHWH, and teach me

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 185–186.

<sup>433</sup> Note, however, that many of the interpreters (i.e., Micah, Jonah, Nehemiah) of Exod. 34:6-7 discussed so far also ignore YHWH's punishing nature.

<sup>434</sup> Cf. the use of *n-t-r* in Nah. 1:2. Benjamin Sommer describes the use of this root here as a pun. He understands *n-t-r* to be a homonym with the meaning "to guard" (cf. *n-s-r*) and also "to be angry." Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 28.

<sup>435</sup> Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," 32, n. 8.

your paths” (v. 4). This psalm also perhaps suggests that the righteous individual should strive to attain those attributes that define YHWH.<sup>436</sup>

Psalm 86 describes YHWH in language familiar from Exodus 34:6-7 (vv. 5, 15). In v. 5, the psalmist suggests that YHWH displays his gracious and merciful nature to “all who call on you.” The notion that anyone who prays to YHWH can attain his mercy differs from other inner-biblical interpretations of Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>437</sup> Although the liturgical formula does not specify to whom YHWH makes available his compassionate nature, the Decalogue suggests that it is for those who “love” him, or maintain covenantal fealty by observing his commandments. Interpretations like those of Jonah and 2 Chronicles suggest that repentance is a necessary prequalification to receive YHWH’s mercy.

Like Nahum in the prophetic tradition, Psalm 109 focuses solely on YHWH’s attributes of vengeance. The psalmist’s enemies<sup>438</sup> ask that YHWH remember the iniquity of his father and mother (v. 14) because he did not show steadfast love (*hāsed*) to the poor and needy, as Psalm 112:4b suggests is the expectation for righteous behavior. Like Nahum and Jonah, this psalm indicates that Israelite interpreters expected the vengeful attributes of YHWH to be used against Israel (or the psalmist’s) human enemies.

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<sup>436</sup> For the connection of this psalm to perhaps both the wisdom tradition and the editing of the Book of the Twelve, see *ibid.*, 37–38.

<sup>437</sup> 2 Chron. 30:9, discussed above, could be an exception to this statement, but its context seems to suggest a limited audience of Israelites in exile, not a universal audience. For the Chronicler, divine mercy relies on the notion of returning (*tāšûbû*) to YHWH, an act that is likely more exclusive than the psalmist’s all-inclusive “all who call (*qōr’êkâ*) on you.”

<sup>438</sup> The speaker of Psalm 109:6-19 is unclear, but even if it is not the psalmist, the psalmist asks that these same curses be inflicted on his enemies in v. 20.

## **II.b. The Reuse of Exodus 34:6-7 in the Biblical Wisdom Tradition**

Given the above examination of the various methods, genres, and contexts in which the liturgical formula from Exodus 34:6-7 is reused in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, it is now appropriate to consider the usage of this passage, and terminology from it, in the wisdom literature. The relationship between Exod. 34:6-7 and each of the biblical wisdom books will be examined below.

As Dentan has observed, the presumed secular interests of sages have often led scholars to ignore Israel's sages as theologians like their counterparts in other areas of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>439</sup> However, Israel's sages were very much concerned with theological issues, and one should not be surprised that YHWH's nature is one of those with which the sages engaged. Just as the issues of divine mercy and justice were important to the authors of passages like the Decalogue, Numbers 14:18, Deuteronomy 7:9-10, Nahum 1:2, Joel 2:13, 2 Chronicles 30:9, etc., so too did they weigh on the mind of those who penned Israel's wisdom literature. Nevertheless, the connection between wisdom passages and Exodus 34:6-7 is not always certain as it tends to be in other biblical reuses of the divine attribute formula because of the aphoristic and pithy nature of wisdom literature. Not every example discussed should be construed as a certain allusion to Exodus 34:6-7, but I have opted to include all possible connections in the interest of leaving no stone unturned.

### **Proverbs**

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<sup>439</sup> Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f," 49. The sages may even have had a hand in the editing of other sections of the Bible. See Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve."



Although Proverbs does not allude to or draw upon biblical literature and traditions in the same manner that later wisdom books, like that of Ben Sira, do, I think it is likely that this work of wisdom participates in the inner-biblical debate about the nature of God. The primary terminology used to discuss the divine nature was drawn from the liturgical formula, which, according to its biblical framework, is YHWH's description of himself. Even if the sage was not inclined to utilize biblical traditions, his reuse of language and themes from Exodus 34:6-7 throughout the book of Proverbs suggests that, at the very least, he employed the debate's familiar terminology, drawn from the cultic/biblical tradition encapsulated in the divine attribute formula of Exod. 34:6-7, in order to make clear his position on the subject to his students.

In Proverbs 16:5-6, the sage uses terminology from Exodus 34:6-7: "An abomination of YHWH is every haughty heart; surely,<sup>440</sup> he will not go unpunished (*yinnāqeh*).<sup>441</sup> Through steadfast love (*b<sup>e</sup>hesed*) and faithfulness (*we<sup>s</sup>met*) iniquity (*āwōn*) is atoned, and through the fear of YHWH one turns aside from evil." This passage comes on the heels of v. 4 ("YHWH has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble"),<sup>442</sup> which seems to suggest that evil individuals are so

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<sup>440</sup> Literally, the expression is "hand to hand" (*yād l'yād*). Cf. Prov. 11:21. Although the expression of *lex talionis* in Exod. 21:23-25 is *yād taḥat yād*, "hand instead of hand" (cf. Lev. 24:19-20, which uses the same preposition but does not include "hand instead of hand" in its list), Deut. 19:21 uses the preposition "b-" to indicate *lex talionis*: *yād b'yād*, "hand for hand." In light of this and the emphasis on strict retributive justice in both Prov. 16:5 and 11:21, the sage may have the notion of *lex talionis* in mind.

<sup>441</sup> The expression, "he will not go unpunished" (*yinnāqeh*) recurs seven times in the book of Proverbs (6:29, 11:21, 17:5, 19:5, 28:20). Prov. 16:5a bears striking similarity to 11:21a: "Surely (*yād l'yād*), the wicked will not go unpunished (*yinnāqeh*)." In addition to this bold claim, the second half of the verse asserts that the righteous will escape. According to Fox, the sage bases his assertion "not on observation but on beliefs about God." This consideration will be discussed further below. Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:539. Cf. Van Leeuwen, "The Book of Proverbs," 119.

<sup>442</sup> See Chapter 2 for further discussion of this verse.

by divine creation, a condition that invites the possibility that the righteous will not suffer punishment because they are innately good. The sage, however, disabuses his righteous pupils of this misunderstanding by suggesting that the individual who haughtily thinks that he is safe from divine retribution will not go unpunished. This recalls God's attributes of justice in the liturgical formula, on which Nahum also focuses.<sup>443</sup>

In contrast to Nahum, however, who focuses on God's wrath to the exclusion of his mercy, Proverbs 16:6 suggests that steadfast love and faithfulness can atone for iniquity.<sup>444</sup> The clustered terminology is reminiscent of Exodus 34:6-7, but the explicit notion that these divine attributes are also human characteristics that can achieve divine appeasement is an idea found in later interpretations of the liturgical formula. For example, Psalm 112:4b suggests that the righteous are gracious and merciful, two other divine attributes known from the liturgical formula. While several reuses of the divine attribute formula have suggested that repentance can compel YHWH to display his merciful, rather than vengeful, qualities, Prov. 16:5-6 builds upon this tradition by asserting that human emulation of divine attributes can assuage divine anger and lead to forgiveness.

The notion that the human student of wisdom can model his own behavior on divine attributes resurfaces later in Prov. 16:32: "Better is the one who is slow to anger

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<sup>443</sup> Cf. Prov. 19:9.

<sup>444</sup> Not all scholars agree that it is human steadfast love and faithfulness that atone for iniquity in Prov. 16:6. On the basis of the borrowed terminology from Exodus 34:6-7, some scholars, like Van Leeuwen, argue that the reference is to divine steadfast love and faithfulness because the passage to which this wisdom alludes, namely Exod. 34:6-7, is a divine revelation of YHWH's nature. Van Leeuwen ignores the possibility that the sage is adapting Exodus 34:6-7 and its theological implications for his own purposes. As advice for a pupil, the passage is more compelling if it provides the student with actions that he can undertake to ensure his success. Indeed, the language of the passage suggests that atonement is achieved (*y<sup>h</sup>kuppar*) through steadfast love (*b<sup>h</sup>hesed*) and faithfulness (*we<sup>h</sup>met*), which should belong to the human subject, not God. Van Leeuwen, "The Book of Proverbs," 119.

(*ʿerek ʿappayim*) than the mighty, and the one who controls his temper than the one who captures a city.” The expression, “slow to anger” (*ʿerek ʿappayim*), literally translated “long of nose,”<sup>445</sup> also occurs in Prov. 14:29, 15:18, and 19:11,<sup>446</sup> which similarly credit the patient individual with being wiser and more capable than the one who lacks such self-restraint. Prov. 19:22 encourages the student to demonstrate steadfast love (*ḥasdô*). As seen already in Psalms 112:4b and 109:16, the righteous individual is expected to model his own behavior on those divine characteristics that YHWH uses to define himself in Exodus 34:6-7.

