

The Waning of Dialogue in Post-Biblical Wisdom Literature

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1. Introduction¹

The language, forms, and themes in wisdom texts have an instructional or pedagogical function. One of the distinguishing features pertains to the literary form of dialogue. Dialogue is widely used in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature² and in biblical wisdom. In the second millennium BCE wisdom text from Boghazkoi and Ugarit, the *Wisdom of Shu-pa-awilum*, there is dialogue in a very primitive way: a father speaks at length, and in the end the son answers.³ Dialogue is also found in *The Babylonian Theodicy*, the *Babylonian Dialogue between the Master and the Servant*, and the Egyptian *Dialogue between a Man and his Ba*.⁴ Dialogue is characteristic of the much later wisdom poetry in Syriac as well.⁵ Later it is found in Greek literature as

¹ This article is derived from part of my doctoral dissertation at Bar-Ilan University written under the supervision of Professors Edward L. Greenstein and Esther Eshel.

² Sara J. Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature: Expression, Instruction, Dialogue* (Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1992); Karel van der Toorn, "The Ancient Near Eastern Literary Dialogue as a Vehicle of Critical Reflection," in G. J. Reinink and H. L. J. Vanstiphout (eds), *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East* (Leuven: Peeters, 1991), 59-75.

³ Victor A. Hurowitz, "The Wisdom of Šupê-amêlî - A Deathbed Debate between a Father and Son," in Richard J. Clifford (ed.), *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 33-51; Yoram Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 81-128.

⁴ There are some good translations: for the Babylonian texts, B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 2005); for the Egyptian one, Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* (3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973-1980).

⁵ For example, "The Book of the Laws of the Countries" of Bardaisan. For Bardaisan, H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa Studia* (Semitica Neerlandica 6; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1966), 76-95. See also Adam H. Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 10.

the *Dialogues of Plato*, which seem to have had an influence on Hellenistic Hebrew wisdom.⁶

Dialogue figures as an element of wisdom in the biblical books, whereas it does not in the extra-biblical ones. Although the Book of Proverbs does not have real dialogue, each chapter or section has a particular speaker, even if it is only the anonymous sage. A personal direct address, like “my son,” indicates that there is an interlocutor presupposed in the speaker’s discourse. In addition, there are the words Lemuel is said to have heard from his mother (Prov. 31:1), which reminds one of ancient Near Eastern instruction texts (see below), and the poem in praise of the virtuous woman (Prov. 31:10-31), in which there are two direct addresses (Prov. 31:2, 4).⁷ The Book of Job is primarily composed of dialogues (God-Satan, Job-Friends, God-Job). Throughout the dialogues, and especially through God’s rhetorical questions, Job forms his understanding of the nature of God.⁸ In the Book of Qohelet, the dialogue is subtle: the sage converses with his heart—with himself.⁹ Furthermore, it is not that dialogue is absent from post-biblical literature. It is found, for example, in the post-biblical 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, which are not, generically speaking, wisdom texts.¹⁰ However, we do

⁶ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 1: 109. Hengel introduces earlier scholars who claim some links with the dialogue of Plato in Hebrew wisdom; Karl Fries, *Das philosophische Gespräch von Hiob bis Platon* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904); Bernhard Stade argues for a Hebrew imitation of the philosophical dialogue in Plato in his *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (Berlin: G. Grote, 1888), 2: 348-51.

⁷ Dialogue is familiar in ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature. In the second millennium BCE wisdom text from Boghazkoi and Ugarit, the Wisdom of Shupe-awilum, there is dialogue in a very primitive way: the father speaks at length, and in the end the son answers. See Hurowitz, “The Wisdom of Šupê-amêli.”

⁸ Edward L. Greenstein, “A Forensic Understanding of the Speech from the Whirlwind” in Michael V. Fox et al. (eds.), *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 241-58.

⁹ Edward L. Greenstein, “Sages with a Sense of Humor: The Babylonian Dialogue between the Master and His Servant and the Book of Qohelet,” in Clifford (ed.), *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel*, 55-65 at 58.

¹⁰ See Michael E. Stone and Matthias Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Translations, Introductions, and Notes* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2013); Matthias Henze, “4 Ezra and 2 Baruch: Literary Composition and Oral Performance in First-Century Apocalyptic Literature,” *JBL* 131 (2012), 181-200; Daewoong Kim, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic in 2 Baruch,” *Henoch* 38 (2011), 250-74.

not find dialogue in the post-biblical wisdom texts, the Book of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon.

