

BEN SIRA--THE BRIDGE BETWEEN  
THE AARONIDE AND PHARISAIC REVOLUTIONS

By

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I.

Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus is a precious source.<sup>1</sup> It connects two massive structural transformations in the history of Israel. The first of these was the canonization of the Pentateuch. This was a revolutionary act, for it brought prophecy to an end, elevated a priestly class--the "sons of Aaron"--into power and stripped those Levites who were not the descendants of Aaron of their claims to priestly authority. Prior to the canonization of the Pentateuch, there were active prophets; after the canonization of the Pentateuch, there were prophets no more. Prior to the canonization of the Pentateuch, the Levites claimed full priestly rights as promised in Deuteronomy (18:1-8; 17:8-13; 33:8-11); after the canonization of the Pentateuch, they were prohibited, on pain of death (Num. 16:40; 18:7), from approaching the altar and offering sacrifices, and they were assigned to serve the descendants of Aaron in a subordinate role.<sup>2</sup>

The other revolutionary transformation occurred when the Pharisees sat themselves in Moses' seat. Power over the Law was transferred from the Aaronide priests to a class of scholars, the Pharisees. The Pharisees proclaimed that God had revealed two Laws, the Written and the Oral, and not only the Written Law, the Pentateuch. It was this Oral Law, so the Pharisees claimed, which authorized their sitting in Moses' seat and justified their stripping the Aaronides of the exclusive power the Pentateuch had decreed for them. Since the Pentateuch was to be read by the Pharisees in the light of the Oral Law, and not literally, the claims of Aaronide hegemony could be brushed aside as spurious.

Unfortunately, we still do not know the precise date of either of these two revolutionary events. The canonization of the Pentateuch is not likely to have been later than ca 397 B.C.E., while the Pharisaic revolution seems to have occurred sometime during the Hasmonean revolt. Since we know that Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus was written sometime between 397 B.C.E. and the Hasmonean Revolt (167-141 B.C.E.), it is a source bridging the two revolutions.

II.

Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus connects us with the canonized Pentateuch and the Aaronide revolution. It is the only source between ca 445 B.C.E. and ca 142 B.C.E. that does so explicitly and definitively, as it is the only source whose

author is known by name and whose dating is securely within this time frame.<sup>3</sup> There are other sources that derive from this period, but they are cloaked in anonymity or masked by false labels. Such Biblical books as Chronicles, Ezra, Job, Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, some Psalms and such apocryphal writings as Tobit may derive from this period, but they are such elusive sources that they create more problems than they solve. As for other sources, they were either written by non-Judeans, or by subsequent historians, such as Josephus. But Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus was written sometime during this epoch by a highly knowledgeable participant-observer, deeply devoted to the Pentateuch, the Aaronide priesthood and the grand heroes of Israel's Biblical past. Hence, Ben Sira connects us with the canonization of the Pentateuch and the Aaronide revolution as does no other source.

Ben Sira confirms that the revolution had indeed occurred, and he proclaims that the Pentateuch is the singular revelation of God's will to Moses:

From his [Jacob's] descendants the Lord  
brought forth a man of mercy,  
who found favour in the sight of all flesh  
and was beloved of God and man,  
Moses, whose memory is blessed.  
He made him equal in glory to the holy ones,  
and made him great in the fears of his enemies. . .  
He gave him commands for His people,  
and showed him part of His glory. . .  
He made him hear His voice,  
and led him into thick darkness,  
and gave him the commandments face to face,  
the Law of life and knowledge,  
to teach Jacob the Covenant,  
and Israel His judgments (45:1-2, 3b, 5).