### **Job**

Although the language does not appear as clustered in the Book of Job as it does in Proverbs, the righteous sufferer protests with terminology familiar from Exod. 34:6-7 that he will be the victim of YHWH’s vengeance even if he ceases to object to divine justice: “If I say, “Let me forget my complaint, let me abandon my sad countenance and be cheerful,” I am afraid of all my suffering for I know that you will not let me go unpunished (*ʿnaqqēnî*)” (Job 9:27-28). The possible connection to the divine attribute formula in Exod. 34:6-7 relies on the presence of only one shared term, however, so one must be cautious in interpreting Job’s use of this common verb as an allusion. Nevertheless, the passage is worth considering for the purposes of this study because, as Dentan has pointed out, the rather common root *n-q-h* occurs in the *piʿel* stem with God as its subject only in Exod. 34:6-7 (and passages dependent upon it), Job 9:28 and 10:14,

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<sup>445</sup> Or, perhaps more accurately, “long of nostrils.”

<sup>446</sup> Cf. Eccl. 7:8, which uses the phrase “long of spirit” (*ʿerek-rûah*) to refer to patience. Dentan, “The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f,” 42.

and a couple of other late texts (Psa. 19:13; Jer. 30:11).<sup>447</sup> Because the connection between Job 10:14 and Exod. 34:6-7 appears stronger, I include Job 9:28 in my discussion in case it may also have relevance that would otherwise be missed by applying stricter criteria for identifying an allusion.

In Job 9:28, the sufferer accuses God of exercising his justice on someone who does not deserve punishment and of not relenting once he has acknowledged his wrongdoing. This contrasts with the notion expressed in other inner-biblical interpretations of Exod. 34:6-7 that suggest that YHWH offers mercy to those who repent. Additionally, Job suggests that God's mercy is not as abundant as the liturgical formula from Exodus 34:6-7 purports: "Life and steadfast love (*wāḥesed*) you have given me, and your oversight has kept (*šām<sup>e</sup>râ*) my spirit. Yet these things you have hidden in your heart; I know that this is with you. If I sin, you watch me (*ûš<sup>e</sup>martānî*) and for my iniquity (*ûmē<sup>e</sup>wōnî*) you do not let me go unpunished (*t<sup>e</sup>naqqēnî*)" (Job 10:12-14). According to Job, God pays close attention to his deeds so as to exercise punishment, not mercy, when he stumbles. Unlike interpretations of Exod. 34:6-7 that focus exclusively on God's mercy, Job focuses primarily on punishment.

Although not responding directly to Job's speech that God is far too exacting in executing punishment, Elihu suggests that God is the opposite of what Job claims: "And now, because his anger (*?appô*) is not punishing (*pāqad*) and he does not take into account many transgressions (*bappaš*)"<sup>448</sup> (Job 35:15). God's merciful nature means that

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>448</sup> Most commentators read *paš* as a corruption of *peša<sup>c</sup>*, "transgression." Pope, *Job*, 229. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 488.

he has been too lenient in punishing human sins, and Elihu suggests that Job has benefitted from this aspect of God's personality.<sup>449</sup>

One more passage in Job may have relevance to the reinterpretation of Exodus 34:6-7. Although the linguistic connection involves only one shared term, Job 13:26 accuses God of practicing delayed punishment: "For you write bitter things against me, and you make me possess the iniquities (*"wōnōt*) of my youth" (Job 13:26; cf. Psalm 25:7). The notion of delayed punishment underlies YHWH's ability to "forgive" (*nōšē*), literally "bear" or "lift up," iniquity and transgression and sin (Exodus 34:7). The laws of the universe demand that things that render a person unholy, like sin, not come into contact with the holy, namely YHWH and his divine immanence on earth, without disastrous consequences. YHWH's amazing power to store up, to "bear," sin and dole out its punishment slowly over time enables YHWH's continued relationship with the human and imperfect Israelite people, who would otherwise be destroyed in a contagious outbreak of divine wrath. Exodus 34:6-7 suggests that YHWH metes out punishment over the course of three to four generations of the sinner. Job observes, as the Israelites who murmured against God in Numbers 14 experienced personally when they were denied admission into the Promised Land, that YHWH can also punish an individual later in his lifetime for an earlier sin. Because his language does not contain an abundance of clustered terminology from Exodus 34:6-7, Job does not appear to be engaging with this tradition by rephrasing it, but he may be aware of interpretations, like that of Psalm 25:7, that do not consider this type of delayed punishment to be merciful.

### **Ben Sira**

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<sup>449</sup> Habel, *The Book of Job*, 494.

Several passages from the Wisdom of Ben Sira make use of language and themes from the Greek translation of Exodus 34:6-7. Sir. 2:11, which is no longer extant in Hebrew, speaks of YHWH's compassionate and merciful nature: "For the Lord is compassionate (*oiktirmōn*) and merciful (*eleēmōn*); he forgives sins and saves in time of trouble."<sup>450</sup> Ben Sira, however, does not draw upon divine revelation to conclude that this description fits YHWH's nature. Rather, he extrapolates these characteristics from his reflection upon bygone generations whose faith in YHWH has never led them astray according to Sir. 2:10.<sup>451</sup>

Sir. 5:4-7 appears to address those who appeal to Exodus 34:6-7 as proof of YHWH's mercy: "Do not say, 'I have sinned, yet what has happened to me?' For God is slow to anger (*ʾrk ʾpym*). Do not trust in forgiveness so that you add iniquity to iniquity (*ʿwn l ʿwn*). Do not say, 'His compassion (*rḥmyw*) is great; the abundance of my iniquities (*ʿwnwtḥ*) he will forgive.' For both compassion (*rḥmym*) and anger (*wʾp*) are with him, and upon the wicked will rest his wrath. Do not delay to return to him, and do not skip over from day to day. For suddenly his wrath will come forth, and on the day of vengeance you will be swept away." Ben Sira's use of the debate formula ("Do not say...") suggests that the issue of YHWH's mercy had stirred a lively debate in his time.<sup>452</sup> The sage responds to his opponents who rely on the revelation of Exodus 34:6-7

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<sup>450</sup> Note that the Greek translation for *raḥûm w'eḥannûn*, "merciful and gracious," in Exod. 34:6-7 is *oiktirmōn kai eleēmōn*, "compassionate and merciful."

<sup>451</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 151.

<sup>452</sup> Beentjes, "God's Mercy: 'Racham' (pi.), 'Rachum', and 'Rachamim' in the Book of Ben Sira," 235. Crenshaw, "Problem," 47.

to justify their behavior by recycling and reinterpreting terminology from YHWH's self-description.

The most prominent transformation is his usage of the expression "slow to anger" (*ʔrk ʔpym*). The sinner credits his continued, unpunished existence to divine mercy, but Ben Sira turns the notion of divine mercy on its head by suggesting that the sinner has not yet suffered punishment because God is "slow to anger," or, perhaps like Nahum, "long in anger." The sage's argument, it seems, is that the sinner's present course of action will bring divine wrath upon himself at a later time. This contradicts Ben Sira's later statement that "retribution does not skip over/delay" (Sir. 7:16). The change in context likely explains the sage's change in theology. Whereas 5:4-7 is addressed to the individual who has already committed a sin and believes he need not rush to repent because of the abundance of divine mercy available to him, 7:16 discourages an individual from interacting with other sinners, who might lead him into sin. In the latter case, the threat of immediate punishment is an effective motivator, but in the former such a claim would conflict with observed reality.<sup>453</sup>

Unlike some passages examined from the Hebrew Bible that reuse Exodus 34:6-7 to emphasize one aspect of YHWH's divine nature over another, Ben Sira reminds his audience that God's nature is both merciful and punishing (5:6). The sage reiterates this point in 16:12: "As great as his compassion (*rḥmyw*), so is his reproof. He judges each man according to his deeds." Although this statement does not make use of terminology from Exodus 34:6-7 to the extent that 5:4-7 does, it seems to refute the notion contained

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<sup>453</sup> Crenshaw, "Problem," 55.

within the divine attribute formula that God's mercy far exceeds his vengeance.<sup>454</sup> Rather, God's mercy and vengeance are equal. Like Deut. 7:9-10, it also suggests that God exercises individual, not collective, retribution.

Although not extant in Hebrew, Sir. 18:8-14 uses language that overlaps with the semantic notions contained in Exodus 34:6-7:

(8) "What is man and what is his use? What is good for him, and what is bad for him? (9) The number of the days of man is many if he reaches one hundred years. (10) Like a drop of water from the sea and a grain of sand, thus are a few years in the days of eternity. (11) On account of this, the Lord is patient (*emakrothymēsen*) with them, and he pours out his mercy (*eleos*) on them. (12) He sees and recognizes that their end is bad; on account of this, he multiplies his forgiveness (*exilasmon*). (13) The mercy (*eleos*) of man is for his neighbor, but the mercy (*eleos*) of the Lord is for all flesh. He reproveth and disciplines and teaches them, and he returns them, as a shepherd to his flock. (14) He shows mercy (*eleq*) to those who accept his discipline and who are eager for his decrees." (Sir. 18:8-14)<sup>455</sup>

In his reflection on the nature of humanity, the sage offers human transience as motivation for divine compassion. This is reminiscent of the reuse of Exodus 34:6-7 in Psalms 78:38-39 and 103:14-18. Whereas Jonah and 2 Chronicles reuse the formula to suggest that repentance enables humans to obtain divine mercy, Ben Sira suggests that God pardons those who embrace the major tools of the wisdom instructor: reproof, discipline, and instruction. Context dictates how ancient interpreters reuse the Exodus 34:6-7 tradition.