Discourse forms that have been discerned in the book of Ben Sira are instructions (Sir. 24:33-34), admonitions (Sir. 8:1-19), the beatitude form in praise of wisdom (Sir. 14:20), hymns of praise (1:1-10; 18:1-7; 39:12-35; 42:15-43:33; 50:22-24; 51:1-12), the personification of Lady Wisdom (24:3-22), autobiographical narrative (33:16-18; 51:13-15), some autobiographical poems on wisdom (51:13-30), two petitionary prayers (22:27-23:6; 36:1-22), didactic narrative (44:1-50:24), and a long hymn in praise of the “fathers” (44:1-50:21).¹¹ But there is no dialogue in the Book of Ben Sira.

The Wisdom of Solomon is composed in a poetic form. Many passages in the Wisdom of Solomon include exhortatory discourse.¹² James M. Reese argues that, “the Wisdom of Solomon belongs to the literary genre of protreptic, a genre of rhetorical exhortation in Greek philosophy.” In other words, the author of the Wisdom of Solomon uses the devices of Greek rhetoric to encourage Jewish readers to love their revealed tradition and to portray biblical morals as superior to their Hellenistic counterparts. The case is argued with great skill by a creative use of figurative language and literary allusions.¹³ In this book also, we cannot find any use of dialogue.

It is therefore striking that dialogue, such as we find most prominently in the Book of Job, is not a feature of post-biblical wisdom literature. This particular discontinuity calls for attention and consideration, and it leads one to ask what the function of dialogue in biblical wisdom might be and what happened to that function in the post-biblical period.

In the present article, I will suggest a likely reason for the waning of the dialogue form in the post-biblical wisdom literature. Toward this end, I

¹¹ Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, O. F. M., *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes by Skehan and Introduction and Commentary by Di Lella* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1987), 21-30.

¹² David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation, with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday & Company, 1979), 18.

¹³ James M. Reese, “Wisdom of Solomon,” in James L. Mays and Joseph Blenkinsopp et al. (eds.), *Harper's Bible Commentary* (SBL; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 820-35 at 820.

will first examine how the literary form of dialogue functions and its nature in wisdom literature. I will adduce some dialogue forms from the biblical wisdom texts. Then I will point out its absence in the post-biblical wisdom literature. Some dialogues from post-biblical texts which are related to but are not themselves wisdom literature will be also enumerated.

2. Dialogue in Wisdom Literature

2.1. The Nature of Dialogue and its Function

The Hebrew Bible is of course a compilation of individual literary works. The diverse literature of the Bible represents a wide variety of genres, including narrative, history, law, poetry, prophecy, song, letter, and dialogue. Various literary components were originally intended for use within a specific setting to accomplish a specific function, as Hermann Gunkel in particular had proposed.¹⁴ According to Gunkel, the identification of biblical genres provides important information regarding the early oral form of a text and its original setting and function in ancient Israel.¹⁵ For example, each distinct genre was used in a specific setting for a specific purpose. Instructions in wisdom tend to be presented as a father teaching his son, but that is generally understood as a teacher instructing his student.¹⁶ Sometimes wisdom instructions display a clear dialogic character. The leading example in Egypt is the *Instructions of Amenemope*. It contains thirty chapters of advice for successful living, ostensibly written by the scribe Amenemope son of Kanakht as a legacy for his son.¹⁷ The leading Akkadian example is the ancient Syrian wisdom text *Šimā Milka*, in which the son cynically responds

¹⁴ Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* (trans. Thomas M. Horner; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

¹⁵ Ibid., 10; idem (completed by Joachim Begrich), *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 16.

¹⁶ See, e.g., James L. Crenshaw, "The Sage in Proverbs," in John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (eds.), *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 205-16 at 212; Samuel L. Adams, *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 76.

¹⁷ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volume II: The New Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 146-63.

to the father in the end. Hurowitz compares the father's admonitions in *Šimā Milka* to the sayings found in Proverbs, while the son's reply echoes sentiments expressed by Qohelet.¹⁸ Yoram Cohen observes, too, that in *Šimā Milka* one voice is positive whereas the other is cynical. The different opinions are expressed by dialogues. Cohen writes:

Whether the son represents a newer or more modern approach that stands in opposition to the traditional approach of wisdom is a possible hypothesis. However, it is less clear whether the son's reply is indicative that the work in front of us is a sophisticated parody of the "Instructions" genre.¹⁹

Dialogue is a more prominent genre than one might have thought, and the so-called instructions, which are admittedly by and large monological, include dialogue more than might be expected. The literary form of dialogue is especially prominent in other wisdom forms, such as sayings, maxims, proverbs, speculative discourse, instructions, and the riddle.²⁰ Steven B. Smith points out that dialogue is the form of writing that comes closest to the "flexibility" and "adaptability" of actual speech. A good dialogue, like a good conversation, may say different things to different people.²¹

The Hebrew Bible is replete with dialogues. Think for example of the story of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-19). Biblical narrative abounds in dialogue, which serves, among other things, to characterize and create drama.²²

¹⁸ Hurowitz, "The Wisdom of Šupê-amêlî," 44-45.