But the core of this revelation is Aaron:

He exalted Aaron, the brother of Moses,  
a holy man like him with splendid vestments,  
and put a glorious robe upon him.  
He clothed him with superb perfection,  
and strengthened him with the symbols of  
authority,  
the linen breeches, the long robe, and the  
ephod. . .  
His sacrifices shall be wholly burned  
twice every day continually.  
Moses ordained him,  
and anointed him with holy oil;  
it was an everlasting covenant for him  
and for all his descendants all the days of  
heaven,

to minister to the Lord and serve as priest  
and bless His people in His name.  
He chose him out of all the living  
to offer sacrifice to the Lord,  
incense and a pleasing odour as a memorial  
portion,  
to make atonement for the people (45:6-16).

Aaron is cloaked with ultimate authority over God's revelation:

In His commandments  
He gave him authority in statutes and judgments,  
to teach Jacob his testimonies,  
and to enlighten Israel with His Law (45:17).

To challenge this authority is to arouse God's burning anger:

Outsiders conspired against him,  
and envied him in the wilderness,  
Dathan and Abiram and their men  
and the company of Korah in wrath and anger.  
The Lord saw it and was not pleased  
and in the wrath of His anger they were  
destroyed;  
he wrought wonders against them  
to consume them in flaming fire (45:18-19).

Aaron is to be well provided for:

He added glory to Aaron  
and gave him a heritage;  
He allotted to him the first of the first fruits  
in abundance;  
for they eat the sacrifices of the Lord  
which He gave to him and his descendants.  
But in the land of the people he has no inheritance,  
and he has no portion among the people;  
for the Lord Himself is his portion and  
inheritance (45:20-22).

Aaron's prerogatives are to be perpetuated by Phineas and his descendants:

Phineas the son of Eleazar is the third in glory  
for he was zealous in the fear of the Lord,  
and stood fast, when the people turned away,  
in the ready goodness of his soul, and made  
atonement for Israel.

Therefore a covenant of peace was established  
with him,  
that he should be leader of the sanctuary and  
of his people,  
that he and his descendants should have  
the dignity of the priesthood forever (45:23-24)

Simon, the High Priest in Ben Sira's day, is living witness  
of God's ongoing covenant with Aaron and Phineas:

How glorious he [Simon son of Onias] was when  
the people gathered round him,  
as he came out of the house of the veil [inner  
sanctuary].

Like the morning star among the clouds,  
like the moon when it is full. . .  
When he put on his glorious robe  
and clothed himself with superb perfection,  
and went up to the holy altar,  
he made the court of the sanctuary glorious.

And when he received the portions from the  
hands of the priests,  
as he stood by the hearth of the altar  
with a garland of brethren around him,  
he was like a young cedar on Lebanon;  
and they surrounded him like the trunks of  
palm trees,

all the sons of Aaron in their splendour  
with the Lord's offering in their hands,  
before the whole congregation of Israel.  
Finishing the services at the altar,  
and arranging the offerings to the Most High,  
the Almighty,

he reached out his hand to the cup  
and poured a libation of the blood of the grape;  
he poured it out at the foot of the altar,  
a pleasing odour to the Most High, the King  
of all.

Then the sons of Aaron shouted,  
they sounded the trumpets of hammered work,  
they made a great noise to be heard  
for remembrance before the Most High.

Then all the people together made haste  
and fell to the ground upon their faces  
to worship their Lord,

the Almighty, God Most High.  
And the singers praised Him with their voices  
in sweet and full-toned melody.

And the people besought the Lord Most High  
in prayer before Him who is merciful,  
till the order of the worship of the Lord was  
ended;

so they completed his service.

Then Simon came down, and lifted up his hands  
over the whole congregation of the sons of  
Israel,  
to pronounce the blessing of the Lord with  
his lips,  
and to glory in His name;  
and they bowed down in worship a second time,  
to receive the blessing from the Most High (50:5-21).