### **Wisdom of Solomon**

The Wisdom of Solomon was composed in Greek, so one cannot be certain whether or not it is engaging with Exodus 34:6-7 by drawing upon its terminology.

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<sup>454</sup> The notion that God's mercy outweighs his vengeance is suggested by the fact that he rewards to the thousandth generation but limits his vengeance to only the third or fourth.

<sup>455</sup> Cf. Sir. 2:11, 51:8.



Nevertheless, this concern need not be insurmountable; it is still instructive to consider this piece of wisdom literature's comments on divine mercy and punishment, especially where those comments use language that overlaps with that of the Greek translation of Exodus 34:6-7.

The author of Wisdom describes God's nature using terminology that occurs in the Greek translation of Exod. 34:6: "But you, our God, are kind and true (*alēthēs*), patient (*makrothymos*) and ruling all things with mercy (*eleei*)" (*Sy de, ho theos hēmōn, chrēstos kai alēthēs, makrothymos kai eleei dioikōn ta panta*) (Wis. 15:1). By comparison, the Greek translation of Exodus 34:6 describes YHWH with similar terminology, but a slightly altered word order: "The Lord, a God compassionate and merciful (*eleēmōn*), patient (*makrothymos*) and abounding with mercy and true (*alēthinos*)" (*Kyrios ho theos oiktirmōn kai eleēmōn, makrothymos kai polyeleos kai alēthinos*). In 11:23, the sage insists that God's mercy is available to all and that its purpose is to encourage repentance (cf. Joel 2:13). McGlynn argues that this is an important function of the "mercy digression" in Wis. 13:1-15:19.<sup>456</sup> Nevertheless, other passages suggest that, although available to all, God's mercy primarily benefits his chosen people (Wis. 4:15; cf. 3:9). The sage speaks of God disciplining the Israelites with mercy (*eleei*), whereas "the ungodly were tormented when judged with wrath" (11:9).

By contrast to the treatment of the non-elect, at a time when the Israelites seem to deserve punishment, God instead does good for his people (16:2). When God judges his elect, they "expect mercy" (12:22). God is even said to "judge with kindness" (12:18).

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<sup>456</sup> McGlynn, *Divine Judgement and Divine Benevolence in the Book of Wisdom*, 25.

God's kindness and mercy establish a model for the Israelites to emulate, according to the sage: "You have taught your people through such works that it is necessary for the righteous to be humane, to make hopeful your children, because you gave repentance for sins" (12:19).<sup>457</sup> This is reminiscent of the reworking of Exodus 34:6-7 in Psalms 112 and 25 to encourage the imitation of YHWH's kind and compassionate nature.

According to Wis. 1:8, "On account of this, the ones uttering unrighteous things cannot hide, and justice, when it reproves, will not pass him by" (*dia touto phtheggomenos adika oudeis mē lathē, oude mē parodeusē auton elegchousa hē dikē*). Wis. 1:8 agrees with Exod. 34:7 that sinners do not go unpunished, but it does not echo any familiar terminology from the divine attribute formula ("and he will not clear the guilty," *kai ou katharizei ton enochon*). However, Wis. 12:2, also in agreement with the themes of the liturgical formula but with no shared terminology, suggests that God spreads out his punishment over a duration of time: "Therefore, you reprove little by little those who fall away, and, reminding them of the things through which they sin, you warn them so that being set free from evil they trust in you, O Lord." The sage applies this logic to the Israelites' failure to eradicate completely the Canaanites, whom God judged little by little so as to provide them with a chance for repentance (12:10). God's patience is not described here as being "slow to anger" or "bearing iniquity and transgression and sin," but the author seems to have these divine characteristics in mind in explaining the persistence of the Canaanites as an act of divine mercy. Obviously, the lack of any linguistic connection to Exod. 34:6-7 in these passages suggests that the sage

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<sup>457</sup> According to Philo, "For what one of the men of old aptly said is true, that in no other action does man so much resemble God as in showing kindness, and what greater good can there be than that they should imitate God, they the created, Him the Eternal?" Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 43–44. See *Spec.* 4.73, cf. 1.294; *Cong.* 171.

is not using allusion to engage with popular notions of the nature of God's mercy, but the thematic overlap suggests that the issue of divine mercy, especially its manifestation in the form of delayed punishment, remained an important issue in the time of Wisdom's composition.

### **III. Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 18 in the Biblical Wisdom Tradition**

Having now considered many of the different ways in which Israel's wisdom literature recycles, reuses, and reinterprets elements of Exod. 34:6-7, a creedal statement about YHWH's nature as a God who exercises intergenerational punishment, this chapter will turn to the use of a hallmark of wisdom literature, the proverb, by two of Judah's prophets to engage with the notion that YHWH practices intergenerational punishment.

Bernard Levinson has demonstrated that although one expects a static, fixed canon to pose problems for cultural and theological innovation, biblical exegetes introduced new ideas and overturned old ones through various processes.<sup>458</sup> In the case of a God who describes himself as exercising intergenerational punishment (i.e., the divine attribute formula in Exod. 34:6-7), human exegetes produced innovative understandings of God's nature that appeared faithful to tradition but that better suited the exegetes' new contexts by reformulating God's self-description.<sup>459</sup> Deuteronomy 7:9-10 provides one such example of canonical innovation by altering the description of a God who exercises collective punishment into one who exercises individual punishment. Within the wisdom tradition, Ben Sira, for example, draws on terminology from Exod.

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<sup>458</sup> Levinson, "The Human Voice," 60.

<sup>459</sup> Fishbane, Michael, "Torah and Tradition," 286.

34:6-7 to create a more balanced description of YHWH's mercy and anger; the intent is to prevent his students from sinning by presenting the expectation that the infinite abundance of YHWH's mercy (Exod. 34:6-7) will spare them divine wrath (Sir. 5:6, 16:12). By reformulating YHWH's own language, these exegetes successfully balance tradition and change to present a new understanding of divine mercy and justice.

By contrast, Levinson argues that Ezekiel 18:1-4 accomplishes innovation by avoiding the biblical language used to describe YHWH's nature as a merciful and just God who practices intergenerational punishment. Instead of recycling YHWH's own words of self-description, Levinson claims, Ezekiel cites and "rejects a simple human proverb, a product of traditional wisdom,"<sup>460</sup> and thus human in origin:

The word of the Lord came to me: What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord YHWH, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die. (Ezek. 18:1-4)

What is the relationship between this proverb, also cited by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:29-30), and the wisdom tradition? The proverb nowhere appears in any of the wisdom books preserved in the Hebrew Bible or Apocrypha, yet it draws upon a literary form, the proverb, common in wisdom literature. What is the origin of this proverb? How does the notion of collective accountability found in this proverb compare to the concept as it is found in the wisdom books?

The *masal*, "proverb," describes an observation of reality in a pithy and often persuasive manner. Such observations of the world and how it works are often secular in

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<sup>460</sup> Levinson, "The Human Voice," 52.

nature.<sup>461</sup> That is, unlike divine commands that dictate righteous behavior and morality based on God's authority alone, a proverb offers a quick lesson in the consequences of certain attitudes and behaviors in order to promote righteous behavior and morality. Proverbs likely have folk origins,<sup>462</sup> but the group that produces them may differ from the group that collects and records them.<sup>463</sup> Many scholars consider the origins of the literary form of the *mashal*, "proverb," to lie within wisdom circles.<sup>464</sup> Did the sages who produced, studied, and perpetuated Israel's own biblical wisdom tradition help to circulate this sour grapes proverb?

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel preach to audiences struggling to make sense of a changing world order that threatened their theological beliefs. The Babylonians had destroyed the temple of their supreme deity and forced their ruling elite into exile. Grasping for an explanation for this turn of events that did not conflict with their understanding of YHWH as ruler of the universe who had a special covenantal relationship with the people of Judah, or at least some of them (for an alternate view, see Jer. 44), they arrived at the conclusion that the devastation through which they had suffered was YHWH's will. To provoke such a display of divine wrath, the people must have angered this deity whose mercy was known to outweigh his vengeance (Exod. 34:6-7). One popular explanation for the nature of Judah's sins, given that the punishment seemed disproportionate to any wrongdoing in recent memory, was that YHWH was

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<sup>461</sup> Menahem Haran, "Proverb," ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol.16 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 639-642: 641.

<sup>462</sup> Claus Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples*, trans. J. Daryl Charles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 2-3.

<sup>463</sup> Katharine J. Dell, "Wisdom," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. John William Rogerson and Judith Lieu (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2006), 411.