¹⁹ Yoram Cohen, *Wisdom from the Late Bronze Age* (SBLWAW; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 122.

²⁰ Alexander Rofé, *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible* (trans. Harvey N. Bock; Jerusalem: Simor, 2009), 538-41.

²¹ Steven B. Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 91.

²² Greenstein provides some statistics for how much direct discourse there is in a number of different narrative books—from about 37% or so in Genesis to 61% in Ruth. See Edward L. Greenstein, "Direct Discourse and Parallelism," in Athalya Brenner-Idan (ed.), *Discourse, Dialogue, and Debate in the Bible: Essays in Honour of Frank Polak* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 79-91. Shimeon Bar-Efrat delineates some functions of dialogue in *The Art of*

Let us now consider the function of dialogue as a literary form in the wisdom texts. Why was dialogue favored in earlier texts and apparently disfavored in post-biblical texts? And what were the contexts of the texts?

Bendt Alster explains that disputation was part of the curriculum of the Edubba (the ancient Mesopotamian scribal school).²³ Argument means dialogue. Although disputation and dialogue are not coextensive terms, argument would seem to lie behind the dialogues in wisdom texts. Dialogue as a rhetorical art form is by definition open-ended. The respondent, divine or human, can afford to be selective in answering questions. An argument may be resolved or remain unresolved. In any event, a good argument entails at least two conflicting points of view.

In the wisdom tradition dialogue is a medium for raising critical questions about God and justice, as in the Babylonian *Theodicy*, *The Dialogue between a Master and His Servant*, the Egyptian *Dialogue between a Man and his Ba*, and the Book of Job. Meanwhile, in the apocalyptic literature, such as 1 Enoch, Daniel, and 4 Ezra, dialogue takes place between a chosen individual and the deity. For this reason, apocalyptic belongs more to the prophetic tradition than to wisdom.²⁴ In Denning-Bolle's survey of studies on ancient Near Eastern and biblical wisdom, she homes in on "dialogue in Akkadian literature," pointing out how Gilgamesh develops and manifests wisdom through dialogue in the poem.²⁵ The Babylonian *Theodicy* features two interlocutors, a sufferer who challenges the justice of the gods and a companion who seeks to get him to maintain his piety. Takayoshi Oshima argues that the sufferer appeals for compassion. In Oshima's understanding, the companion is a senior sage, explaining how one should respond to

the Biblical Story (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1979), 88-89 [in Hebrew]; see also Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 63-87.

²³ Bendt Alster, *Proverbs of Ancient Sumer* (2 vols.; Bethesda, MD: Capital Decisions Ltd., 1997), 1: xiv and xix-xx; See also Bendt Alster and H. L. J. Vanstiphout, "Lahar and Ashnan. Presentation and Analysis of a Sumerian Disputation," *Acta Sumerologica* 9 (1987), 1-43.

²⁴ See Stephen L. Cook, *Prophecy & Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

²⁵ Sara Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature: Expression, Instruction, Dialogue* (Leiden: Ex Oriente Lux, 1992), 88-103.

skepticism with piety.²⁶ Denning-Bolle considers the possibility that the *Theodicy* is an inner dialogue.²⁷ Although there seem to be two distinct speakers in the poem, each one alternating with the other, it is possible to see the argument as an internal debate within the heart of an individual who is struggling with the problem of divine justice. Compare the Egyptian *Man and His ba* and the biblical Qohelet, as described above.

2.2. Platonic Dialogues—Their Form and Their Themes

We find in such Greek literature as *the Dialogues of Plato*, a form of dialogue which seems to have had an influence on Hellenistic Hebrew wisdom. We know that in rhetoric, Socratic dialogue is an argument using the question and answer in the Platonic dialogues. This kind of conversation would stimulate independent, reflective, and critical thinking. James J. Murphy explains Platonic dialogue in this way:

The Platonic dialogue usually begins with Socrates professing ignorance of the subject matter. He asks questions of the other characters, resulting in a fuller understanding of the subject. The dialogues are named after the key person interrogated by Socrates. The dialogue has an obvious relation to both drama and argumentation. In the dialogues the characters speak in ways appropriate not only to their own views, but to their speaking styles as well. The dialogues are also a form of “dialectic,” a branch of logic focusing on reasoning in philosophical matters such that even if absolute certainty is unattainable, truth is pursued to a high degree of probability.²⁸

²⁶ Takayoshi Oshima, *The Babylonian Theodicy* (SAACT 9; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2013), xlvi.

