

Dr. David deSilva, Apocrypha, Lecture 8, Impact of the Apocrypha in the New Testament and Early Christianity

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This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on the Apocrypha. This is session 8, Impact of the Apocrypha in the New Testament and Early Christianity.

In this lecture, we'll look together at some of the traces of the impact of the Apocrypha on the writings of the New Testament, the emerging literature, and the thoughts of the early church.

Speaking of the use of the Apocrypha in the New Testament is perhaps a bit controversial. It is clear that no New Testament author explicitly cites a text from the Apocrypha, and it is certainly clear that they don't cite any text in the Apocrypha as sacred scripture. This might indeed be an indication to us that the author or the speaker if speech is being represented as in the case of Jesus, doesn't view these texts on the same level as scripture.

There's nothing to be gained by quoting a text that one or one's audience will not accept as an authoritative word on the subject. So, we might have a lack of explicit quotations as a sign of an awareness that these texts do not possess the authority, the argument-winning authority of the sacred scriptures. Nevertheless, having said that there is a great deal of evidence to consider in regard to Apocryphal texts exercising some sort of formative impact on the thinking and the writing of those voices that have given us the New Testament, even beginning with the voice of Jesus himself.

Now, the question of influence is a methodologically complex one. Just because text A and text B say the same thing or similar things, one cannot automatically assume influence either way. One has to be able to demonstrate that the alleged influencing text was plausibly available to the allegedly influenced speaker or writer in some fashion.

The content has to be sufficiently distinctive to speak about influence rather than simply both texts drawing on a commonly available source. Also, it's helpful, though not necessary, for points of influence to be sufficiently numerous, detailed, and pervasive so that the correspondence between these two texts shouldn't be attributed to a mere fluke. That is to say, if there's one point of contact between text A and text B, that's not a great influence is possible, but one point of contact isn't a great argument for influence.

If there are numerous points of contact throughout text B with material throughout text A, that increases the likelihood of influence of some kind. With regard to the question of influence, let's begin by thinking together about the Wisdom of Ben Sira, which is certainly one of the oldest texts among the Apocrypha and perhaps one of the best poised to exercise influence. With regard to that question, was the alleged influencing text, in this case, Ben Sira, plausibly available to individuals like Jesus and James to exercise influence? I would say in the case of Ben Sira, and one could make a strong case that the author was well poised to enter the mainstream of Jewish wisdom and thus be available in some fashion to particularly motivated Jews who become teachers themselves, like Jesus and James did, to encounter that wisdom and incorporate that wisdom in some form.

First off, Ben Sira himself was located in Jerusalem for the majority of his career. He maintained a school of instruction in Jerusalem. He was a noted and reputable teacher of many other sages, scribes, and Jewish elite leaders in Jerusalem.

He was a conservative voice in a time when Torah observance was on the table, where questions were being raised as to the degree to which we should remain bound by or loyal to the covenant. He would be remembered as a faithful voice and thus one to whom generations of the faithful would later turn, as opposed to whatever characters like Jason and Menelaus might've had to say on the topic. Ben Sira preserved his teaching in writing for posterity and we have evidence of his text being available and used into the first century AD.

For example, fragments of scrolls of Ben Sira have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and also have been found tucked away in corners at Masada, the last stand of the zealots. So, we know that his book was available in the first century. And we see evidence of his impact on Jewish teachers centuries later.

He is quoted in the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds, in the Midrashim and later rabbinic literature, over a hundred times, according to the studies and tallies of Solomon Schechter back in an article written in 1891, which is clear evidence that his voice continued to speak and to be valued throughout the first centuries of the Christian era among Jewish authors. Now, one other question that we might need to think about, even before we proceed, is the idea of Jesus being taught. Some Christians are inherently antagonistic to the idea that Jesus, the son of God, had to learn anything.

I would simply suggest that if we take the dual nature of Jesus with utmost seriousness, it is natural to think of the boy Jesus learning and seeking to learn as he carried out his divinely given mission. I want to just very briefly point to two texts that show us, Jesus, in the school and urge us to align ourselves with the canonical vision of Jesus in the school as opposed to the apocryphal gospel's vision. If one were to read the infancy gospel of Thomas, one would find four episodes in that narrative

in which we see Jesus in the school, as it were, dealing with the question of Jesus' education, trying to answer the question, where did Jesus get his knowledge? And these episodes all try to answer the question in this way.

He didn't get it from any human teacher. He came with all of his knowledge pre-packaged and available to him. I should just simply point out that this is a Gnostic text, in all likelihood.

