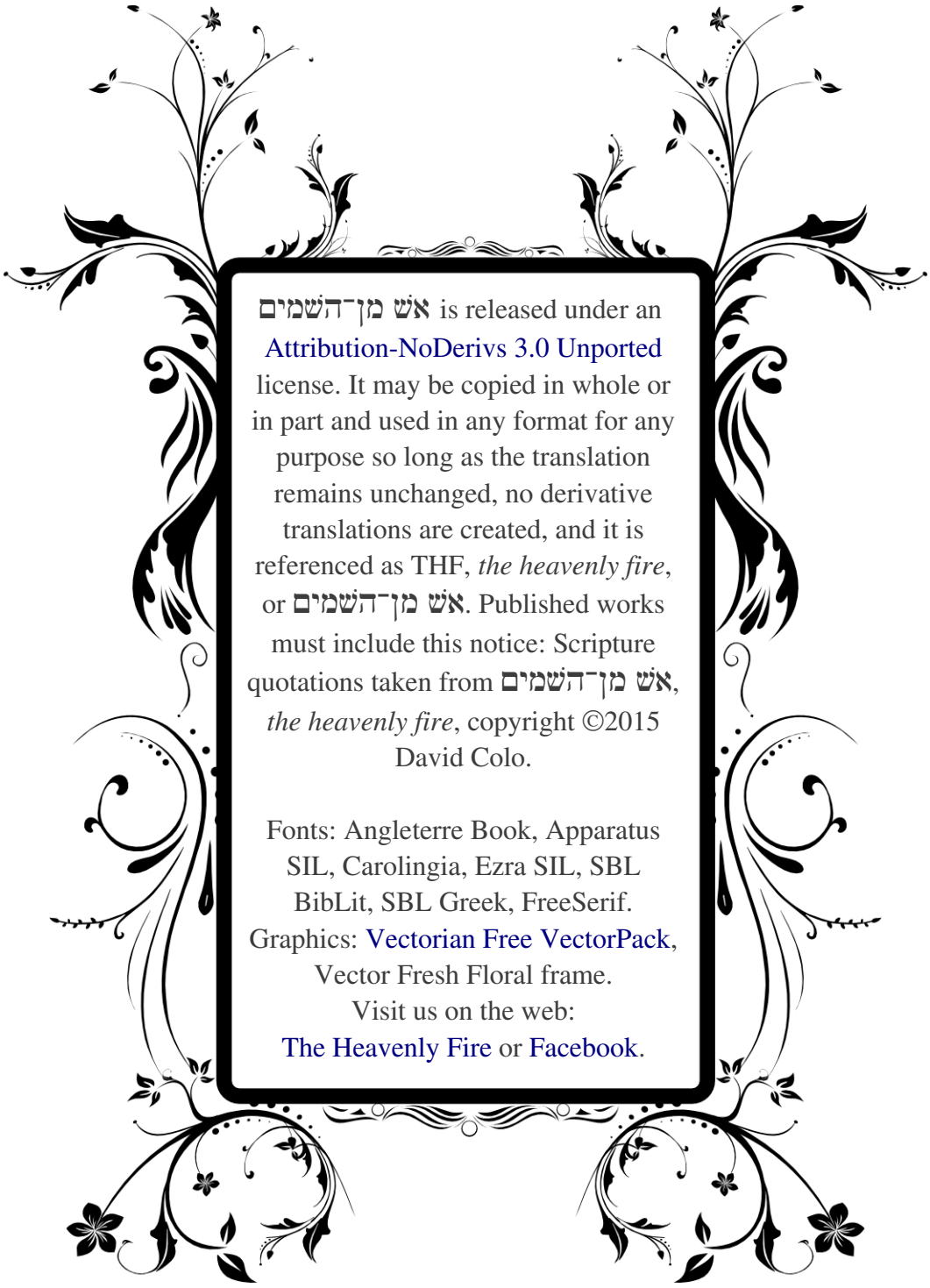


אש מן-השמים
the heavenly fire



בן סירא
Ben Sira

David Colo



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INTRODUCTION

NAMES AND TERMINOLOGY

1. Of The Translation

“Isn't it true [that] my word [is] like fire,” proclaims YHWH,
 “and like hammer, shatters stone?”
 —Jer 23:29

אש מן־השמים (*’ēš min-haššāmayim*) translates as “the fire from heaven” or, more simply, “**the heavenly fire**” (THF). Such language is drawn from theophanic imagery, which likens the presence of YHWH to various manifestations of fire, and from an ancient Jewish conception of YHWH's word as fire. Early Rabbinic tradition equated the fire that descended from heaven on Sinai with scripture itself. This can be seen, for instance, in the following midrash, which uses a word-play to phonetically link “Torah” (תּוֹרָה) with “its flame” (אִוֶּרָה): “*Because YHWH descended upon it in fire* (Exod 19:18). This shows that the Torah [is] fire, was given from fire, and is comparable to fire. . . . One can do nothing but warm himself [with] its flame” (*Mek. Bahodesh* 4).