²⁷ Denning-Bolle, *Wisdom in Akkadian Literature*, 155-56.

²⁸ James J. Murphy, Richard A. Katula, eds., *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric* (3rd ed.; New York-London: Routledge, 2003).

Leo Strauss emphasizes that “Plato composes his writings in such a way as to prevent for all time their use as authoritative texts.”²⁹ Yet, Smith points that “the difficulty of unraveling the meaning of a dialogue does not result in a kind of total epistemological abstinence. In fact, a close reading of the dialogues will reveal that Plato indicates “very specific hermeneutic rules” about how to read a dialogue.”³⁰ We can say that Plato’s dialogues demand to be read with exceeding care. There is nothing superfluous, nothing meaningless in a Platonic dialogue.³¹ We hear Strauss’ statement about these rules:

For presenting his teaching Plato uses not merely the “content” of his work, but also their “form” (the dialogue form in general, the particular form of each dialogue and of each section of it, the action, characters, names places, times of it, the action, characters, names, places, times, situations and the like); an adequate understanding of the dialogues understands the “content” in the light of the “form.”³²

Let us now take a closer look at some samples of dialogue from the biblical wisdom texts. This may enable us better to suggest what seem to have been the sociological settings of dialogue in the biblical wisdom literature.

3. Dialogue in Biblical Wisdom Literature

3.1. The Book of Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs does not have real dialogue. However, there is a particular speaker in each chapter or section. A personal direct address, like “my son,” indicates that there is an interlocutor in a speaker’s speech. We find the direct address “my son” repeatedly (1:8, 10,15; 2:1; 3:1, 11,21; 4:10,

²⁹ Leo Strauss, *In the City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 351.

³⁰ Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss*, 91.

³¹ Leo Strauss, *On Plato’s Symposium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.

³² Leo Strauss, “On a New Interpretation of Plato’s Political Philosophy,” *Social Research* 13 (1946), 326-67 at 351.

20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1; 19:27; 23:15; 23:19, 26; 24:13, 21; 27:11; 31:2), and also “my sons” (4:1; 5:7; 7:24; 8:32). For example:

Prov. 1: 8

Listen, my son, to your	שמע בני מוסר אביך;
father's instruction;	
neglect not your	ואל-תטש תורת אמך.
mother's teaching. ³³	

Prov. 4:1

Hear, O sons, a father's	שמעו בנים מוסר אב;
instruction,	
listen to learn	והקשיבו לדעת בינה.
understanding! ³⁴	

Prov. 7:24

So now, my sons, listen	ועתה בנים שמעו לי
to me,	
give heed to the words	והקשיבו לאמרי פי.
of my mouth. ³⁵	

Prov. 19:27

Cease, my son, to listen	
to instruction,	חדל-בני לשמע מוסר;
to stray from words of	
knowledge! ³⁶	לשגות מאמרי-דעת.

Prov. 31:2

No, my son, no, son of	מה-ברי ומה-בר-בטני;
my womb,	
no, son of my vows. ³⁷	ומה-בר-נדרי.

³³ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 78.

³⁴ Ibid., 171.

³⁵ Ibid., 239.

³⁶ Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31: A New Translation with Instruction and Commentary* (AB 18B; New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 661.

³⁷ Ibid., 882.

Direct personal address is also found in ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts. For example, the Sumerian wisdom text, *the Instructions of Shuruppak*, is the advice of Shuruppak, who survived the Flood, to his son. It is known in Akkadian from a small fragment, but it is attested in Sumerian before 2500 BCE. In this text we find the use of direct personal address (lines 9, 34):

My son, let me give instructions; let my instructions be taken!³⁸

My son, don't sit in a chamber with someone who is married!³⁹

The Akkadian wisdom text, the *Counsels of Wisdom*, is a collection of moral exhortations. While Benjamin Foster argues that “the timelessness of the wisdom they convey makes dating of any particular collection impossible,”⁴⁰ W. G. Lambert assumes its date of compilation is probably later than the first Dynasty of Babylon.⁴¹ This text seems to have “my son” once in its prologue (K.13770)⁴² and once in its main text, line 81: “My son, should it be the prince's will that you serve him.”⁴³ Ahiqar addresses “my son” several times in the surviving Aramaic text:⁴⁴