These stories present Jesus learning nothing from his Jewish teachers as he was growing up, his Jewish teachers being entirely incapable of teaching him anything and in some cases just giving up. What we find in this gospel is that Jesus confounded those who would presume to be his teachers with his superior knowledge about everything from the letter Aleph to the Torah. There's a decidedly different emphasis in the canonical gospel of Luke.

Actually, the episode at the end of chapter two in Luke's gospel is an episode that also appears in Thomas's infancy gospel. In the infancy gospel of Thomas, Jesus is teaching the teachers in the temple. It is not a dialogue; it is a monologue, and Jesus is the one speaking and putting the teachers in the temple to silence.

This is a very different picture in Luke, and the key verses are 46 and 47. After three days, Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

What we have in the canonical gospel is a picture of pedagogical conversation, not a way to rant. Jesus is listening; he is taking in what his senior sages in his parent religion have to offer, and he's posing intuitive questions. Of course, if you know anything about Jewish culture, you know that the well-posed question can be just as incisive and insightful as the rant, the response.

We get this picture of Jesus drinking in, weighing, testing, and probing the learning that is available to him through the typical media of his culture. Certainly not showing up on the scene with all the knowledge intact in his brain, ready to go. Jesus was certainly an innovative teacher, bringing new teaching with authority, but at the same time, much more of his teaching has a pedigree than we might commonly suppose.

With that said, I would suggest that, probably indirectly, Jesus drank in, approved, and used some of the wisdom of Ben Sira. I wouldn't suggest that he read the text of Ben Sira, that he opened up that scroll somewhere, but I would suggest that Ben Sira, the wisdom, the teaching of Ben Sira had permeated the wisdom of the sages, scribes, rabbis, teachers in Judea by virtue of his location. And we've seen evidence

that he was influential before Jesus and was very influential after Jesus, so he was probably influential during Jesus' lifetime as well.

And so, as Jesus listened to his teachers, he would have had occasion to drink in, even without knowing the source, some of what we find in Ben Sira. So, Jesus says, as it's recorded in Matthew 5, Give to everyone who begs from you and does not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. Now, we will see material here that's distinctive to Jesus, but some of it appears to have been learned and appropriated beyond what the Old Testament has to offer from the wisdom of Ben Sira, who has a similar vision of how to imitate God. By being generous by loving one's enemies and praying for those who persecute you, you become a child of your Father in heaven because you imitate the character of God.

Similarly, Ben Sira writes, do not reject a suppliant in distress or turn your face away from the poor. Do not avert your eye from the needy and give no one reason to curse you. Be a father to orphans; be like a husband to their mother.

You will then be like a son of the Most High, and he will love you more than your own mother does. Now, while there are differences, Ben Sira doesn't go so far as to suggest loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. He does teach that one should not turn one's eye away from the needy or reject a petitioner, just as Jesus would teach later.

Give to everyone who begs from you, and don't refuse those who would borrow from you. Ben Sira also connects being a child of God with mirroring God's generous heart and God's care for those in need. Jesus taught a lot about forgiveness and when I myself was simply immersed in the Old Testament and the New Testament, I regarded these teachings on forgiveness as entirely the new invention of Jesus, something that his audience would never have heard before.

Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Part of the Lord's Prayer, of course, is the only part that receives commentary in the Sermon on the Mount, for if you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

And the reader familiar with Matthew might also think at this point of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18, I think it's verses 21 or 23 to verse 35 that the parable of the unforgiving servant reinforces this teaching in Matthew 6:14 to 15. Just to refresh your memory, just in case it's not right there for you, a servant owes his master a certain debt, say a hundred denarii, because I can't remember the exact

amount and the master threatens to sell the servant, and his family so that the money can be recovered and the debt is taken care of. The servant begs the master not to do that but to be patient with him and give him time to repay the debt.

And the master, frankly, forgives the debt. But that same servant goes out and finds a fellow servant who owes him one denarii, one denarius, and the second servant begs him to be patient with him, to forgive the debt. And this first servant refuses and hands him over to the jailers until the debt is repaid.

The master finds out and reams out the first servant because he did not extend mercy on his fellow servant after his master had extended so much more mercy toward him. Well, again, if you only read the Old Testament, this sounds like a novel teaching. But we find that Ben Sira had taught very similarly on forgiveness.