These citations from Ben Sira reveal that the Aaronide revolution had occurred, and that the Pentateuch was being read through Aaronide eyes. First, Aaron, not Moses, is the focus of attention. Whereas Ben Sira allocates five verses to Moses, he lavishes seventeen verses on Aaron, plus an additional two verses for Phineas. Secondly, whereas Moses reveals the Law, ongoing authority over the Law is assigned to Aaron. Thirdly, of all the episodes that occurred in the wilderness, Ben Sira singles out the revolt of Dathan, Abiram and Korah against Aaron, and reminds his reader of how God consumed the rebels in flaming fire. Fourthly, Ben Sira underlines the everlasting covenant that God made with Aaron, Phineas and their descendants. And, finally, in glowing tribute, Ben Sira sets before us in the person of the High Priest of his day, Simon, son of Onias, a living exemplar of Yahweh's covenant with Aaron and his sons.

If, then, we allow Ben Sira to lead us into the Pentateuch, he directs us first to all those layers which underwrite God's everlasting covenant with Aaron and his sons, and to those hundred or so verses (Num. 16-18) devoted to the rebellion of Korah and his fellow Levites against Aaron's priestly hegemony. Only after exhausting all the passages devoted to Aaron, his sons and the cultus, does Ben Sira lead us to the non-Aaronide layers of the Pentateuch. By then, however, we should have been so overwhelmed by Aaron's preeminence and authority, that we would read all the other layers as supportive of Aaron's prerogatives, rather than challenging them. And when finally we come to Deuteronomy, where the entire tribe of Levi is accorded full priestly rights, we are ready to assume that the Levitical Priests are identical with the "sons of Aaron."

Ben Sira dramatically illustrates this filtering process; in his final blessing to Israel, Moses bestows authority over his laws to the entire tribe of Levi and accords them full altar rights:

And of Levi he said:

"They shall teach your judgments to Jacob  
and your Torah to Israel.

They shall place incense in your nostrils,  
and the whole burnt-offering on your altar."

(Deut. 33:10)

Ben Sira, however, paraphrases this verse and has Moses bestow this authority exclusively on Aaron:

In his commandments he [Moses] gave him  
[Aaron]  
authority in statutes and judgments,  
to teach Jacob the testimonies,  
and to enlighten Israel with his Law (45:17).

Ben Sira follows this up with the evocation of the Korah rebellion, a rebellion that is alleged to have occurred while Moses was very much alive. And since this rebellion was the occasion for burying the priestly claims of the Levites, Ben Sira is affirming the Aaronide hegemony (45:18-19) by reading Deut. 33:10 in the light of the Korah rebellion. He thus filters the Pentateuch, screening out those texts that threatened the hegemony of the Aaronides and focusing on those texts that proclaim Yahweh's everlasting covenant with Aaron and his sons.

Ben Sira thus confirms for us a vital fact: the Aaronide layers of the Pentateuch must have been the operational texts of the Pentateuch. The rebellion of Korah and the burying of Levitical claims were etched in the minds of Ben Sira and his contemporaries more sharply than Moses' deathbed blessing! It was more vivid in their minds than the episode of the golden calf! Yahweh had punished Korah, his fellow Levites and the people at large far more severely for challenging Aaron than He had punished Aaron and Israel for worshipping the golden calf. For the golden calf episode, Scriptures has a paltry forty-four verses (Exod. 32:1-35; Deut. 9:11-21); for Korah and his rebellion and its aftermath, a staggering one hundred!

Ben Sira's focus on the Aaronide texts of the Pentateuch has far-reaching implications, for it attests to the fact that the promulgation of the Pentateuch had been a revolutionary act indeed. In Ben Sira's day, the Aaronides exercised full authority and enjoyed the enthusiastic support of intellectuals, such as Ben Sira. The Pentateuch is filtered through Aaronide lenses. All other systems of authority recorded in the Pentateuch--be they prophetic, Levitical-priestly or monarchical--are subordinated to the overarching authority of Aaron and his sons. Yet, prior to the promulgation of the Pentateuch, there is no evidence that the Aaronides functioned at all!