If I beat you, my son, you will not die;

but if I leave you alone, [you will not live].⁴⁵

(saying 4, line 82)

My son, do not curse the day until you have seen the night.⁴⁶

(saying 14a, line 96)

[Hear], O my son: harvest any harvest, and do any job;

then you may eat your fill and provide for your children.⁴⁷

³⁸ Bendt Alster, *Wisdom of Ancient Sumer* (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 2005), 57.

³⁹ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁰ Foster, *Before the Muses*, 412.

⁴¹ W. G. Lambert, *BWL* (Repr.: Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 97.

⁴² Ibid., 106.

⁴³ Foster, *Before the Muses*, 414.

⁴⁴ Cf. H. L. Ginsberg's translation of Ahiqar in Pritchard (ed.), *ANET*, 245-49. This text is preserved in a palimpsest papyrus of the late fifth century BCE. The composition of the text may antedate the preserved copy by as much as a century.

⁴⁵ James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 51.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 71.

(saying 40, line 127)

[Hear], O my son: borrow grain and wheat, that you may eat your fill /
and provide your children with you.⁴⁸

(saying 42, line 129)

In Egyptian wisdom literature is often addressed from father to son.

As we have seen, the Book of Proverbs continues the ancient Near Eastern wisdom convention of using the direct addresses, “my son” or “my sons.” This direct personal address can be assumed to serve an instructional function, in the context of father-son (teacher-student) admonitions. As said above, even though the “son” rarely responds to the “father” in these texts, the second person discourse implies a dialogical situation. And, in the case of the Wisdom of Šupê-amêlî (see above), the son does indeed respond, challenging his father’s wisdom.

3.2. *The Book of Job*

The Book of Job consists of a series of poetic discourses framed by a prologue (1:1-2:13) and epilogue (42:7-17). The most thoroughgoing feature of the Book of Job is the “dialogue” from the beginning until the end. The form of dialogue is found in the prose as well as in the poem. Chaps. 1-2 feature dialogue between God and the Satan and between Job and his wife; chaps. 3-37 are dialogues between Job and three friends, and Elihu. Finally, chaps. 38-42 are a dialogue between God and Job. The prologue of the Book of Job (1:1-2:13) is a superb instance of the art of narration through dialogue. Alter has nicely remarked on how the respective speeches of YHWH and the Satan function as “contrastive dialogue” to suggest characterization.⁴⁹

However, while the argument between the Lord and the Satan anticipate the lengthy dialogues between Job and his companions, and then between Job and God, it is the poetic discourses that constitute the dialogical

⁴⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁹ Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 74.

core of the book. The Book of Job is subversive. It challenges conventional wisdom theology. The unjust suffering of the righteous Job cannot be explained by the traditional doctrine of retributive justice. Indeed, much of the dialogue takes the form of legal disputation. Interpreters have typically seen the Book of Job as a radical challenge to traditional views about the relationship between act and consequence.⁵⁰ There are three cycles of dialogue-dispute (chaps. 3-27); three monologues—Job's (chaps. 29-31); Elihu's (chaps. 32-37); God's (chaps. 38-41). However, they are not entirely monologues. They each presuppose a specific audience. In chaps. 29-31 Job lays some protest before God and he swears (before God) to his innocence of any transgressions.⁵¹ Elihu acknowledges Job and his other companions and addresses himself directly to Job, responding to many of Job's contentions. Edouard Dhorme observes that, "the most striking feature about Elihu's speeches is the mode of discussion adopted. If the reader will refer to our analysis of the poetic dialogue, he will easily note that each speaker expounds his point of view and doctrine without really troubling to confute previous argument. The refutation arises of itself from the essence of the debate."⁵² The deity addresses Job as well—although it is much less clear that he is responding to Job's issues.⁵³

Even when God was silent during the dialogues of Job and friends, He seems to have been listening to Job's complaints. Therefore, we might say that a literary dialogue between Job and God extends from the beginning to the end of the poetic dialogues. While I agree with Greenstein that the series of rhetorical questions that make up most the divine speeches may be taken

⁵⁰ James L. Crenshaw, "Job" in *Urgent Advice and Probing Questions: Collected Writings on Old Testament Wisdom* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1995), 426-48 at 464. Lannart Boström characterizes the relationship as character-consequence rather than act-consequence; *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs* (CB 29; Lund: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1990), 90.