He writes, forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does a person harbor anger against another person and yet seek healing from the Lord? Do they have no mercy toward human beings like themselves and yet pray for their own sins? We find in the older sage the expectation that we, the fellow servants of God, are going to be merciful toward each other's offenses as a prerequisite to seeking mercy from God for our offenses against him. The presupposition is that God's honor is so much greater than our own that it is the ultimate presumption on our part, on the one hand, to think that God is going to set aside slights, our sins, our transgressions while we don't set aside slights.

If we treat our honor, our worth, as more valuable, more to be preserved than God's own honor, we're committing a sin of great presumption, and we should expect, therefore, not to be forgiven when we pray. This is precisely the logic we find in Jesus' parable and then in his more extracted instruction. Ben Sira, like Tobit, promotes almsgiving.

And we know that almsgiving is something that Torah itself gives a great deal of attention to. In the law, we are told to care for the needy among us, to give to the poor. And so, what Ben Sira or Tobit do isn't entirely novel.

But the figures that they use and the motivations that they use take Old Testament discourse a step further. And so, we read in Ben Sira, chapter 29, Help the poor for the commandment's sake and in their need, do not send them away empty-handed. Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a friend, and do not let it rust under a stone and be lost.

Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from every disaster. Now, those of us who are familiar with Jesus' teachings about

giving alms and about charity toward our neighbor will already have heard some key figures and themes there that emerge in Jesus' teachings.

For example, in Matthew 6, verses 19 and 20, do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. And in Luke's gospel, we have more explicit instructions about how to lay up a treasure in heaven. In Luke 12, Jesus says, sell your possessions and give alms.

Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. Like Ben Sira, Jesus asserts that the stash of money that sits idle, rather than being spent in works of mercy, relieving someone else's present need, ends up being lost to rust and to theft. Like Ben Sira, Jesus uses this image of storing up treasure on earth versus a treasure in heaven or a treasure with God that has more lasting value for the future than just putting money away in our hole in the ground or in our bank account.

What is slightly different here is that Ben Sira doesn't have, well, probably any view of an afterlife. And so, for Ben Sira, that treasure being laid up with God pays dividends in this life when one has needed oneself. For Jesus, laying up that treasure with God pays, if I could put it that way, eternal dividends.

Both agree with this, however. You really only keep what you give away. What you try to save for yourself gets lost.

What you give to relieve the needs of others stays with you in God's account forever. We find that both Ben Sira and Jesus, two centuries later, teach about presumption and teach against presumption on God's mercy. Ben Sira had said, do not commit a sin twice.

Even for one, you will not go unpunished. Do not say he will consider the multitude of my gifts. And when I make an offering to the most high God, he will accept it.

Ben Sira teaches in a kind of proverbial genre that you can't basically buy off God with your good behavior or your charitable acts. Sin is serious and needs to be repented of. Jesus teaches a very similar point in a narrative mode, using a parable rather than direct discourse, a proverbial teaching.

And we're familiar with this story from Luke 18. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing off by himself, was praying thus, God, I thank you that I am not like other people.

Thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of all my income.

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other. Now, perhaps there's no direct line of dependence there, but Jesus' parable.

Resonates deeply with material already present in the Jewish wisdom tradition. Namely, this idea that your piety and your acts of charity do not give you the basis for pride in God's sight. But before God, one must always reckon carefully one's own sins and transgressions and remain humble, asking for mercy rather than presuming God's forgiveness based on one's imagined pious stature.

Another striking point of correspondence is shown in the invitations to discipleship that we find both in Ben Sira and in Jesus' speech, as recorded in Matthew. In Matthew 11, Jesus says, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

This invitation resonates rather strikingly with other such invitations from other sages and other teachers of wisdom in this culture, notably Ben Sira, chapter 51. Draw near to me, you who are untaught, and lodge in my school. Put your neck under the yoke and let your souls receive instruction.

It is to be found close by. See with your eyes that I have labored little and found myself much rest. Between the two, we find a number of commonalities.

The invitation to come to me, to draw near to me, the image of instruction as a yoke that the disciple is to take on. The promise is that the disciple will not find that yoke to be burdensome but rather will find that yoke to be the path to rest. Obviously, a major difference is that Ben Sira invites people to come to the school building that he owns in Jerusalem.

Jesus is inviting people to come along with him on the way, because he, of course, has nowhere to lay his head. And his ministry is an itinerant one far from the official structures of Jewish learning and piety. Now, having said all that, I do think it suggests that material from Ben Sira entered the stream of teaching throughout Judea.

And that Jesus heard, learned, and approved, and in some instances, modified and developed that teaching. Having said all that, there are also some very striking points of difference between what we find in Jesus and what we find in Ben Sira. For

example, returning to the idea of charity and extending aid, Ben Sira specifically advises limiting one's generosity to the pious and the good among the poor.