This fact can be simply tested if one works one's way back from Ben Sira's time to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C.E. The books of Ezra and Chronicles are thoroughly Aaronide--but they are post-Pentateuchal. As soon as we reach Malachi, however, the Aaronides disappear. In their stead, we have prophets and priests--and an appeal to Horeb, the mountain of revelation in Deuteronomy, and not to Sinai, the mountain from which Moses had proclaimed the hegemony of Aaron and his sons:

Remember the law of Moses My servant  
which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel,  
even statutes and ordinances (Mal. 3:22).

Malachi insists that the covenant with Levi holds, however  
sinful and negligent they have shown themselves to be:

Know that I have sent  
this commandment unto you,  
that My covenant might be with Levi,  
says the Lord of Hosts.  
My covenant was with him  
of life and peace, and I gave them to him  
and of fear, and he feared Me,  
and was afraid of My name.  
The law of truth was in his mouth,  
and unrighteousness was not found on his lips;  
he walked with Me in peace and uprightness,  
and turned many away from iniquity.  
For the priest's lip should keep knowledge  
and they should seek the law at his mouth;  
for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.  
But you have turned aside out of the way;  
you have caused many to stumble in the law;  
you have corrupted the covenant of Levi,  
saith the Lord of Hosts.  
Therefore I made you contemptible and base  
before all the people  
according as you have not kept My ways,  
but have had respect of persons in the law  
(Mal. 2:4-9).

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of  
silver,  
and he shall purify the sons of Levi,  
and purge them as gold and silver.  
And there shall be those who shall offer  
unto the Lord  
offerings in righteousness.  
Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem  
be pleasant unto the Lord,  
as in the days of old,  
and as in ancient years (Mal. 3:3-4).

Neither Haggai nor Zechariah--or any post-exilic, exilic or  
pre-exilic prophet--mentions the Aaronides. They are nowhere  
confirmed as priests, nor are they ever denounced as priests.  
They are nowhere existent--even not for Ezekiel! And this is  
highly significant, for Ezekiel is determined to degrade the  
Levites, yet he does not conjure up the rebellion of Korah and  
his fellow Levites against Moses and Aaron. He has no aware-  
ness of the burial in the wilderness of Korah and the priestly  
claims of the Levites. He has no notion of an everlasting  
covenant with Aaron and his sons, or of Yahweh's promise to

Phineas of the priesthood forever. Precisely because he has no precedent, Ezekiel seeks to discredit the Levites (44:9-14) by resorting to his prerogatives as a prophet, and not to a Mosaic command or a wilderness episode. And when Ezekiel offers the people a loyal priestly family, he turns to the sons of Zadok (43:18-27; 44:15-31), and not to the sons of Aaron. Indeed, Moses and Aaron are not even mentioned in the book of Ezekiel.

And if we turn from Ezekiel to the books of Kings, we find no Aaronide priests. Whereas in Chronicles the sons of Aaron enjoy a priestly monopoly antedating Solomon's Temple (I Chron. 23:13-14, 24 to 24:31), the books of Kings do not even mention Aaron as the forefather of Zadok.

And, finally, when we look into Deuteronomy (18:1-5; 33:8-11) we are struck by the fact that the tribe of Levi as a whole is assigned authority over the laws and is accorded full altar rights, but not a word is said about the "sons of Aaron." Indeed, the only prominent act of Aaron recorded in all of Deuteronomy was his role in the building of the golden calf (9:20-21).

Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus thus proves itself to be a pivotal source. Working back from the secure Aaronide base described by Ben Sira, we can discern the following stages in the development of authority systems in Israel:

1. Aaronide authority rooted in the canonized Pentateuch. This authority is confirmed by Ben Sira as operational in his day, and it is assumed throughout Chronicles and Ezra to be the legitimate and exclusive priesthood. Prophets have been phased out, and Levites have been consigned to a subordinate role.
2. The canonization of the Pentateuch--no earlier than Malachi and no later than Chronicles and Ezra. The promulgation of the Pentateuch marks off the decisive line of demarcation, with the Aaronide hegemony on the one side, and the prophetic, Levitical-priestly and monarchical claims on the other.
3. The post-exilic and exilic. Prophets are still in the ascendancy and continue to play a decisive leadership role. Malachi lends prophetic support to the Levites and confirms the revelation of God to Moses on Mt. Horeb, i.e., Deuteronomy alone is binding; Haggai expresses Yahweh's will to both Zerubabel, the scion of David and Jehozadak, the High Priest; Zechariah acknowledges the Levites (Zech. 12:13) and anticipates a Davidic restoration (12:7 to 13:6); while Ezekiel depreciates the Levites, calls for Zadokite priestly hegemony, binds the Prince to the cultus (45:7-25) and legislates freely without recourse to Mosaic authority or precedent. Throughout this phase prophets, priests and monarchical aspirants vie with one another for ascendancy. The definitive role of Moses as lawgiver in the wilderness is still being challenged by prophets who speak out directly in Yahweh's name without regard to a Mosaic revelation.

4. The promulgation of Deuteronomy. The significance of Deuteronomy in its final form lies in its effort to establish a coalition of Levitical priests, prophets and kings on the basis of Mosaic authority. No less significant is Deuteronomy's failure to mention the Aaronides, either for praise or for blame. Following on the promulgation of Deuteronomy, prophets take note of the Levites, but they remain silent with respect to the Aaronides.

The promulgation of the Pentateuch and the ascendancy of the Aaronides is thus confirmed as a revolutionary act; for it (a) elevated a hitherto undocumented priestly class into Moses' seat; (b) brought prophetic activity to an end; (c) gave the coup de grace to monarchical aspirants.

### III.

Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus likewise plays a pivotal role in confirming the Pharisaic revolution.<sup>4</sup> As pointed out above, Ben Sira enthusiastically endorses Aaronide authority as divinely mandated. No other class is to enjoy equivalent authority, not even the class of Soferim (38:24 to 39:11), to which Ben Sira himself belongs. To Aaron alone did God give authority over his commandments, judgments and statutes. He alone was to teach Jacob the testimonies and enlighten Israel with His Law (45:17-18). The Soferim were to revel in the laws, mediate upon the statutes and judgments and glorify the God who had chosen Aaron and his sons, but they were not to exercise any independent authority with respect to the laws or their meaning.<sup>5</sup>

This class of Soferim was nonetheless an anomalous class, for it had emerged after the canonization of the Pentateuch. They are nowhere mentioned in the Pentateuch, yet they play a prominent and respected role in Ben Sira's day. Their métier, Wisdom, is not a Pentateuchal preoccupation. The Aaronides are to offer sacrifices and expiate sins, but neither they nor any others are charged with the pursuit of Wisdom.

The Soferic class was thus a class that emerged after the canonization of the Pentateuch and dedicated itself to the pursuit of Wisdom, a pursuit neither commanded nor prohibited by the Pentateuch. It was a free area, which might be explored without in any way challenging the grip of the Aaronides over the Law and over the expiating cultus. Indeed, Wisdom could as easily strengthen the Aaronides as undermine them.

The Soferim of Ben Sira's day gave the Aaronides cause for rejoicing, for they venerated the Pentateuch and glorified the Aaronides. They made no bid for control over the laws, since these laws did not restrict them from the cultivation of Wisdom. Reiterating that the beginning of Wisdom is the fear of the Lord

and that Wisdom was vouchsafed Israel by the same God who had revealed the Law and the hegemony of the Aaronides, the Soferim freely indulged their intellectual passions and curiosity.

Ben Sira is the eloquent witness of this fruitful collaboration between the Aaronides in charge of the Law and cultus, and the Soferim. For him, the Pentateuch is the Law, and the High Priest alone determined how this Law was to be read and what its provisions meant. There was for Ben Sira no Oral Law standing alongside the Written Law, and there was no scholar class laying down the true Law for the Aaronides. Soferim such as Ben Sira were followers of the Law, not authorities over the Law.