2. Of The Text

Sigla and Abbreviations

Ⲯ	Septuagint: Old Greek
Ⲯ ^s	Septuagint: Codex Sinaiticus
Ⲯ ^A	Septuagint: Codex Alexandrinus
Ⲯ ^B	Septuagint: Codex Vaticanus
2Q18	Qumran Cave 2 Ben Sira Fragments (50-1 BC)
11Q5	Qumran Cave 11 Psalms Scroll (AD 1-50)
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud tractate
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah tractate
<i>y.</i>	Jerusalem Talmud tractate
AB	Anchor Bible Commentary
DSS	Dead Sea Scroll(s)
GI	The First Greek Version ¹
GII	The Expanded Greek Version ²
MAS	Masada Scroll of Ben Sira (AD 1-50)
MS(S)	Manuscript(s)
MS A	Cairo Genizah MS (11 th Century)
MS B	Cairo Genizah MS (12 th Century)
MS C	Cairo Genizah MS (10 th Century)
MS D	Cairo Genizah MS (11 th Century)
MS E	Cairo Genizah MS (not dated)
MS F	Cairo Genizah MS (not dated)
NABRE	New American Bible (Revised Edition)
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

Meaning

Historical Stuff

Form and Genre

The Wisdom of the Sage

	Chapter I	§ ³	Variant Apparatus
GI	¹ All wisdom [is] from the Lord, ⁴ and with him, it exists perpetually. ⁵ ² The sand of seas, and drops of rain, and days of antiquity, ⁶ who can count? ³ The height of heaven, and width of earth, and depth of the deep, ⁷ who can trace? ⁴ Before everything, wisdom was created. The understanding of prudence [comes] from ancient times.		² [days] ט ⁿ = the day ³ [depth of the deep] ט ⁿ / A / B = the deep and wisdom
GII	(⁵ The spring ⁸ of Wisdom [is] the word of God in the highest [regions], and her channels, the perpetual commandments.)		
GI	⁶ The source ⁹ of Wisdom, to whom was it revealed? And her private places, ¹⁰ who is intimate [with them]? ¹¹		
GII	(⁷ The knowledge of Wisdom, to whom was it manifest? And her extensive experience, ¹² who has understood [it]?)		
GI	⁸ Only one is wise, extremely awesome, ¹³ sitting on his throne: the Lord. ¹⁴ ⁹ [It is] he who created her. ¹⁵ He saw her and proclaimed her. ¹⁶ He poured her out on all his works— ¹⁰ upon all flesh—according to one's portion, ¹⁷ but supplied her [abundantly] to his devotees. ¹⁸		
GII	(insert here)		
GI	¹¹ The fear of the Lord [is] glory, and pride, and gladness, and a crown of rejoicing. ¹² The fear of the Lord will cheer the heart. It will give gladness, joy, and long life.		

- ¹³ Whoever fears the Lord,
it will be well at the end,
on the day of one's death,
such will be blessed.
- ¹⁴ The beginning of wisdom
is fearing the Lord.
And with the faithful in the womb,
she was created with them.
- ¹⁵ Among humans,
a lasting foundation she constructed.
And among their offspring,
she will be trusted.
- ¹⁶ An abundance of wisdom
is fearing the Lord.
She intoxicates them with her fruits.
- ¹⁷ Their whole house,
she will make full of pleasant things
and their storehouses from her produce.
- ¹⁸ A crown of wisdom
[is] the fear of the Lord,
sprouting peace and safe healing.
- ¹⁹ {He saw and enumerated her.}¹⁹
Knowledge and the understanding of insight,
she rained
and the glory of those who took hold of her,
she exalted.
- ²⁰ The root of wisdom [is] fearing the Lord
and her branches [are] long life.²⁰
- ²² Unjust wrath will not be able to do justice
because the weight of its wrath
[is] its own downfall.
- ²³ Until the right time,
a patient person will withstand
and after, gladness will give [back] to him.
- ²⁴ Until the right time,
he will hide his words
and the lips of many
will describe his understanding.

²⁵ In the treasuries of wisdom
are knowledgeable proverbs.
But an abomination to the sinner [is] piety.

Chapter 2 ב²¹

Chapter 3 ג

6 ...who honors his mother.