<sup>464</sup> Haran, "Proverb," 641.

punishing Judah for the sins of its ancestors and former leaders (for example, 2 Kgs. 21:11-16, 22:13, 24:3). The Deuteronomistic Historian puts forth this argument in recounting the history of Israel and Judah. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel suggest that the people, in response to this interpretation of historical events, had summed up their bad fortune with the pithy proverb: “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.”

Ezekiel deals with the issue of collective accountability at length in chapter 18. His examples make clear that those who suffer or prosper do so as a result of their own deeds, and this would appear to be a clear rejection of collective accountability in favor of individual accountability. However, in setting the stage for this discussion, Ezekiel carefully phrases the complaint of the people and YHWH’s position on the issue of collective accountability. According to the prophet, YHWH asks the people why they use the proverb, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezek. 18:2). This line of questioning does not necessarily discount the apparent meaning of the proverb (namely, that the people of Judah suffer for the sins of their ancestors), but rather sparks the people’s introspection into their use of the proverb and attribution of their suffering to others. YHWH does not declare the proverb, or the notion of collective accountability, for that matter, to be invalid. Rather, he foretells that the people will no longer repeat the proverb in Israel (Ezek. 18:3). While one could interpret this to mean that YHWH has rejected the notion of collective accountability and changed his own nature to promote individual accountability, this is not the plain sense meaning of the text. YHWH is not the one who will change, according to Ezekiel’s prophecy (cf. Ezek. 18:25, 29). The people will change; they will stop repeating the sour grapes

proverb. The simple meaning of this prophecy, then, is that the people, who have, it is to be hoped, acknowledged their own shortcomings and resolved to mend their relationship with YHWH, will no longer blame their ancestors for their suffering by repeating the proverb. In other words, they will no longer use collective accountability as an explanation for their suffering. This does not necessitate that YHWH cease to be a deity who exercises collective accountability.

Most commentators understand Jeremiah and Ezekiel's quotation of this proverb to reflect the proverb's historical currency among their respective audiences.<sup>465</sup> That the survivors of the Babylonian campaigns against Judah and Jerusalem pithily and poetically described themselves as suffering for the sins of their ancestors is proved by Lam. 5:7 ("Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, but we bear their iniquities."), but this is not what the prophets quote.

A proverb, like the one quoted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, will often draw upon observations from the natural world to support the logic of its pithy argument (for example, Prov. 10:26, 11:22, 14:4, 20:2, 23:32, 25:12, 25:16, 25:18, 26:11, 27:17). The proverb relies on logic and observation of fact rather than divine origins for its authority. If the image depicted by the proverb is illogical or does not accurately reflect reality, the proverb does not prove its point. If a proverb distorts reality, then the interpreter must investigate what effect such a distortion achieves.

The sour grapes proverb used by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel depicts a physiologically impossible situation, yet presents it, in proverbial form, as an observation

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<sup>465</sup> Gilbert Nwadinobi Alaribe, *Ezekiel 18 and the Ethics of Responsibility: A Study in Biblical Interpretations and Christian Ethics*, *Arbeiten Zu Text Und Sprache Im Alten Testament* 77. Bd (St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 2006), 137–140. Alex Varughese, *Jeremiah 26-52: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, *New Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City, Mo: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010), 147.

of reality.<sup>466</sup> A father's ingestion of any food cannot have an effect on the teeth or taste receptors of his offspring. As will be discussed below, the proverb is a complaint uttered by the sinner's children who perceive that they have suffered for someone else's wrongdoing.<sup>467</sup> The absurdity of the metaphor, children suffering dental harm because of their parents' grape consumption, emphasizes that the wrong person suffers the effect of the original action.<sup>468</sup> While Israelite communities did in fact complain that the suffering they endured was punishment for their ancestors' sins (Lam. 5:7, the Deuteronomistic Historian's explanation for the fall of Jerusalem), one must question whether their complaints actually took the form of this nonsensical proverb. Is it perhaps possible that the prophet(s) devised this proverb in order to create a subtly criticized caricature of the Israelites' complaint that their suffering was unmerited? In other words, the prophets are paraphrasing the people's claims of unjust suffering by using a proverb that appeals to the natural world in order to underscore its logic; yet the reality that it depicts is distorted, and thus the people are forced to reflect on the illogical nature of their complaint.

An ancient Near Eastern example of a similar phenomenon may help to understand the subtlety of Jeremiah and Ezekiel's use of what seems to be a caricature of a circulating proverb like Lam. 5:7, or some similar line of thinking. In the

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<sup>466</sup> In the Targum of Ezekiel, the translator does not render the proverb literally but rather paraphrases it without retaining the metaphorical language: "The fathers sinned and the sons suffer." Although this transformation does not radically alter the meaning of the proverb, it does raise the question why the translator would make this substitution. Did the translator perhaps recognize the faulty logic to which the proverb appeals and so render it in a more straightforward fashion?

<sup>467</sup> *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed, The Anchor Bible v. 22 (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1983), 328.

<sup>468</sup> A more logically compelling proverb would be, "The parents gathered sour grapes; the children's teeth are set on edge." Compare with the Chinese proverb, "One generation plants the trees, and another gets the shade." Although this proverb deals with intergenerational reward rather than punishment, the example that it draws upon to support its argument matches, rather than distorts, reality.



propagandistic Persian Verse Account of Nabonidus, the Babylonian king is depicted as boasting about his wisdom:

He would stand in the assembly (and) exalt him[self] (as follows): ‘I am wise. I am knowledgeable. I have seen hid[den things]. I do not know a tablet (made by) a cut-reed stylus (*i.e.*, cuneiform writing), (but) I have seen se[cret things]. Ilteri has given me revelations; he has [made known to me] everything. As for (the series) Uskaru Anu Enlil, which Adapa compiled, I surpass it in all wisdo[m].’<sup>469</sup>

Believing it to be an actual Babylonian astronomical collection, scholars had long grappled over the proper translation and referent of the cryptic title, “Uskaru Anu Enlil.” However, as Machinist and Tadmor have proposed, the title is more likely an invented one for a series that never existed; it is a play on the astronomical collection *Enuma Anu Enlil*.<sup>470</sup> The author of the text criticizes the illiterate Nabonidus’s pretensions to wisdom. By putting a boast of having greater wisdom than a nonsensical source of learning into the mouth of the illiterate king, the author pokes fun at the king’s ignorance of important sources of understanding, like *Enuma Anu Enlil*. Similarly, Jeremiah and Ezekiel’s placing of the satirical sour grapes proverb in the mouths of their audiences subtly suggests that their complaints are invalid; their suffering is not unjust.

As previously mentioned in the discussion of Jeremiah in the introduction to this chapter, the prophets’ reject this proverb because the attitude that it encapsulates exculpates the sufferer from having played any role in his suffering. For Jeremiah and Ezekiel, this is not a productive attitude to encourage people to reform their ways. So long as they can blame someone else for their suffering, they have no motive to do

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<sup>469</sup> This translation of the Persian Verse Account of Nabonidus 8-13 follows Peter Machinist and Hayim Tadmor, “Heavenly Wisdom,” in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg. (Bethesda, Md: CDL Press, 1993), 146.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–150.

anything to change their situation or their relationship with God. Admittedly, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel seem to express solidarity with the complaint of the people by rejecting the proverb. Their critique is subtle enough that it allows the prophets to make their audience feel accepted in their feelings of injustice.<sup>471</sup> Ezekiel, for example, words his rejection of the proverb very carefully. He does not state that the proverb is not true or invalid; nor does he state that God's nature has changed. Rather, he states that the people will no longer use the proverb: "No longer will you repeat this proverb in Israel" (*'im-yihyeh lākem 'ōd m'šōl hammāšāl hazzeh b'yiśrā'el*) (Ezek. 18:3b). Ezekiel redirects his audience's frustrations by describing what will happen when they accept his message of repentance and loyalty to God. Namely, the people of Israel will stop blaming their ancestors for their suffering and focus instead on acting in a manner that will put them in good standing with God. This does not necessitate that their ancestors not be blameworthy, just that the people will no longer focus on bygone generations whose deeds they cannot change as the source of their anguish.

The sour grapes proverb, as Levinson has noted, is secular; in contrast to Exodus 34:6-7, which also deals with the issue of intergenerational punishment, the proverb does not mention God. The prophets, then, do not deny that God can punish intergenerationally by rejecting an illogical proverb. Rather, they are denying that the people are suffering for the sins of another. The people's suffering is not evidence of injustice, divine or otherwise. God's ways are just (Ezek. 18:25, 29); it is the people's own actions that have produced their current predicament.

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<sup>471</sup> Contrast this position with that taken by Job's comforters, who reject outright his claim to innocent suffering and thereby elicit only greater protestations from the righteous sufferer.