Indeed, these Soferim were not even exegetes. They did not parse the verses of the Pentateuch to disclose hidden meanings, or to justify and rationalize some novel law or doctrinal teaching. They were not commentators. Not once in his entire book does Ben Sira even quote a Biblical verse, much less explicate its meaning.

This non-exegetical stance is clearly evident in Ben Sira's praise of Wisdom as a divine revelation. He cites no Biblical verses and does not extract hidden meanings from the text of Genesis. He simply affirms:

Wisdom will praise herself  
and will glory in the midst of her people.  
In the assembly of the Most High  
she will open her mouth,  
and in the presence of His host she will glory:  
"I come from the mouth of the Most High. . . ."  
Then the Creator of all things gave me a com-  
mandment  
and the one who created me assigned a place  
for my tent.  
And He said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob,  
and in Israel receive your inheritance."  
From eternity, in the beginning He created me,  
and for eternity I shall not cease to exist.  
In the holy tabernacle I ministered before Him,  
and so I was established in Zion.  
In the beloved city He likewise gave me a  
resting place  
and in Jerusalem was my dominion.  
So I took root in an honoured people,  
in the portion of the Lord, who is their inheri-  
tance (24:1-3, 8-12)

Ben Sira does not extract Wisdom from the text, but melds Wisdom with the Pentateuch:

All this is the book of the Covenant of the  
Most High God,  
the Law which Moses commanded us,

as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob.

It fills men with Wisdom, like the Pishon, and like the Tigris at the time of the first fruits. . . (24:23, 25)

The Soferim and the Aaronides in this way confirmed and strengthened one another. God had revealed the Torah to Moses. This Torah gave the Aaronides authority over the Law and the expiating cultus. God had no less revealed Wisdom. This revelation gave to the Soferim the right to pursue Wisdom as a divine mandate.

Ben Sira thus describes the following situation: (a) the Pentateuch is the Law of God; (b) the Aaronides are in charge of administering and clarifying its demands; (c) the Soferim are not in charge of the Law, but they are free to pursue Wisdom; (d) there is no Oral Law, no exegesis and no prohibition against Soferim writing down their thoughts.

By giving us such a sharply etched portrait of the ruling Aaronides and the supportive Soferim, Ben Sira reveals a system of authority that was subsequently phased out by the triumphant Pharisees. These Pharisees were a scholar class calling themselves "Soferim," yet their teachings were antithetical to those of the Soferim who had flourished in Ben Sira's day. The Soferim-Pharisees proclaimed that God had given Moses not one Torah, but two, the Written Pentateuch and the Oral Law. This two-fold Law had been transmitted, so they claimed (Aboth 1:1), from Moses to Joshua, to the elders, to the prophets and to the men of the Great Synagogue. The Aaronide priesthood is bypassed completely. The Soferim-Pharisees further taught that God had revealed this two-fold Law so that the law-abiding Israelite could win for himself the world to come and resurrection. The Oral Law, in contradistinction to the Written Law, was highly flexible and could be expanded or contracted as changing conditions prescribed. The oral laws were called halakhot, taqqanoth and gezeroth--legal nomenclature nowhere used in the Pentateuch. Alongside the oral laws, the Soferim-Pharisees taught aggadoth, oral lore, which, like the oral laws, are not set down in the Pentateuch.

Deviating sharply from the Soferim of Ben Sira's day, the Soferim-Pharisees looked to the Pentateuch--and the Prophets and Hagiographa as well--for proof texts to confirm both Oral Law and Oral Lore. And unlike their predecessors, the Soferim-Pharisees were not pursuers of hypostasized Wisdom, nor did they set down either their Oral Law or Lore in writing. Indeed, they so sharply differentiated between the written and the oral laws that they created their own distinctive legal and aggadic formulae, which studiously avoided using any Biblical forms for their models.