8 My son,
with [both] word and deed,
honor your father
so that every blessing²² may²³

Chapter 4 ד

Chapter 5 ה

Chapter 6 ו

20 Hazardous [is] she to a fool

Chapter 7 ז

Chapter 8 ח

Chapter 9 ט

Chapter 10 י

Chapter 11 י"א

Chapter 12 י"ב

Chapter 13 י"ג

Chapter 14 י"ד

Chapter 15 י"ה

Chapter 16 י"ו

Chapter 17 י"ז

Chapter 18 י"ח

Chapter 19 י"ט

Chapter 20 כ

Chapter 21 כ"א

Chapter 22 כ"ב

Chapter 23 כ"ג

Chapter 24 כ"ד²⁴

¹ Wisdom will praise her self
and in the midst of her people, boast.

² In the assembly of the High One,
her mouth, she will open,
and in the presence of his power, boast.

³ "I from the mouth of the High One, proceeded,
and like mist, covered earth.

the heavenly fire

⁴ I, in a high place, dwelled,
and my throne [was] in a pillar of cloud.
⁵ The circle of heaven, I alone encompassed,
and in the deep of the abyss, I walked.
⁶ On the waves of the sea, in all the earth,
and in every race and nation, I am purchased.
⁷ With all these, I sought a resting-place.
Yet, in what sort of inheritance will I dwell?
⁸ Then the Creator of Everything commanded me,
and my Creator settled my tent and said,
“In Jacob, make a home.
In Israel, take possession.”
⁹ Before antiquity, from the beginning,
he established me
so that I should not fail—not ever.
¹⁰ In the holy tent, before him, I served,
and so in Zion, I was established.
¹¹ In the loved city also, he settled me,
and in Jerusalem [was] my dominion.
¹² And I was rooted in a glorified people,
in the portion of the Lord, his inheritance.
¹³ Like a cedar, I was raised up in Lebanon,
like a cypress on Mount Hermon.
¹⁴ Like a palm tree, I was raised up in En Gedi
like rose bushes in Jericho.
Like a beautiful olive-tree in the field,
like a plane tree, I was raised up.
¹⁵ Like cassia and camel thorn of spices,
I gave an aroma.
And like chosen myrrh,
I gave out fragrance.
Like ? and ? and ?,
like the fume of frankensense in a tent.
¹⁶ I stretched out my branches like a terebinth,
my branches of glory and grace.
¹⁷ I sprouted grace like a vine.
My flowers [were] fruit of glory and wealth.
¹⁹ Come to me, those who desire me,

and from my produce, be satisfied.
²⁰ Because the memory of me
[is] beyond sweet honey,
my inheritance [is] beyond honeycomb.
²¹ Those who eat me will still hunger,
and those who drink me will still thirst.
²² Whoever follows me will not be shamed,
and those who work with me will not sin.
²³ All these things [are] the book of the covenant
of God Supernal,
the Law that Moses commanded us,
an inheritance for the synagogues of Jacob.
²⁵ He fills wisdom like Pishon
and like Tigris in days of new [things].
²⁶ He fills up with understanding like Euphrates
and like Jordan in days of harvest.
²⁷ He reveals instruction like light,
like Gihon in days of gathering.
²⁸ The first [man] did not finish knowing her
and so the last will not trace her.
²⁹ For her thinking was filled because of the sea
and her advise because of the great abyss.
³⁰ And I [was] like a channel from a stream,
and like a conduit I emerged into paradise.
31
32
33
34

Chapter 25	כה
Chapter 26	כו
Chapter 27	כז
Chapter 28	כח
Chapter 29	כט

Chapter 30	ל	Chapter 37	לז
Chapter 31	לא	Chapter 38	לח
Chapter 32	לב	Chapter 39	לט
Chapter 33	לג	Chapter 40	מ
Chapter 34	לד	Chapter 41	מא
Chapter 35	לה	Chapter 42	מב
Chapter 36	לו	Chapter 43	מג