One major function of intergenerational punishment in wisdom literature is to validate divine justice. Job challenges the conventional wisdom that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Righteous and bereft of his children, he has observed that the wicked prosper and are blessed with many children. One defense proffered by Job's friends to the sufferer's critique of theodicy is that the prosperity and abundant offspring of the wicked are only temporary. Although they may have many children, they die violent deaths and suffer negative consequences (Job 18:15-21). This solution, offered to Job whose own children have been robbed of life, strikes the modern reader as ironic because it attempts to placate the innocent sufferer with the promise of innocent suffering for the children of the wicked. Ben Sira also responds to critics of God's justice by using the promise of intergenerational punishment looming over the children of the wicked, who otherwise seem to be prospering (Sir. 40:15, 41:5-10). What the sages know of YHWH's nature from revelation dovetails with observed reality (the children of wrongdoers are part of a cycle of violence) to provide a solution, albeit not satisfying to sufferers like Job, to the problem of prosperous sinners. The perspective here is from that of the outsider looking in on what bad things befall the sinful father. Job, his comforters, and Ben Sira are unconcerned with the injustice of the children suffering for their father's sins. For them, the suffering of children is evidence of justice, of punishment for the wicked. Freed from the prophetic contexts that challenge its validity, the sour grapes proverb does not provide support for the contention that YHWH is just. For the one allegedly citing this proverb or expressing a similar sentiment (i.e. Lam. 5:7), YHWH is not merely a midwife, *a la Koch*, in the operation of retributive justice. Rather, YHWH interferes with the natural order of the universe, a reality in which it is impossible for

children to experience any physical effects from their parents' dietary choices, to exercise retribution. Unlike the use of intergenerational punishment in Israel's wisdom books, the proverb that Jeremiah and Ezekiel quote seems to suggest that God is unjust.

Very frequently when Israel's sages mention intergenerational punishment, they use it as a pedagogical tool to persuade their students to avoid behavior and attitudes that will have far-reaching and long-lasting repercussions (i.e., Prov. 15:27, Job 15:28-35, Sir. 23:24-27). The sages' audiences were concerned about the preservation of their lineages in order to secure the closest thing to immortality that this ephemeral world has to offer. The threat of intergenerational punishment was therefore an effective deterrent to committing sins or otherwise straying from the advice of the teacher. The sage concerns himself not with the perspective of the innocently suffering children, but rather with the father (or future father), who has the power to choose not to sin, and thus to shield his children from any negative consequences.

In its context within Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the sour grapes proverb does not discourage sin by pointing out the magnitude of that sin's reverberations on the sinner's family. Rather, the proverb is a complaint uttered by the sinner's children who perceive that they have suffered for someone else's wrongdoing.<sup>472</sup> The unnatural nature of the metaphor, which depicts a physiologically impossible situation upon which the proverb bases its logic, emphasizes that the sufferer is innocent; the children have not eaten any sour grapes, yet it is their teeth that are set on edge. The prophets' proverb, then, addresses the suffering children, not the sinful fathers, as the authors of Israel's wisdom books did. As a complaint from the perspective of the suffering children, the proverb is

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<sup>472</sup> *Ezekiel 1-20*, 328.

not terribly useful to the sage. While he can instruct a father (or future father) to conduct himself so as not to bring bad consequences upon his children, his wisdom offers little value to the innocent sufferer who played no role in the curse he has incurred and has no power to avert the consequences of his father's actions (note the case of Job, the righteous sufferer who takes no comfort in the words of his comforters). If one were to understand the sour grapes proverb as a genuine piece of folk wisdom and not a prophetic tool for satirizing the audience's complaint, its origins cannot lie among collections of instructions offered by a teacher to his pupil.

Thus, Jeremiah and Ezekiel challenge a widespread belief that the people of Judah were suffering for the sins of their ancestors by satirizing and rejecting a proverb that is theologically useless both for prophetic purposes (i.e. exhorting people to turn to God and to reform their ways) and for sapiential purposes (i.e. instructing students to avoid behaviors that have wide-ranging consequences). Although Exodus 34:6-7 and the sour grapes proverb present a major theological problem involving innocent suffering, both the prophets and the sages find the perspective of the innocent sufferers, that is, the children of the wicked, to be useless for their objectives.<sup>473</sup> Acknowledging or explaining the merits of innocent suffering cannot help them in their mission to empower their audiences to lead moral and virtuous lives.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 146. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 337–338. According to Adamiak, similar motivations inform the tendency to emphasize individual accountability in the Book of Deuteronomy (i.e. Deut. 7:9-10, 29:15-20). The generation entering the land would construe the wilderness generation's numerous sins as crippling their ability to succeed in the land through their own acts of covenant faithfulness. Richard Adamiak, *Justice and History in the Old Testament* (Cleveland: John T. Zubal, 1982), 65–66.

<sup>474</sup> Levinson suggests that Ezekiel offers a sophisticated critique of Exod. 34:6-7 by rejecting a proverb of human origin instead of YHWH's own self-description. I think the prophet is in fact offering a sophisticated critique of the people's complaint that allows him to appeal to their concerns about the

While the proverb cited by Jeremiah and Ezekiel expresses a sentiment similar to that of Exodus 34:6-7, one notable difference between the two is, as I have noted, the secular nature of the former.<sup>475</sup> The proverb, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” makes no mention of YHWH or his role in the suffering of children for the sins of their parents. By contrast, Exodus 34:6-7 makes clear that exercising intergenerational punishment is a part of YHWH’s very nature. Many references to collective punishment in Israel’s wisdom tradition do not directly implicate God as responsible for the intergenerational effects of a father’s sins. In light of Koch’s thesis that God acts as a midwife to justice in a universe ordered by the act-consequence model, God’s role in all collective accountability would appear to be only indirect.<sup>476</sup> Although, if one understands that God created and ordered the universe in this manner, then God is ultimately, albeit indirectly, responsible for the consequences that any given act produces. According to Collins,

The merit of Koch’s observations lies in noting the impersonal character of this system, whether one refers to it as retribution or not. While Yahweh is undoubtedly personal, his personality does not modify the order of justice. We do not read in Proverbs of a God who ‘repents’ or has mercy. The ‘retribution’ of Yahweh can also be expressed in impersonal terms as the consequence of human acts. The sages perceive no tension between the impersonal character of this order and their belief in a personal God, but their explicit starting point is human experience, not mythological formulations of an anthropomorphic God, or special revelations. The sages identified God in their perception of the order of the universe but they retained to a great extent the impersonal formulation

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injustice of intergenerational punishment without denying the truth of YHWH’s revealed nature in Exod. 34:6-7. Levinson, “The Human Voice,” 53.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 52–53. McKane, *Proverbs*, 29–30.

<sup>476</sup> Koch’s thesis, as the upcoming quotation from Collins suggests, is too rigid in its universal application of the system and strict definition of retribution, but otherwise offers a good model by which one can understand the sages’ general understanding of retribution.

of common human experience.<sup>477</sup>

According to divine revelation, the defining attributes of YHWH's personal character are those of mercy and vengeance (Exod. 34:6-7). Yet in a divinely created universe that strictly operates impersonally, there is no room for mercy. Retribution occurs mechanically, and God does not interfere. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapters examining the references to collective accountability in Israel's wisdom literature, Israel's sages do not generally view the exercise of intergenerational punishment as a merciful act of God to intercede for the sinner who would otherwise be wiped out by the natural and ineluctable consequences of his actions. In most cases, the sages rely on observed reality and a need to motivate students to justify the existence of collective accountability; they do not generally appeal to YHWH's character.

Both Fox and Van Leeuwen claim that the repeated use of the familiar expression "will not go unpunished" (*yinnāqeh*) in Proverbs attests to the sage's reliance on the revelation of YHWH's nature and not on reality as he and his forebears have experienced it.<sup>478</sup> The author of Proverbs, of course, alludes to the divine attribute formula not to appeal to YHWH's merciful nature, but rather to validate the continued operation of retribution for sins. Despite the dominance, especially in the earliest wisdom books (i.e., Proverbs), of a mechanical retributive system as envisioned by Koch in Israel's wisdom tradition, the God of the authors of Proverbs,<sup>479</sup> Job,<sup>480</sup> and Qoheleth<sup>481</sup> is capable of

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<sup>477</sup> John Joseph Collins, *Encounters with Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 99.

<sup>478</sup> Van Leeuwen, "The Book of Proverbs," 119. Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 2:539.

<sup>479</sup> The notion of mercy is admittedly hard to find in Proverbs, but 28:13 "accommodates itself to the idea of a compassionate deity." James L. Crenshaw, "The Concept of God in Israelite Wisdom," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and Bernard Brandon Scott (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 4.

mercy.<sup>482</sup> And by the time of Ben Sira, divine compassion emerges as a fairly common theme, even if it does not mitigate the sage's staunch belief in divine retribution (Sir. 51:30).<sup>483</sup> Divine mercy occurs relatively frequently in the Wisdom of Solomon as well. The observation of reality, namely that all of humanity has not been consumed by divine wrath, attests to the existence of mercy. Given the imperfect nature of humanity, no sage can fully subscribe to a system of mechanized retributive justice that is as strict and free from divine interference as the one envisioned by Koch. The natural world teaches this, and revelation confirms it.