The Soferim-Pharisees must thus be sharply differentiated from the Soferim described by Ben Sira. Whereas the Aaronide Soferim upheld the absolute authority of the literal Pentateuch and the hegemony of the descendants of Aaron, the Soferim-Pharisees upheld their own authority as absolute. They even dictated to the Aaronide priests the procedures that they were to follow in the Temple service, and prescribed the ritual for the High Priest's entry into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. Whereas the hegemony of Aaron and his sons, as proclaimed by the Aaronide Soferim, is explicitly spelled out in the Pentateuch, no Pentateuchal text assigns authority to Soferim-Pharisees; yet, the Soferim-Pharisees claim the right to sit in Moses' seat. Whereas the Aaronide Soferim heed the demand of Moses that the laws set down are inviolable and immutable, the Soferim-Pharisees freely circulate oral laws which bypass, offset or even negate explicit Pentateuchal commands.

This incongruence is confirmed by Josephus:

For the present I wish merely to explain that the Pharisees have passed on to the people certain regulations handed down from former generations and not written in the Laws of Moses. For this reason they are rejected by the Sadducaean group, who hold that only those regulations should be considered valid which were written down in the Pentateuch, while those which had been handed down by former generations must not be observed. And concerning these matters, the two groupings came to have controversies and serious differences, the Sadducees having the confidence of the wealthy alone but no following among the populace, while the Pharisees have the support of the masses (Antiquities, XII:297-298).

We thus have conclusive evidence that a revolutionary transformation had occurred. The structure of Aaronide authority as it existed in Ben Sira's day is incongruent with the structure of Pharisaic authority in the Hasmonean and post-Hasmonean periods. Since the Pharisaic system does not follow logically from the Aaronide, it represents an innovative, revolutionary breakthrough.

#### IV.

Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus thus proves to be a precious source, bridging two revolutionary transformations. By holding up before us a society built on the Pentateuch and ruled over

by the Aaronides, he allows us to compare it with societies that preceded it and those that followed. When we move back from Ben Sira, we cross a line of demarcation marked off by the promulgation of the Pentateuch. On the pre-Pentateuchal side of the line are prophets, Levitical priests and monarchical aspirants; on the post-Pentateuchal side are the Aaronides. Likewise, when we move forward from Ben Sira, we cross a line of demarcation marked off by the rise of Pharisaism. On the pre-Pharisaic side, we find the Written Law, Aaronide hegemony and Soferim upholding the literal Pentateuch with its mandate to Aaron and his sons to exercise hegemony in perpetuity. On the other side of this line we find the Soferim-Pharisees in Moses' seat, subordinating the Aaronides to halakhoth, tagqanoth and gezeroth and proclaiming eternal life and resurrection. And since the system of authority prevailing in Ben Sira's day is incongruent with either the pre-Pentateuchal system of authority, or the Pharisaic system, it follows that both the promulgation of the Pentateuch and the rise of the Aaronides, on the one hand, and the promulgation of the two-fold Law and the rise of the Soferim-Pharisees, on the other hand, were revolutionary events radically altering the nature of the religion of Israel and the destiny of the Jewish people.<sup>6</sup>

FOOTNOTES

1. For the pivotal role of Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus as a "sentinel," or "control" source, see E. Rivkin, "Ben Sira and the Non-Existence of the Synagogue," in: D. J. Silver (ed.), In the Time of Harvest--Essays in Honor of Abba Hillel Silver, New York 1963, pp. 320-354. For the most part, however, scholars have focused on Ben Sira's contribution to the Wisdom Literature rather than to his definitive testimony to Aaronide hegemony and his witness to a society operating on the basis of a literal reading of the Pentateuch. See, e.g., R. Smend, Die Weissheit des Jesus Sirach, Berlin 1906; G.H. Box & W.O.E. Oesterly, "Sirach," in: R.H. Charles, The Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, Oxford 1913; J.H.A. Hart, Ecclesiasticus in Greek, Cambridge 1909; C.C. Torrey, The Apocryphal Literature, New Haven 1945; M.S. Siegel, Sefer Ben Sira ha-Shalem, Jerusalem 1953; R.H. Pfeiffer, History of New Testament Times, New York 1949; O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament--An Introduction, trans. P.R. Ackroyd, New York 1965, pp. 595-599, 772; V. Tcherikower, Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews, Philadelphia 1959, pp. 142-151; S. Zeitlin, The Rise and Fall of the Judean State, I, Philadelphia 1962, pp. 297-300; E. Bevan, Jerusalem under the High Priests, London 1912, pp. 49-68.