Since, as he reasons, God hates sinners. Jesus, on the other hand, urged generosity toward all suppliants, good and bad, since, he asserted, God was generous to the good and the wicked alike. So one finds a tight drawing of charity to those whom one knows to be Torah observant Jews, like oneself in Ben Sira.

Because this is a reflection of Ben Sira's God-image. God hates sinners and loves the righteous. But Jesus carries and presents a very different God-image.

This influences, this impacts, how he urges people to be imitators of God. Ben Sira adamantly consigns women to the private spaces within the home. And he also fosters hostility, albeit just in a handful of verses, against Samaritans.

Jesus does neither. He parts company with Ben Sira very starkly on both. With regard to Samaritans, he freely interacts and seeks to minister to them.

Think of John 4, for example. Samaritans appear as heroes of his parables, the Good Samaritan, of course, and are singled out as those who respond to Jesus better than others. For example, in the Ten Lepers, only one of them thought of coming back and expressing gratitude personally to Jesus.

And that one was a Samaritan. And, of course, Jesus invited women into spaces where male disciples gathered. For example, Mary was welcome in the company of his male disciples to hear and benefit from his teaching, while Martha wanted to call Mary back to the inner spaces of the house in the kitchen.

And women traveled with Jesus. In Luke 8:1 to 3, we learn about those women of means who supported Jesus' itinerant ministry and didn't just do it by writing a check and sending it from afar but by traveling in the company of Jesus. Which was probably a daring thing to do because women unescorted by males in the company of other males was a bit of a questionable thing in that culture.

Ben Sira advises divorcing the wife who doesn't do what she's told. Jesus, quite to the contrary, elevates God's intentions for marriage as expressed in Genesis 2:24 above the legal provision for divorce in the Torah itself. So, there are several important points of differentiation where Jesus disagreed sharply with the wisdom tradition that he inherited in those synagogues where he learned as a child.

I want to turn now to some points of influence between Ben Sira and James, the half-brother of Jesus, who became the leader of at least the Jewish Christian wing of the Christian movement, perhaps the leader of the entire Christian movement, based in Jerusalem, probably for at least three decades of his life, from about 30 A.D. to 62

A.D., when James finally met with martyrdom himself. Both Ben Sira, in about 200 B.C., and James, writing his epistle in, we really don't know when, anywhere between 40 and 62 A.D., let's say, both sages address the theological problems, I'm sorry, both sages address the danger of the tongue, the danger of speech. That is to say, speech can heal and help, speech can hurt and destroy, speech can win favor, and speech can alienate and lose favor.

So, in Ben Sira's wisdom, he actually returns to this topic several times. He writes, who will set a guard over my mouth and an effective seal upon my lips so that I may not fall because of them and my tongue not destroy me? And Ben Sira asks the rhetorical question, who has never sinned with the tongue? And he says later that the tongue has no power over the godly. They will not be burned in its flame.

Those who forsake the Lord will fall into its power. It will burn among them, and it will not be put out. James also notes the danger of the tongue, and he uses the same metaphor to talk about the power of the tongue.

The tongue is a fire. It is placed among our members as a world full of iniquity. It stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell.

A restless evil is full of deadly poison. Now, there's not a great deal of direct evidence of dependence there, but this image of the tongue as a burning fire that can burn you up, that can cause great harm, is an image that James takes over from the wisdom tradition he has inherited. A bit more direct, a bit more close a point of correspondence, has to do with the way both sages look at the duality of speech.

Ben Sira writes that if you blow on a spark, it will glow. If you spit on it, it will be put out. Yet both come out of your mouth.

And this is in the context of thinking about the very different effects that speech can have. It can build up, tear down, win favor, and alienate. But both kinds of act come out of the same fount, the same spout.

And isn't that just odd? James gives us a very similar picture, although developing it quite a bit more. With the tongue, we bless the Lord and Father, and with the tongue, we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.

And he says, brothers and sisters, it should not be. Why? Because nature tells us that the same orifice should not produce such different effects. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening, both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

So, both sages deal with the troublesomeness of the different kinds of consequences that come from speech and urge their pupils, their hearers, to move toward greater integrity in speech. So that, in James' case, for example, blessing comes consistently from it and the like. Ben Sira says that the sage approves a maxim and adds to it.

So, sages always think about wisdom with proverbs. Sages are always thinking about proverbs and adding to the proverb and the repertoire of proverbs. And there's just an interesting example of this kind of activity between these two sages, Ben Sira and James themselves.