The revelation that reveals YHWH's nature as both punishing and merciful is Exodus 34:6-7, which purports to be YHWH's self-description. Yet, Levinson has noted that the formula's reuse in Exodus 20:5-6 draws upon legal ideas that are prominent in international treaties.<sup>484</sup> The notion that a sovereign could inflict punishment upon the children of the person with whom he enters into a treaty occurs in ancient Near Eastern

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<sup>480</sup> For example, Job's friends urge the sufferer to acknowledge his guilt and repent so that he can receive forgiveness, mercy. *Ibid.*, 13. However, as Mettinger has pointed out, in encouraging Job to repent, they are creating a tension between the expectation that Job can receive mercy and their understanding of a God who exercises strict retributive justice, a position that does not allow for mercy. Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 178.

<sup>481</sup> See Eccl. 9:1. For his part, Qoheleth has not "ruled out the possibility that God might smile on humankind." Crenshaw, "The Concept of God in Israelite Wisdom," 6.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>484</sup> For example, "A strikingly similar tri-generational structure occurs in the group of treaties made between the neo-Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon and his eastern vassals in 672 B.C.E. Esarhaddon's intent in the treaty is to ensure his vassals' loyalty to his designated successor, his son Ashurbanipal. One of the concluding series of paragraphs involving curses for disobedience employs such a tri-generational formulation to designate those who are to be obedient to the new suzerain as well as those who are to be requited in the absence of such fealty: 'If, as long as *we, our sons and our grandsons* live, the crown prince designate Ashurbanipal will not be our king and lord, if we place another king, another prince over *ourselves, our sons, our grandsons*—may all the gods mentioned (here) call *us, our offspring, and our descendants*, to account'" (Levinson's translation and italics). Levinson, "The Human Voice," 46.



legal documents.<sup>485</sup> Given that Exodus 34:6-7 is situated within a narrative about the divine promulgation of law and that YHWH's covenantal relationship with the people of Israel has strong parallels to ancient Near Eastern treaty language,<sup>486</sup> Levinson's suggestion is appealing. Israel's sages do not seem to limit their understanding of the phenomenon to a simple truth of divine revelation. The observation of human experiences confirmed for the sages the theology expressed in Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>487</sup>

#### **IV. Summary of Findings**

The preceding discussion of the relationship between two formulaic sayings concerned with the notion of intergenerational punishment found in the Hebrew Bible and their connections to Israel's wisdom tradition has produced several important findings. With respect to Exodus 34:6-7, Israel's wisdom tradition is engaging with this liturgical formula in ways that are familiar from other biblical corpora. They adapt its meaning to fit their own contexts by reusing its terminology. Often, these adaptations overlap with, modify, or disagree with interpretations of the formula found elsewhere in the Bible. YHWH's nature was an important theological issue that interested Israel's sages and prompted them to incorporate their thoughts on it into their teachings.

One important usage of language from the divine attribute formula in Israel's

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>486</sup> Weinfeld has drawn an analogy between grant formula and the promise of rewards to future generations of the grantee. M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970): 184–203, doi:10.2307/598135.

<sup>487</sup> Krasovec proposes this solution as the explanation for the presence of intergenerational punishment in all of the Hebrew Bible, but this claim is not adequately substantiated. For example, the observation of human experience alone cannot explain why Achan's family would suffer for his sin in Joshua 7. To make sense of his family's death, one must rely on notions of holiness and divine wrath. Jože Krašovec, "Is There a Doctrine of 'Collective Retribution' in the Hebrew Bible?," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 65 (1994): 80–83.

wisdom literature is to encourage *imitatio dei*. Just as YHWH is merciful, gracious, patient, and abounding in steadfast love in faithfulness, so too should the sage's pupils aspire to espouse these attributes. However, the sages encourage their students only to emulate those qualities that describe YHWH's mercy. Israel's wisdom literature does not encourage human jealousy of or vengeance against other humans (i.e. Prov. 3:31, 6:34, 14:30, 23:17, 24:1, 24:19, 27:4;<sup>488</sup> Job 5:2; Sir. 9:1, 37:10). Not clearing the guilty is an activity restricted to the divine realm. Wisdom literature nowhere suggests that humans should exercise vengeance or justice in the manner that the attribute formula describes YHWH's vengeance and justice. Deuteronomy 24:16 prohibits the human exercise of intergenerational punishment: "Fathers will not be put to death for their sons and sons will not be put to death for their fathers; each man for his own sin will be put to death" (Deut. 24:16). Israel's wisdom tradition appears to agree with this law. Human jurisprudence and Israelite wisdom both prohibit humans from imitating the punishing aspect of YHWH's personality.

Several scholars have argued that Jeremiah and Ezekiel's challenging of the sour grapes proverb represents an attempt to align divine justice with human justice.<sup>489</sup> Just as humans are restricted from practicing vicarious punishment in their legal systems, humans will no longer complain that the human standard for justice does not match the divine standard. Israel's sages do not appear to support such a shift in the understanding of divine justice. They recognize YHWH as both merciful and vengeful, and they

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<sup>488</sup> Cf. Nah. 1:6; Psa. 76:7.

<sup>489</sup> I follow Kaminsky, who acknowledges that this is the effect of Ezekiel's reuse of language from Deut. 24:16, although he does not believe that this is Ezekiel's intention. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 173. See also Greenberg, "Some Postulates," 1991, 344. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 339.

encourage their students to emulate YHWH's merciful characteristics so as to avoid personally experiencing his vengeful ones. In other words, Israel's wisdom literature does not object to the double standard for human and divine justice. Humans should emulate YHWH's merciful and compassionate characteristics, but intergenerational vengeance belongs exclusively to the divine realm.

The sour grapes proverb quoted by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel reflects the perspective of one who perceives himself to be an innocent sufferer. As the comforters of Job unwittingly demonstrate in their dialogue with the indignant and righteous sufferer, wisdom instructors are not inclined to acknowledge righteous suffering because to do so impedes their ability to teach their students that they possess the power to choose between good and evil, reward and punishment. Without the power to choose righteousness, wisdom instructions are ineffectual. The sour grapes proverb represents the victim's expression of hopelessness and self-pity. If my suggestion that it may be a prophetic paraphrase of a popular complaint is correct, the prophets are suggesting that intergenerational punishment considered from the perspective of the children of the wicked is also an ineffective means of understanding and correcting one's predicament. Examples of collective accountability that appear in Israel's wisdom literature are the sages' tools in validating theodicy and motivating adherence to wisdom instruction in order to preserve one's posterity. The sages do not indiscriminately make use of all folk wisdom that relates to collective accountability; they filter out that which does not suit their context and purpose. Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, they would also probably challenge the sour grapes proverb.

## **Chapter Eight: Summary and Conclusion**

### **I. Introduction**

In light of the previous seven chapters that have attempted to consider the issue of collective accountability in Israel's biblical wisdom tradition in a systematic way, this chapter will attempt to summarize and offer a conclusion to the foregoing analyses. I will integrate into this summary a comparison of the picture of collective accountability found in biblical wisdom literature with its conception in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (II). In order to appreciate the differences among each wisdom's book depiction of collective accountability, I will briefly consider diachronic developments that have emerged from this study of collective accountability in the biblical wisdom tradition (III). In addition to highlighting the major conclusions of this study and their significance for understanding wisdom literature and collective accountability, I will also consider further directions in which this line of research could proceed (IV).

### **II. Summary of Findings**

This study of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom literature has examined each wisdom book on its own so as to avoid flattening the distinctions among the various works. Additionally, this method will allow me to note any diachronic developments in the conception of collective accountability in Israel's biblical wisdom tradition. A summary of my analysis of each book can be found at the conclusion of each book's respective chapter, so I will not reproduce those summaries here. Rather, this summary

will attempt to bring together the analyses of each book so as to consider Israel's wisdom literature as a whole. This approach will allow me to highlight the ways in which the different examples of Israelite wisdom are similar to and yet also different from one another.

The discussion of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom tradition is not limited to any particular terminology, but several trends do emerge in the language used to describe this phenomenon. In the book of Proverbs, and also to some extent in Job, references to the dwelling place (house, abode, tent, etc.) of the wicked or righteous (i.e. Prov. 3:33, 21:20; Job 5:3, 8:22) are common. Plant imagery and metaphors are especially popular in Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon, and Job also makes use of them (Sir. 44:8-13; Wis. 4:3-6; Job 5:3-5). The notion of children as seeds, a plant image found throughout the Hebrew Bible, also appears in the wisdom books (Prov. 11:21; Sir. 44:11). The use of plant imagery to depict human lineages and communities is not, of course, limited to Israel's wisdom tradition. In Deut. 29:17-20, for example, touches on issues of collective accountability through the use of plant imagery (cf. Isa 37:31; Mal 3:19). Although the depiction of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom literature may not align precisely with its depiction in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, Israel's sages nonetheless drew upon familiar biblical terminology in formulating their discussion of it.