⁵¹ Michael B. Dick, "Job 31, the Oath of Innocence, and the Sage," *ZAW* 95 (1983), 31-53.

⁵² Edouard Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Harold Knight; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), liv-lvii and xcvi-cx.

⁵³ Athalya Brenner, "God's Answer to Job," *VT* 31 (1981), 129-37.

to serve a distinctly juridical purpose,⁵⁴ I think the emphasis on the dialogue form in this book is also for the purpose of sapiential education by the method of question and answer—much in the same way that Oshima has suggested for the *Babylonian Theodicy*.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray emphasize that the difference between the Babylonian “philosophical dialogue” and the dialogue in Job is so great that any direct influence of one over the other is altogether improbable; and the same can be said of the Greek dialogues.⁵⁶ The Platonic dialogues are analytical, while the Joban discourses are lengthy and more broadly argumentative. The Babylonian dialogues comprise much briefer interchanges. Marvin Pope also argues that there is scant similarity between the long poetic monologues of the so-called dialogue of the Book of Job and the brief, precise, and analytical conversation of Plato’s dialogues.⁵⁷

In order to appreciate the place of Job in the history of argumentative dialogue, let us turn our attention briefly to what is thought about the milieu in which the book was composed. There are different opinions as to the date. Leo Perdue enumerates several factors that may point to the location and period of the dialogues being composed during the Babylonian exile. First, the absence of Torah and the themes of salvation history and their combination show that the Book of Job would have been composed prior to the period of Ezra in the early fourth century BCE⁵⁸ and Ben Sira in the early second century BCE, when the Torah and themes of salvation history were combined in shaping the theology of the Second Temple sages. Second, the poet’s rejection of the doctrine of retribution would provide a possible interpretation of the national catastrophe when traditional faith was challenged. The devastation of Judah and Jerusalem by the Babylonians was unparalleled in Judah’s history. The justice of God and the meaning of

⁵⁴ Greenstein, “Forensic Understanding” (n. 8 above), 250.

⁵⁵ Oshima, *Babylonian Theodicy*, xxxii-xxxiii.

⁵⁶ S. R. Driver and George B. Gray, *The Book of Job* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, last edition in 1964), xxiv.

⁵⁷ Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (3rd ed.; AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), xxxi.

⁵⁸ Scholars tend to think Ezra was written in the second half of the fifth century BCE.

election came under serious question.⁵⁹ Perdue remarks that both the exiles and those who remained in the homeland no longer held “the Deuteronomistic Historian’s doctrine of retribution.” The catastrophe provoked debates over theodicy and prompted “the anticipation of new acts of divine salvation and liberation (Second Isaiah).”⁶⁰

Avi Hurvitz claimed already in 1974: “The language of the prose tale of Job has several features aligning it with the Late Biblical Hebrew (LBH) known from Persian-Period writings such as Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Daniel.”⁶¹ Jan Joosten evaluates the linguistic evidence and defends a position slightly different from that of Hurvitz: the prose tale is written not in LBH but in transitional Biblical Hebrew.⁶² He emphasizes, “the use of classical forms of expression is not very relevant to the issue of the date of the text. A passage using such elements is judged to be late, a passage where they are lacking can be held to be early.”⁶³ Joosten argues that, “if the prose framework of the Book of Job shows both late and early features, this does not make the linguistic approach to the dating of biblical texts impracticable. The linguistic profile of the prose tale strongly suggests that it belongs neither to the classical corpus nor to LBH, but to somewhere between the two.”⁶⁴ Joosten concludes, “rather than the Persian

⁵⁹ Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom Literature: A Theological History* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) 84. Greenstein argues that this second argument is very weak. Questioning the principle of just retribution did not begin with Job, but with Job’s friends: “who make an illogical deduction from the fact of Job’s suffering in the light of the principle of retribution. They assume that because suffering may constitute a divine punishment for sin, any and all suffering must be a divine suffering.” See Edward L. Greenstein, “The Problem of Evil in the Book of Job,” in Nili S. Fox et al. (eds.), *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment in Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 333-62 at 338.

⁶⁰ Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 78.

⁶¹ Avi Hurvitz, “The Date of the Prose-Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered,” *HTR* 67 (1974), 17-34.