And, of course, Ben Sira here is picking up on the text of the canonical book of Proverbs as well. He says to be quick to hear but deliberate in answering. And James says, let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, deliberate in answering, and slow to anger.

So, and I offer this somewhat fancifully, we might have an example here of James as a sage approving a maxim and adding a clause to it. A more serious correspondence comes as we consider how the two sages both address the theological problem of the source of temptation in a world that is ruled by a supposedly omnipotent God. Thus, the question arises of who is ultimately responsible for sin.

Both sages will assert that the problem cannot be resolved by laying the responsibility upon God. Ben Sira wrote, don't say, because of the Lord, I left the right way, for God will not do what God hates. Don't say, God led me astray, for God has no need of a sinful person.

He doesn't command anyone to be ungodly, and he doesn't give anyone a license to sin. James quite similarly teaches, let no one, when tempted, say, I am tempted by God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

But each person is tempted when he or she is lured and enticed by his or her own desire. So, both Ben Sira and James answer the question of the theological problem in the same way. They distance God from being the cause or the source of evil and place responsibility squarely on the individual person.

Human desire is the source of enticement to sin, and the power to yield to sin or to resist sin rests in our choice. As Ben Sira would say, he has put fire and water before you. You can stretch out your hand for whichever you choose.

Life and death are in front of human beings. They will be granted whichever they please. James similarly says, or rather puts in the human's choice, whether to give in to those cravings that lead to death or to resist those temptations and walk in the way that leads to life.

Now, it strikes me as not surprising that two teachers who are themselves so closely embedded in the wisdom tradition of Israel, James, and Jesus, do not more commonly quote the sages from whom they have learned. And I say this because Ben Sira himself is pervasively dependent upon Proverbs, upon the canonical book of Proverbs. And yet he never once quotes Proverbs.

He recites, well recite is the wrong word. He weaves the material of Proverbs into his own new material without attribution. And often, kind of paraphrasing what we'd find in Proverbs, he makes the wisdom his own and part of the wisdom that he passes on without footnoting. Richard Bauckham, a great scholar of the Jesus tradition and also Jesus' brothers, James and Jude, understands it to be naturally the sage's practice in this period.

This is the pre-rabbinic period when quotation is everything. He understands the sage's practice of expressing his own wisdom, and I'm quoting Baucom now to express his own wisdom in his own formulation of the wisdom he has gained from his intensive study of the tradition without simply repeating it. I'd like to shift gears now from James and Jude to think about Paul.

Particularly to look at ways in which the material that we find in Solomon's wisdom might have exercised some formative influence on Paul's thinking particularly as Paul thinks about Gentile religion and Gentile ethical or unethical practices. And here questions of direct influence become more difficult.

Ben Sira wrote 200 odd years before Jesus and James. That's a long time. Plenty of time for a text to become pervasive enough to exercise influence.

Wisdom of Solomon could conceivably have been written only a few decades before Paul's active ministry. Perhaps only a decade before Paul's own conversion. So, bearing in mind that the dating of the Wisdom of Solomon is much disputed, I would not suggest then that the Wisdom of Solomon is exercising a direct influence on Paul.

But I would suggest that in the Wisdom of Solomon, we have access to Hellenistic Jewish traditions that also influence Paul. And I merely bring this out to say that if we're familiar with the Apocrypha, we become more aware of when a writer like Paul is creating material afresh. When a writer like Paul draws on a well-developed tradition that he has inherited,

This is especially true of Paul's critique of Gentile religion and practice. The author of Wisdom of Solomon writes in chapter 13, All humans who don't know God are empty-headed by nature. In spite of the good things that can be seen, they were somehow unable to know the one who truly is.

Though they were fascinated by what he had made, they were unable to recognize the maker of everything. These people could have perceived something of the one who created all things as they thought about the power and beauty of the things that were created. It is for this reason that they're not without guilt.

These persons aren't excused. So, what we find in Wisdom of Solomon is a sense that the imprint of God is there in creation. Contemplating creation itself should lead to awareness of God and appreciation for God's majesty, power, and divine attributes.

So, Gentiles, even though they don't have the direct revelation of God that Israelites enjoyed throughout history, are not without excuse for having gone after other gods and worshiping idols. Creation itself should have led them to the truth about God. Now we turn to Romans 1, and we find this same traditional argument being used by Paul as he talks about Gentile accountability and sinfulness.

God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodly behavior and the injustice of human beings who silence the truth with injustice. This is because what is known about God should be plain to them. Because God made it plain to them.

Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen because they are understood through the things God has made. So, human beings are without excuse. Paul is even stronger on this point than the author of Wisdom of Solomon.

The latter author wants to give Gentiles a little bit of a break because creation is so beautiful. Maybe they were distracted by beauty into worshiping the created thing instead of the creator. But Paul won't have any of that.

There's no excuse for worshiping the created thing rather than the creator. We also find in Wisdom of Solomon that this failure to come to a perception of the one God and so worshiping created things instead lies at the root of the ethical confusion, the ethical disorder that pervades Gentile society. So, we read in Wisdom of Solomon 14 that everything becomes a confused mix of blood, murder, theft, and deception.

Corruption, breaking one's word, upheaval, false pledges, all these things abound. Adultery and promiscuity abound. The worship of nameless idols is the origin of all evil, its cause as well as its result.

Then, if we go back to Romans, we will find the same move being made. Idolatry is the root cause of the moral disruption, throughout Gentile society.

And so, we read in Romans 1, they, the Gentiles, traded God's truth for a lie. And they worshiped and served the creation instead of the creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

That's why God abandoned them to degrading lust. God abandoned them to a defective mind to do inappropriate things. So, they were filled with all injustice, wicked behavior, greed, and evil behavior.

They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, deception, and malice. They are without understanding, disloyal, without affection, and without mercy. And so, Paul clearly has adopted and put to use a traditional Hellenistic Jewish description of what's wrong with Gentile culture and why.

So, he's approved it, he's put it to use. Obviously though, he takes one stunning step that the author of Wisdom of Solomon doesn't take. Once Paul is done with all this, in chapter 2, he turns his attention to what's wrong with Jewish practice and thought.

Because in Paul's point of view, neither ethnic group, or bundle of ethnic groups in the case of Gentiles, has an edge on the other before God. I want to turn now to another way in which apocryphal literature has impacted early Christian thinking. And so, I'm going to turn to 2 and 4 Maccabees, particularly the story of the nine martyrs in 2 Maccabees 6 and 7. This seems to have exercised an impact as early as the letter to the Hebrews.

Toward the tail end of the author of the Hebrews celebration of what faith looks like in practice, his celebration of the worthies of old who have embodied faith, he includes this verse. Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release in order to obtain a better resurrection.

Now, in this verse, the author uses resurrection twice, but he's clearly distinguishing two types of resurrection. In the first half of the verse, he's probably referring back to the stories of Elijah and Elisha and bringing back from the dead the children of widows in need.

But that was just a resuscitation. That's a word we would use that they didn't use back in the first century. Those were just a resuscitation.

Presumably, those kids died again, hopefully in old age. Lazarus, you know, died again, presumably in much older age than the first time. Something different is referred to in the second verse.

Those who were tortured, refusing to accept release in order to obtain a better resurrection. That better resurrection, of course, is coming to the life eternal, within which there is no further death. The author of Hebrews 11 is looking back on those martyrs of 2 Maccabees 6.18 to 7.40. These are the people in Jewish tradition who

are tortured, who are given the opportunity to be released from torture if they would simply break faith with God.

And who refuse specifically for the hope of resurrection and eternal life that God would give to the faithful. What the author of Hebrews does, just in passing, other early Christian authors, and now I'm beginning to push beyond the New Testament to the impact of the Apocrypha on the early church in the second and third centuries. Other early Christian authors would do this in a much more focused way.

As you know, Christians came to be increasingly persecuted in the second and third centuries AD. Origin, living in about 235 AD, really it's in the third century that persecution just takes off like wildfire in the Roman world. Origin, writing in 235 AD, tries to prepare two deacons, Ambrose and Protactitus, who have been arrested and are facing this same sort of scenario.

They are about to be given the choice to be released from a brutal and prolonged experience of death or hold firm to their faith in Christ to the end. And so when Origin writes his exhortation to martyrdom, it is, in effect, a lengthy homily on 2 Maccabees 6 and 7. It's to these Jewish martyrs that Christians have to look for the example that will steal their courage and give them the model that they need to face a very similar contest to the one faced by those martyrs before Antiochus IV. And for the record, Origin shows a clear knowledge of both 2 and 4 Maccabees.

He follows the text of 2 Maccabees but uses many images and adds many scraps of dialogue from 4 Maccabees as he goes. So, the seven brothers become, in his words, a powerful and noble example of robust martyrdom for everyone who considers whether he will prove to be less a man than a boy. He commends especially the last words of Eleazar as a model for the mindset to adopt when facing death.