As it does in the Hebrew Bible more generally, collective accountability takes many forms in biblical wisdom literature. By far its most common manifestations are as intergenerational punishment and reward. Although the sages normally envision intergenerational accountability as parents producing consequences for the children, the actions of children can also affect parents (i.e., Sir. 22:8). Within the family, the wife's

conduct has consequences not only for her children, but also for her husband (Prov. 12:4). Such examples of collective accountability reflect an acknowledgment of intragenerational accountability by Israel's sages. Most of the wisdom books appear to contain examples of intragenerational reward or punishment (i.e. Prov. 13:20; Job 22:28-30; Sir. 22:13; Wis. 18:20), although this form of collective accountability appears far less frequently than intergenerational reward and punishment.

In general, collective punishment occurs with greater frequency than collective reward. This may suggest a particular sapiential concern to discourage bad behavior or to explain to skeptics that the wicked suffer for their sins even though that suffering may not be immediately apparent. Given that the collective rewards promised to the righteous person are usually distant and vague, it may also be the case that the threat of collective punishment was a more effective motivator than the promise of collective reward. The emphasis on punishment may also reflect the sapiential desire to defend divine justice by claiming that the wicked will eventually suffer for their misdeeds despite their apparent prosperity.

Not every reflection on collective accountability appears to agree that divine retribution can be collective. Although Qoheleth does not accept the notion of divine retribution that is intelligible to humans, the sage appears to be more inclined toward individual accountability (Eccl. 2:18-21, 8:11). Only Job appears to challenge the notion of intergenerational punishment outright (Job 21:19-21), but a closer examination of this passage and Job's statements on this topic as a whole suggests that he seeks only to modify, not completely to reject the concept, so that the sinner suffers personally in addition to the harm that will befall his children after he is dead. Most instances of

rejecting, or favoring individual accountability over, collective accountability occur in the later wisdom books of the Apocrypha that draw upon historical examples familiar from the biblical narrative. Thus, Ben Sira describes famous cases of group punishments in which those (usually just a single individual) who are righteous are spared (Sir. 16:7-11). In the Wisdom of Solomon, the sage rewrites historical accounts of collective accountability so as to deemphasize the collective nature of the original tale and perhaps to promote individual accountability as a means of controlling one's own destiny through righteous behavior (Wis. 10:6-8, 12:10-11, 16:5-9).

The types of crimes meriting collective punishment are general. Whereas in most of the Hebrew Bible collective punishment is limited to cases of covenant infidelity (Deut. 5:9-10),<sup>490</sup> Israel's wisdom literature is often vague about the nature of the sinner's wrongdoing. Collective punishment generally falls upon those associated with the wicked, the sinful, the foolish, or the ungodly (e.g., Prov. 3:33; Job 5:3-5; Sir. 41:5-10; Wis. 3:12). In some cases, specific crimes, like adultery, are mentioned (e.g., Sir. 34:24-27; Wis. 4:3-6), but this is not the general trend. In the case of collective reward, the deeds meriting reward are similarly vague. For example, good things may come to those associated with the righteous, the virtuous, the wise, or the godly (e.g., Prov. 21:20).

The kinds of punishments administered include general suffering like loss of one's wealth or inheritance, the failure of the lineage to prosper, or the cutting off of the line. For Job, Ben Sira, and Wisdom of Solomon, the cutting off of the family line is often depicted metaphorically with plant imagery (e.g., Job 15:28-35; Sir. 40:15; Wis. 3:12-19). Wisdom of Solomon, however, does not emphasize the suffering of the

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<sup>490</sup> Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 344. Levinson, "The Human Voice," 47.

children so much as the suffering endured after death by the sinner himself. Punishment for the sinner includes not only loss of progeny, but also the destruction of the immortal soul, an idea rejected by earlier sages (e.g., Wis. 3:12-19). Both of these concepts, however, suggest the same basic punishment, namely, loss of immortality. For the righteous, collective reward holds the promise of inherited wealth, successful progeny, peace, and security (e.g., Prov. 14:26; Job 5:24-25; Sir. 44:8-13). Essentially, collective rewards ensure one's chance at immortality through a long lineage.

The divine role in executing punishment or rewarding righteousness is not often explicit. Nevertheless, God's role is sometimes mentioned specifically, especially in historical examples (Prov. 3:33; Sir. 47:18-23; Wis. 18:20). In general, the sages observe that collective accountability is part of the way in which the world works. Because Israel's sages understand God to be the creator of the universe, they likely consider God to be the ultimate source of the collective punishments and rewards that are built into the structure of the universe. The Wisdom of Solomon comes closest to expressing explicitly the notion that consequences are built into the structure in the universe in such a way that an individual is the recipient of those actions that he brought upon others (Wis. 11:16; cf. Prov. 17:13). Rather than basing the notion that God exercises collective punishment upon divine revelation as is frequently the case in the Hebrew Bible (see Chapter 7 for the reuse of the revelation of YHWH's character in Exodus 34:6-7), the sages rely upon observed reality.

Israel's sages appear to have numerous motives for using collective accountability in their teachings. For most of the books considered in the previous chapters, the sages do not have solely one purpose that can account for every use of collective



accountability. The simplest motive for some sapiential appearances of collective accountability is dependence upon historical accounts of collective accountability. So, in the case of the depiction of the Canaanites in the Wisdom of Solomon, God's delayed execution of punishment over several generations appears to be an act of mercy (Wis. 12:10-11), albeit one that, at least in the mind of the sage, renders morally acceptable the punishment of a people predetermined to be evil.

In addition to historical memory, the sages who employ collective accountability frequently do so for pedagogical reasons. Through the use of collective accountability, the sage teaches his students that their actions will have long lasting and far-reaching consequences (i.e. Prov. 3:33); actions affect not only the person who sets the consequences in motion, but also his friends (Prov. 13:20) and family (Prov. 14:1), sometimes for generations after him. Whereas the Israelite legal system operates on the principle of *lex talionis*, which limits the punishment of a crime to the same severity of the criminal's offense,<sup>491</sup> the consequences of a person's sin, according to the sage who penned Prov. 17:13, for example, can extend beyond the sinner. This emphasis on the magnitude of an action's ramifications has two functions. First, it discourages wrongdoing and encourages good deeds, which are certainly important objectives for the sage (Sir. 23:24-27, 41:5-10). Second, it also matches observed reality. Although the legal system may place limitations on, for example, the rights of a wronged family to seek vengeance that exceeds the wrong done to its members, such a law exists because it was human nature to want to inflict great hurt on one's enemies. In modern terminology, people often speak of the law of unintended consequences. Israel's sages had observed

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<sup>491</sup> This limitation on punishment applies only to full members of the community. Slaves, for example, are punished according to a different principle.

this phenomenon long before the expression was coined. The individual who seeks to inflict harm on another brings negative consequences upon himself and his family for generations. The use of collective accountability for pedagogical purposes relies upon observed reality to undergird the logic of the sage's argument (Sir. 23:24-27). Collective punishment is not generally meant to indicate divine mercy as it is in many cases in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Num. 14; 1 Kgs. 21; 2 Kgs. 20), but rather to instill a fear of punishment that extends beyond what was expected.

Another major purpose for the use of collective accountability is to vindicate divine justice, a major concern for many of Israel's sages. This purpose is especially popular among Job's comforters (Job 18:15-21), Ben Sira (Sir. 40:15), and the Wisdom of Solomon (Wis. 4:3-6). In response to complaints, like that of Job (Job 21:19-21), that God's punishment does not seem to fall upon the wicked, some of Israel's sages claimed that God achieved justice by punishing the children of the wicked. By describing the punishment that befalls the children of the wicked, sages like Job's comforters and Ben Sira emphasize the emotional distress inflicted upon the original sinner who must witness or anticipate the misfortunes that will befall his children (Job 18:15-21, 27:14-15; Sir. 41:5-10). These assurances that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous appear at times to be based on lived experience (Job 20:21). The depiction of collective accountability here is vindictive, not merciful.

To some extent, especially in allusions to specific biblical examples of collective accountability, Israel's sages do rely upon revelation as a source for their understanding of collective accountability. In such cases (e.g., Wis. 18:21-25), it is clear that notions of contagious divine wrath or the divine nature may help to inform the sage's use of

collective accountability. However, this, in general, dovetails with reality as the sage has observed it. The observation of patterns in actions and consequences taught the sages that when the consequence of a sin boomerangs back to the original sinner, it often hits not only the sinner but also his associates. Whereas the depiction of collective accountability in the Hebrew Bible more generally may originate in the sphere of lawgiving or international treaties, the notion of a God who exercises collective punishment relies heavily on a pragmatic understanding of the divinely created universe and its impersonal operation (i.e. Sir. 22:13, 37:12).