2. For the revolutionary implications of the canonization of the Pentateuch, see E. Rivkin, The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation, New York 1971, pp. 21-41; idem, The Dynamics of Jewish History, Sarasota (Florida) 1970, pp. 15-31; idem, "Prologomenon" to Judaism and Christianity, ed. W.E.O. Oesterly & H.M.J. Loewe, New York 1969.

3. On the problem of dating Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus, see the discussion in Rivkin (above, n. 1), Appendix A, pp. 348-350.

4. For the concept of the Pharisaic Revolution, see E. Rivkin, "The Pharisaic Revolution," in M. Shulwass (ed.), Perspectives in Jewish Learning, Chicago 1966, pp. 26-51; "Defining the Pharisees--The Tannaitic Sources," HUCA, XL-XLI (1969-1970), pp. 205-249; "Pharisaism and the Crisis of the Individual in the Greco-Roman World," JQR, LXI (1970), pp. 27-53; "Prologomenon" (above, n. 2), pp. xi-lxx; "The Internal City," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, V (1966), pp. 26-51; The Dynamics of Jewish History (above, n. 2), pp. 33-50; The Shaping of Jewish History (above, n. 2), pp. 42-83. Although Zeitlin has stressed the revolutionary significance of the Pharisees, he sees them as emerging in the early post-exilic period; see Zeitlin (above, n. 1), pp. 23, 176-187; idem, "The Origin of the Pharisees Reconsidered," JQR, LIX (1969), pp. 255-267. Most scholars, however, see the Pharisees as evolving gradually out of the scribal class of the pre-Hasmonean

period; see, e.g., Tcherikower (above, n. 1), pp. 124-126, 253-265; L. Finkelstein, The Pharisees, Philadelphia 1962; idem, "The Origins of the Pharisees Reconsidered," Conservative Judaism, XXIII (1969), pp. 25-36. For the spectrum of scholarly views on the Pharisees, see R. Marcus, "The Pharisees in the Light of Modern Scholarship," Journal of Religion, XXXII (1952), pp. 153-164; A. Nichel & I. Le Moyne, "Pharisiens," in: H. Cazelles & André Feuillet (eds.), Supplement au Dictionnaire de la bible, Paris 1965, Fasc. 39-40, pp. 1022-1115; J. Neusner, The Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70 A.D., I-III, Leiden 1971; idem, From Politics to Piety--The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism, New Jersey 1973.

5. Scholars have tended to blur the picture of the Soferim given by Ben Sira by melding them first with the Hasidim and then with the Pharisees. Whereas Ben Sira assigns exclusive hegemony over the Law to the Aaronides, most scholars insist on ascribing an authoritative legal provenance for the Soferim even antedating Ben Sira see, e.g., Tcherikower (above, n. 1), pp. 83-84, 124-126, and esp. notes 19, 21, 23 on pp. 456-457; G.F. Moore, Judaism, I, Cambridge 1962, pp. 37-47. By positing the existence of the Pharisees during the pre-Hasmonean period, Zeitlin acknowledges a class of legal authorities who developed the Oral Law independently of the Aaronides; see Zeitlin (above, n. 1), pp. 9-13, 23-25, 31-33, 176-187, and passim. Such blurring of the image of the pre-Hasmonean Soferim derives from the failure to recognize that Ben Sira's Ecclesiasticus is a unique and definitive source for pre-Hasmonean society; see Rivkin (above, n. 1), pp. 320-354.

6. For fuller documentation of this revolutionary transformation, see Rivkin, above, n. 4.