Namely, considering how one will set an example for others, in this case, Christians, so that by one's own failure to persevere unto death, one doesn't undermine the commitment of one's sisters and brothers to persevere unto death and thus cost them as well as oneself eternal life. Origin recounts the tortures of 2 Maccabees in grisly detail to assure these two deacons that whatever they will face, worse has already been endured for the sake of God. Origin, also like 2 and 4 Maccabees, uses the topic of gratitude to urge Christian martyrs because martyrdom is the perfect repayment of the gift of life back to the one who gave life in the first place.

Not much later, Cyprian of Carthage wrote an exhortation about martyrdom in about 256 AD. And he, like Origin, paraphrases and quotes extensively from 2 Maccabees along the way urging Christians facing the next great wave of persecution to endure to the end. Now, the influence of 2 and 4 Maccabees and these martyr narratives persists long after Christianity became legalized and, in fact, became the dominant and majority religion throughout the Roman Empire.

Augustine continues to look to the martyrs in his sermons for inspiration for his audience. The mother of the seven brothers becomes a figure, a prototype for the mother church during the centuries of persecution. And Augustine argues, quite strikingly, that these were Christian martyrs even though they died before Jesus lived.

They died for the old covenant that anticipated the new covenant. They died, as he put it, for the name of Christ, as that name was veiled in the law. I should simply point out at this point that there was a place for the Jewish martyrs in the Christian calendar of saints.

Only these martyrs, the ones recounted in 2 and 4 Maccabees. August 1st was their day and some people in the 4th century and the 5th century gain saved the idea, but both Augustine and Chrysostom defended their place in the calendar of saints because they showed such a commitment to God even before Christ came and rendered death less fearsome. When we turn to the writings of John Chrysostom, we find a different use of these martyrs, a use actually much more in keeping with 4th Maccabees than 2nd Maccabees.

John Chrysostom uses the martyrs, just as the author of 4th Maccabees had done, as examples of endurance in virtue in the face of the onslaught of the passions. And so he encourages his Christian audience to display as much endurance against the irrational passions of anger, desire for money, bodily lust, empty glory, and the like as these Jewish martyrs showed commitment to their philosophy in their agonies. Another way in which the Wisdom of Solomon, shifting gears once again, exercised a profound influence on the early church was in the area of early Christian theology, especially in the area of trying to think about Jesus before the incarnation, believing Jesus to be equal with God and eternal, the Son, believing the Son to be eternal alongside God, early Christians naturally wondered, well then, what was the Son up to before the Word became flesh? Wisdom of Solomon provided a great deal of raw material for answering that question.

Now, as we've already discussed, the Wisdom of Solomon itself developed something we find in Proverbs, Proverbs 8, this figure of lady wisdom who was alongside God in creation, who was there like a master craftsman alongside the architect in the creation of all that is, and in the preservation of all that is. But the author of Wisdom of Solomon goes further in his description of wisdom, and so we read in Wisdom of Solomon 7, Wisdom, the skilled fashioner of all things, taught me, taught me, Solomon, as it were, Solomon in quotation marks. She is a breath of God's power, a spotless mirror of God's power to act, and an image of God's goodness.

Being one, she is capable of all things, and remaining intact in herself, she renews all things and enters into holy souls generation after generation, making them prophets

and God's friends. Now, beyond Proverbs, the author of Wisdom of Solomon talks about wisdom as a spotless reflection of God's being. He uses the image of, I seem to have skipped it here, but he uses the image of illumination, of effulgence, and the source of light to talk about the relationship of wisdom to God.

These same images show up when New Testament authors begin to talk about Jesus before the incarnation and the sun before the incarnation. Paul uses language to this effect in Colossians 1:15 to 17. The sun is the image, again the word *eikon*, the image of the invisible God, the one who is first over all creation, because all things were created by him, both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible.

All things were created through him and for him. He existed before all things, and all things are held together in him. Now, a lot of that can be attributed to Proverbs talking about wisdom as a kind of God's partner in creation.

But the idea that the sun is the image of the invisible God draws on the development of wisdom in Wisdom of Solomon 7. The author of Hebrews goes even further. He writes, in these most recent days, God spoke to us in a sun, whom he made heir of all things, through whom he created the ages, who is the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. Now, the image of, or the idea of, the sun being the radiance of God's glory seems to be a paraphrase, a reuse of the image of wisdom being the illumination that comes off of God, the light source.