TRANSLATION NOTES



- 1 Generally represented by S^A , S^B , S^* , and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus.
- 2 The readings of the expanded Greek version do not occur in any single manuscript. Most are contained in two recensions of Septuagint manuscripts: the Lucianic and Hexaplaric. The Hexaplaric recension is represented by, for instance, the Syro-Hexapla and the Old Latin.
- 3 Though originally Hebrew, this chapter is only extant in Greek (or other) translations. See also ch. 2. The Prologue by Ben Sira's son is not included since it was not part of the original Hebrew text.
- 4 The Greek uses $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\sigma$ (lord/master/sir/owner) in place of numerous Hebrew names and titles such as El, Elohim, YHWH, and My Sovereign. Since no Hebrew text is extant, the original name or title is unknown. We, therefore, follow the Greek.
- 5 If we were following the Greek more closely, we would render this something like “into the age.” Typically, however, the phrase $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\nu\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\alpha$ is used to render the Hebrew expression לעלם (forever/perpetually).
- 6 The same phrase ($\eta\mu\epsilon\rho\alpha\varsigma\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\omicron\varsigma$) is used in S -Deut 32:7 for the Hebrew phrase יְמֹת עוֹלָם . As context makes clear, it does not refer to “eternity” or any point in the future, but to “ancient times” or “days of old.”
- 7 Though all the early and major Greek codices agree that this is “and the abyss and wisdom,” the Old Latin, which precedes them all, says “the depth of the abyss.” Parallelism with the preceding verse argues strongly for its originality. Moreover, the same terminology that occurs in this verse appears in Sir 24:5 to refer to the extent that Lady Wisdom reaches. It is only logical that it has drawn its words directly from this chapter and, therefore, “depth of the abyss” was original. The word “abyss” represents תְּהוֹם (deep) as in S -Gen 1:2.
- 8 Alternatively, “fountain.”
- 9 Literally, “root,” which sometimes refers to one's family or descendants and sometimes refers to the source or foundation of something.
- 10 In Judith 11:8, $\pi\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ is used as a synonym of wisdom or sagacity and its root is often used to render the Hebrew verb עָרַם (to be clever/cunning). So NRSV and NABRE (her subtleties) and NJB (her resourceful ways). NETS (her wondrous feats) is interpretive. The Hebrew, however, is different. $\pi\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon\rho\gamma\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha$ is used in Sira 42:18 in place of an original מַעְרוֹמִים . That word occurs in 2 Chr 28:15 and means “naked ones.” It is, therefore, related to עָרֹם (naked), not עָרוֹם (clever). Context also favors that rendering: 1) Sira 1:6 deals with that which is usually hidden or beyond view, not with cleverness or cunning, 2) a Hebrew verb is employed that often refers to physical intimacy (see next note), and 3) the imagery is related to Bar 3:15, which asks “Who has entered into/taken possession of her treasures/treasures?”, which has little to do with cunning and a lot to do with close relations and special access. Thus, Neubauer's “Glossary of Words” in *The Original Hebrew of a Portion of Ecclesiasticus* defines מַעְרוֹם as “naked place.”

- 11 Literally, “knows.” In Hebrew, the verb “to know” often refers to the intimacy of sexual intercourse. Here, however, it has a more metaphoric sense—understanding the secrets that, like one's private places, are hidden. See previous note.
- 12 NETS renders this “great experience,” which is imprecise since it suggests a value judgment concerning one particular experience and not the totality of Wisdom's experience. NRSV comes close to our rendering with “abundant experience.” NABRE's “resourcefulness” is highly interpretive.
- 13 Literally, “fearsome.”
- 14 Since no Hebrew text is extant, we follow the Greek. See note 4. We divide this verse slightly differently than most. Instead of ending this verse with “his throne” and beginning the next with “the Lord,” we have moved “the Lord” up to complete the thought.
- 15 This would have been **הוא בראה**. To place the pronoun before the verb represents a far more emphatic statement in Hebrew than simply “he created her.” So Patrick Skehan (AB): “he it is.”
- 16 This statement comes from Job 28:27, which says in the Hebrew **ראה ויספרה** (he saw her and proclaimed her). The Greek seems to have mistaken the Piel (he proclaimed her) for a Qal (he counted her).
- 17 **δοσιν** is used in Gen 47:22 for **חֶק** (portion/allotment/prescription). Thus, everyone is given a certain amount of wisdom. Alternatively, the pronoun could refer to YHWH (according to his gift) as in Sira 35:12.
- 18 Literally, “to those who love him,” which would be **לאהביו** in Hebrew. Some suggest reading “to those who fear him” (along with the Syriac and several Greek MSS belonging to the Lucianic recension) since that would provide a natural link between the end of the introduction (1:1-10) and the main body.
- 19 Either a case of *Wiederaufnahme* (repetitive resumption), which is evidence of scribal editing, or accidental insertion of material from v. 9.
- 20 Supplemental v. 21: “The fear of the Lord drives off sins and **FINISH TRANSLATION**
- 21 Though originally Hebrew, this chapter is only extant in Greek (or later) translations. See also ch. 24.
- 22 Literally, “all blessings.”
- 23 Alternatively, “will.”
- 24 Though originally Hebrew, this chapter is only extant in Greek (or later) translations.