⁶² Jan Joosten, “Linguistic Clues as to the Date of the Book of Job: A Mediating Position,” in James K. Aitken et al. (eds.), *Interested Readers* (Fs. David J. A. Clines; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 347-57 at 347.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 351.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

period, linguistic analysis indicates that the prose tale came into being in the Babylonian period.”⁶⁵

However, Greenstein argues that, “the Book of Job was composed sometime in the Persian period, when Aramaic was the *lingua franca* in the Levant, and the frequent use of Aramaic words and forms by the poet should have posed no difficulty at all.”⁶⁶ He asserts that the Satan as a figure and the widespread use of Aramaic in the dialogues of Job make the Persian period almost certain.⁶⁷ Greenstein argues that without in any way denying that the book examines a number of theological issues and human concerns, even more than being about issues and themes, it is about the ways that we talk about them, how we talk about God.⁶⁸ The problem of theodicy is, then, not the overall theme of Job but rather the topic of discussion among the characters.

Carol Newsom regards the Book of Job as heavily influenced by the work of the literary expression of “the dialogical conception of truth” that pervades the biblical book as a whole.⁶⁹ For Newsom, the “truth” of the book is not represented in the argument and perspective of any one speaker but in the dynamic created among the diverse perspectives and positions. Greenstein takes a different approach: instead of finding the “truth” of the book to arise within the dynamic of the dialogue of the speakers, he finds the book to favor the perspective of Job.⁷⁰ As Greenstein points out, Job has established truth in his discourse as an absolute principle, the highest of

⁶⁵ Ibid., 357.

⁶⁶ Edward L. Greenstein, “‘Difficulty’ in the Poetry of Job,” in David J. A. Clines and Ellen van Wolde (eds.), *A Critical Engagement: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of J. Cheryl Exum* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 186-95 at 187.

⁶⁷ Cf. Edward L. Greenstein, “The Language of Job and Its Poetic Function,” *JBL* 122 (2003), 651-66.

⁶⁸ Edward L. Greenstein, “Truth or Theodicy? Speaking Truth to Power in the Book of Job,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 27 (2006), 238-58 at 239.

⁶⁹ Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 86-89; see also M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (ed. Michael Holquist; trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁷⁰ Greenstein, “Truth or Theodicy?” 238-58, esp. 239.

values: "Job is not the first biblical personality to speak truth to power. But he is the first to make a point of speaking truth."⁷¹

Whether the Book of Job was composed in the Babylonian exile, in the Persian period, or in between, it cannot be denied that the author of the Job was affected by the national catastrophe and the question of theodicy. We may assume that a sage who examines the pressing issue of the justice of God within the context of fundamental social, political, economic, and religious change invests the theological, poetic book with his concerns.⁷² The poet's rejection of the doctrine of retribution might have been caused by the trauma of national catastrophe, the devastation of Judah and Jerusalem by the Babylonians, when the justice of God and traditional faith came under serious question. This question is raised in the dialogues between Job and three friends, and between God and Job, from the beginning until the end of the book.

There is no direct answer to the question of Job's unjust suffering. However, as Greenstein points out, the series of rhetorical questions that make up most of the divine speeches may be taken to close the juridical challenge that Job poses to the deity.⁷³ Job assumes (incorrectly) that God has punished him for transgression, and Job seeks to know what the divine charges against him are. He compels God to respond by taking an "oath of innocence." Michael Dick places the burden of proof on the deity.⁷⁴ When God appears, however, he does not reply to Job's demand but rather dismisses Job's claims *pro forma*: Job was not present at the creation and is therefore not a qualified witness to how God governs the world.

The dialogues between Job and his friends, however, are more fully developed and extensive. Dialogue, argument, conveys a critical approach to the question of the nature of God and divine justice.

⁷¹ Ibid., 255.

⁷² Perdue, *Wisdom Literature*, 78.

⁷³ Greenstein, "A Forensic Understanding," 241-58.

⁷⁴ Michael B. Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in *Job* 31," *CBQ* 41 (1979), 37-50.

3.3. Qohelet

In the Book of Qohelet, there are not any strictly dialogical passages. Nevertheless, there is still a dialogical element in Qohelet. One can see Qohelet's speaking with himself as dialogue. For example,

Qoh. 1:16 a

I spoke to my heart. דברתי אני עם-לבי.

Qoh. 2:1a ; 3:17

I said in my heart. אמרתי אני בלבי.