The idea of the sun being the exact imprint of God's being reflects the idea of wisdom as the *eikon* of God, the image of God. And then this added note that the sun sustains all things by his powerful word moves beyond wisdom as God's agent in creation to wisdom as that which continues to sustain what God created. All that to say, wisdom traditions, not just in Proverbs 8 but also as they were developed in the Second Temple period in texts like Wisdom of Solomon, provide the raw material for deciding or thinking about what the sun was doing prior to the incarnation.

Wisdom of Solomon continues to be used in the early church into the second, third, and fourth centuries in discussions concerning the subordination or the equality of the father and the son, whether or not the father and the son share the same essence, as in the creed of one being with the father, as well as the question of the eternal generation of the son from the father, as in the line also from the creed, eternally begotten of the father. I'll just give a few examples here. An early church father named *Quod Volt Deus*.

Obviously, he took that name. It simply means what God wills. *Quod Volt Deus* applies Wisdom 8:1, where we read that wisdom reaches in strength from one corner of the earth to the other, ordering all things well, to argue for the son's

equality with the father since the son identified with wisdom here, exhibits the same omnipresence and omnipotence of the father.

Dionysius of Alexandria argues that the father and the son have the same eternal nature since the son is an emanation of the power of God, quoting Wisdom of Solomon 7:25. Since the son is related to the father, as radiance is related to light. They are the son and the father; however, they are also, no more two different beings than the radiance of light can be separated from the source of light, as Ambrose argues. So, all this to say, early church fathers drew extensively upon the Wisdom of Solomon and the developed picture of the figure of wisdom there to sort out some very basic fundamental issues of Christology and Trinitarian theology.

In conclusion, I just want to look at a few places where early church fathers read the Apocrypha as a prophetic witness to Christ, in exactly the same way that they and the New Testament authors read the, for us, canonical Old Testament as a prophetic witness to Christ, supplying additional proofs that Jesus' distinctive form of messiahship was all part of God's plan. In Baruch 3, 36 to 37, we find this statement about God. This is our God.

No other will be compared to him. God discovered every way of knowledge and gave her, namely wisdom, to his child Jacob, to Israel, whom he loved. After this, she or he appeared on the earth and lived among human beings.

Now, this is read, and I say she or he because in Greek there's no pronoun at that point to determine whether we're talking about a he or a she. So, we could move away from lady wisdom at that point to God at that point. And afterward, God appeared on earth and lived among human beings.

And this is how several early Christian fathers take Baruch 3. They quote it as a prophecy of the incarnation, understanding God to be the subject of the verb he appeared on the earth. Wisdom of Solomon 2 is also read as a prophecy, specifically a prophecy of the crucifixion of Christ. In Wisdom of Solomon 2, we read the ungodly making of this plan.

Let's lie in ambush for the one who does what is right, for the righteous one. He even boasts that God is his father. Let's see if his words are true.

Let's put him to the extreme test and see what happens. If this man who is righteous is indeed God's son, then God will assist him. Perhaps I could have an aside there and say, maybe you hear a resonance of the taunt in Matthew.

If he trusted in God to deliver him, let God deliver him if he delights in him, for he says, I am the son of God, back to the Wisdom of Solomon. God will rescue him from the hand of those who oppress him if, indeed, he's God's son.

So, let's test him by assaulting and torturing him. Then we'll know just how good he really is. Let's test his ability to endure pain.

Let's condemn him to a disgraceful death. According to him, God should show up to protect him. In this passage, Augustine claims that he finds, quote, the passion of Christ most openly prophesied, complete with a preview of what his impious murderers, as Augustine puts it, would say.

So, also, Origen and Cyril of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers turn to the Wisdom of Solomon, among the typical Old Testament texts, for a prophetic announcement of the passion of Christ. So, in these many ways, we find that the books of the Apocrypha have exercised already some impact on our own scriptures and on the Christian tradition that all Christians look back to with approval. Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox might disagree now about the extent of the canon.

But on the whole, they don't disagree about matters of Christology and Trinitarian theology. And when these things were being forged, the Apocrypha, the Apocryphal texts, like Baruch and Wisdom of Solomon, were go-to resources for hammering out those core Christian doctrines alongside the agreed-upon texts of the Old Testament. Because of this, because of the impact that the Apocrypha had in the earliest centuries of the Church and the obvious respect with which our Christian forebears, even beginning with some of the authors in the New Testament, the respect with which our Christian forebears embraced these texts, it is wise for us as their Christian heirs to familiarize ourselves, at the very least, with this body of resources that they held to be so valuable and that left such a mark on their own writings.

This is Dr. David DeSilva in his teaching on the Apocrypha. This is session 8, Impact of the Apocrypha in the New Testament and Early Christianity.