None of Israel's wisdom books presents a straightforward and unambiguous position on the issue of divine determinism vs. human free will. This lack of clarity enables collective accountability to be used to vindicate theodicy. From the perspective of the survivors of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the fate of Judah was a consequence of its former leaders and inhabitants and was thus an unfair punishment of the generation that endured punishment for its ancestors' sins. This innocent suffering caused people to challenge God's justice. However, if the children who suffer negative consequences for the deeds of their parents are innately wicked themselves, then the problem of innocent suffering dissipates because the sufferers are not innocent. The question then arises to what extent wisdom can empower an individual to overcome the curses of his ancestors (Sir. 41:5-10). Because the purpose of wisdom literature is to empower students to choose good and reject evil, biblical wisdom must acknowledge the capability of the children of the wicked to avoid sin and punishment (Sir. 15:14-17). Nevertheless, Israel's sages simultaneously acknowledge the limits of their wisdom (Job 28:13) for certain kinds of people (Prov. 9:7-9; Job 11:12, 30:1-8, 14:4-6). None of

Israel's wisdom books provides a satisfactory answer to the question of how the suffering of the innocent children of the wicked proves God's justice because they are in general not concerned with the perspective of the innocent children. They aim to instruct the parents of those children to make choices that will produce the best possible outcomes. Israel's sages likely never meant for their doctrine of collective accountability to be examined from the perspective of the child. The feelings of the children of the wicked are mostly irrelevant for the sage's purposes.

The sour grapes proverb quoted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel reverses the sapiential method of ignoring the perspective of the suffering children. The proverb emphasizes through its distortion of reality that the children suffer wrongly. In my understanding of the prophetic use of this proverb, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are subtly criticizing the community that considers itself the innocent victim of its forebears. Like Israel's sages and Job's comforters, the two prophets do not consider the fixation on innocent suffering to be a productive means of improving one's current situation.

Although some scholars claim that Jeremiah and Ezekiel are attempting to align divine justice with human justice by quoting the sour grapes proverb,<sup>492</sup> I find it more likely that the prophets, like the sages, appreciated the bifurcated nature of YHWH's character and were comfortable reserving the exercise of vengeance and collective punishment to YHWH alone. Such attributes do not belong to humans (i.e. Prov. 3:31, 6:34, 14:30, 23:17, 24:1, 24:19, 27:4,<sup>493</sup> Job 5:2; Sir. 9:1, 37:10), although Israel's sages

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<sup>492</sup> I follow Kaminsky, who acknowledges that this is the effect of Ezekiel's reuse of language from Deut. 24:16, although he does not believe that this is Ezekiel's intention. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, 173. See also Greenberg, "Some Postulates," 1991, 344. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 339.

<sup>493</sup> Cf. Nah. 1:6; Psa. 76:7.

did encourage their students to emulate YHWH's gracious and merciful qualities. In this respect, the sages agree with Israel's legal texts (Deut. 24:16) about the human exercise of vicarious punishment. While the divinely created universe may bring about unintended consequences for wrongdoers, humans should not.

Israel's sages were very much concerned with understanding the divine nature, but not necessarily imitating every aspect of it. Nevertheless, even when aspects of YHWH's personality were not useful as a model for student behavior, Israel's sages still applied them to their lessons in order to discourage wrongdoing.

### **III. Diachronic Developments in the Depiction of Collective Accountability in Israel's Biblical Wisdom Tradition**

In order to trace diachronic developments in the depiction of collective accountability in Israel's biblical wisdom tradition, one must first establish the dating and sequence of the books that constitute this literary tradition. For some wisdom books, a consensus has emerged, but for others, the books' historical periods of composition continue to stir up controversy among scholars.<sup>494</sup> It is not the purpose of this study to end the debate concerning the dating of Israel's wisdom books. However, it is necessary to establish what dates are accepted for each book so that changes in the depiction of collective accountability can be correlated to historical changes.

Because of their composite nature, the dating of many of Israel's biblical wisdom books is complex. Additionally, the oral origins of some of the most common forms of wisdom (for example, the proverb) complicate any attempt to date a wisdom book and its

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<sup>494</sup> For example, in his commentary on Job, Marvin Pope analyzes the wide range of dates proposed by interpreters and scholars and concludes, "The date of the Book of Job, then, is still an open question and will remain so until more convincing arguments can be given for assigning it to any given century." Pope, *Job*, XL.

contents. The sages of both Proverbs and Job likely drew upon pre-exilic sources and traditions, but the final form of each book probably emerged in the post-exilic era, probably not later than the Persian period (539-332 BCE).<sup>495</sup> These books are followed by Qoheleth in the Hellenistic period (third century BCE),<sup>496</sup> then Ben Sira in the early part of the second century BCE before 180 BCE,<sup>497</sup> and finally the Wisdom of Solomon in the first century CE.<sup>498</sup> The order of chapters two through six of this study follows the chronological sequence of these wisdom books.

As all of Israel's wisdom books reflect some level of post-exilic composition and editing, a trend already present in the concept of collective accountability in the Hebrew Bible more generally manifests itself in the wisdom tradition as well. Whereas collective punishment originally represents an act of divine mercy in the earliest biblical episodes, those who have suffered through the trauma of exile and considered themselves the victims of their ancestors' sins no longer associate collective punishment with mercy. Israel's sages also do not generally understand collective punishment as merciful, but their position is not centered on the innocent victims of collective punishment. Rather, they use collective punishment as a pedagogical tool to scare (future) parents from behaving in a way that will bring negative consequences upon their lineages.

The other major diachronic trends in the sapiential depiction of collective accountability reflect developments within the wisdom tradition itself. For example, the

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<sup>495</sup> Fox, *Proverbs*, 2009, 1:6. Habel, *The Book of Job*, 42.

<sup>496</sup> However, note that some commentators consider the book to be earlier. Seow places it in the fifth to fourth centuries BCE. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 18C: 38.

<sup>497</sup> Di Lella and Skehan, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, 10.

<sup>498</sup> Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 20–25. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age*, 178–179.

sage of the Wisdom of Solomon does not rely on the promise of collective punishment alone as assurance that the wicked will suffer eventually. He also draws upon the notion of an incorruptible soul (Wis. 3:12-19) to augment his argument about future suffering for the children of the wicked, an argument that he shares in common with both Job (for example, Job 15:28-35) and Ben Sira (for example, Sir. 41:5-10).

Furthermore, one notes in both Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon an increased use of historical examples of collective accountability. Many of the occurrences of collective accountability in these books are historical allusions. This reflects a greater emphasis on scripture in Israel's wisdom tradition generally. While historical references to biblical tradition in the earlier books, like Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth, are so vague that they are usually barely visible, both Ben Sira and Wisdom of Solomon frequently draw upon biblical figures and narratives to support their teachings. These historical remembrances at times reinterpret the original biblical narratives and their statements on collective accountability.

#### **IV. Concluding Thoughts**

This study of collective accountability in Israel's wisdom literature has produced a couple of important findings that will nuance our understanding of both wisdom literature and collective accountability. Firstly, this study fills a gap in the scholarship of collective accountability, which does not include any systematic study of the phenomenon in wisdom literature. Secondly, although scholars often consider wisdom literature to be individualistic, more so than any other part of the Hebrew Bible, this study has demonstrated that collective notions were both important for and useful to

Israel's sages. The impact of an individual's actions affected those surrounding him and those following him. The longevity of an individual's lineage was threatened by sin, yet secured through good deeds.

In addition to the major findings mentioned above, this study has also produced other noteworthy observations. Collective accountability in Israel's wisdom literature shares much in common with its depiction in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, but also manifests some significant differences (see section II of this chapter above for a fuller discussion). In the biblical wisdom tradition, collective accountability appears as both intergenerational and intragenerational accountability. The divine exercise of this type of punishment is not always explicit, but it is unlikely that the sage envisions the consequences experienced by the children of a sinner to be human jurisprudence. Its primary power for the sage is not explanatory (as it is for historians, like that of the Deuteronomistic History, reflecting on the past to explain the present), but rather pedagogical. The threat of long-lasting repercussions for sin discouraged wrongdoing and encouraged good deeds. The sage focused on helping his students produce a good future, not explaining current suffering as the result of the past. Nevertheless, the sage draws upon observations of the past to distill a universal truth about actions and their far-reaching consequences. Although several stories of the Hebrew Bible reflect on the innocence of the suffering children (David and Bathsheba's son), Israel's sages are largely silent on the children's perspective. In this respect, one might expect collective punishment to function as an act of mercy as it was likely originally conceived (Exod. 34:6-7), but this is not the case. Collective punishment generally functions as a threat, not a promise of mercy.



Future studies of collective accountability in wisdom literature promise to shed light on questions left unanswered by this study. For example, a comparison of the results of this study of Israel's wisdom tradition with the wisdom literature of other ancient Near Eastern societies could help to advance our understanding of why this concept appears in a body of literature that for so long has been considered to be highly individualistic. Determining whether collective accountability exists in the wisdom literature of other ancient Near Eastern cultures would help to understand if Israel's biblical wisdom tradition is aberrational in this respect, and, if so, what significance that has for its concept of the individual vs. the collective, *mutatis mutandis*, versus the wisdom literature of other ancient Near East societies.

As I hope this study has made clear, collective accountability appears in many shapes and forms, serves multiple functions, and originates from diverse spheres. Future studies of collective accountability would benefit greatly from an attempt to treat and define these various facets of collective accountability, as well as their interrelations, systematically. One especially promising avenue of study involves the rabbinic concept of the merit of the fathers. This concept may have some relationship to the presence of collective reward in the Hebrew Bible, and an exploration of its precise definition, function, and origin could help to shed new light on the diachronic developments in concepts of collective accountability in ancient Israel.

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