Michael V. Fox compellingly challenges theories that find quotations or actual dialogue in the Book of Qohelet, though it is impossible to deny the dialogic texture of some passages.⁷⁵ However, as said above, we have learned from the work of Bakhtin that much discourse is dialogical, in the sense that when people speak, they formulate their speech in consideration of those who might hear it; and even the narrator's discourse incorporates a multiplicity of perspectives and voices.⁷⁶

A similar point is made by Greenstein in his comparative study of the Babylonian *Dialogue between a Master and His Servant* and the Book of Qohelet: Qohelet engages in dialogue with himself. Greenstein points out, however, that they are also radically different. While the *Dialogue* has two parties in a continuous verbal exchange, Qohelet has only a virtual interlocutor, his heart.⁷⁷ One can nevertheless compare the Egyptian *Dispute between a Man and His Ba*, which provides a more apt parallel to Qohelet from this perspective.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions* (JSOT Sup71; Sheffield: Almond, 1989) 25-28.

⁷⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 279.

⁷⁷ Greenstein, "Sages with a Sense of Humor," 58.

⁷⁸ Eunni P. Lee points out that, "as like Qohelet takes up with his heart in the conversations (1:16; 2:1, 15; 3:17, 18), the Dispute between a Man and His Ba (see Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1, 163-69) presents conflicting viewpoints in the form of a dialogue between a man and his inner-self"; *The Vitality of Enjoyment in Qohelet's Theological Rhetoric* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) 24-25. Thomas Krüger argues that "the title in Qohelet 1:1 and 12:9-14 have corresponding forms in Egyptian wisdom instructions"; *Qoheleth: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004, 11 and 39).

Like Proverbs, the Book of Qohelet offers advice on how to succeed in life. However, this book is also speculative, and it underscores the limitations of traditional retributive justice, such as we find in the Book of Job.

On the other hand, there is the unusual rhetoric and discourse of Qohelet, who describes his own empirical experimentation with such valued things as wealth and wisdom, in a quasi-autobiographical form. While the wisdom of Proverbs and Job's friends is traditional, the wisdom of Qohelet, like that of Job, is empirical.⁷⁹ Unlike conventional understandings of God, Qohelet came to comprehend God through his own experience. While the wisdom of Proverbs and Job's friends is traditional, the wisdom of Qohelet, like that of Job, is empirical.⁸⁰ Unlike conventional understandings of God, Qohelet came to comprehend God through his own experience.

James L. Crenshaw also suggests that the dominant literary type in Qohelet is reflection arising from personal observation.⁸¹ Indeed, Qohelet focuses on individual experience, in particular the perception of pleasure, such as "drinking," "eating," and "taking enjoyment in life and work" (2:24; 3:12-13, 22; 5:17-18; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:9). Ogden notices that Qohelet first uses "observes" (ראה), then "muses to himself" (אמרתי בלבי).⁸² The dialogue form is used when Qohelet speaks to himself.

As in Proverbs, with the address to the son, Qohelet, appears to be talking to himself. In neither is there an explicit response, only one voice speaking. So in what ways are these texts similar to real dialogues, such as the Babylonian Theodicy and the Book of Job? The answer is that the

⁷⁹ Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 80, 85, 88, 90-91.

⁸⁰ Edward L. Greenstein, "'On My Skin and in My Flesh': Personal Experience as a Source of Knowledge in the Book of Job," in Kathryn R. Kravitz and Diane M. Sharon (eds.), *Bringing the Hidden to Light: The Process of Interpretation, Studies in Honor of Stephen A. Geller* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 63-78, at 77. Greenstein remarks that Qohelet's epistemology leans more toward cognition, while Job's may lean more to the side of lived experience (Job 14:22; 19:20). He asserts, "this difference derives understandably from a difference in circumstances. Qohelet's critical reflection arises out of apparent frustration; Job's arises out of a most terrible ordeal. In any event, Job's attitude toward conventional wisdom is no less subversive than Qohelet's."

⁸¹ Crenshaw, "The Book of Ecclesiastes," in *ABD* (1992), 2.271-80 at 275.

⁸² Graham S. Ogden, "The Mathematics of Wisdom: Qoheleth IV 1-12," *VT* 34 (1984), 446-53 at 446-47.

discourse is shaped for the sake of a particular audience who is known to the speaker. The speaker knows what the concerns and values of the audience are, and he seeks to address those concerns and values. Such a perspective emerges from the influential work of Bakhtin. What Bakhtin calls “double-voiced words” means the expression of two speakers. The speaker of a double voiced word appropriates the utterance of another and uses it “for his own purposes by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has—and retains—its own orientation.”⁸³

4. *No Dialogue in Post-Biblical Wisdom Literature*

4.1. *The Book of Ben Sira*

The Book of Ben Sira comprises instructions written by teachers for students (e.g., Sir. 24:33-34). This book also contains sequences of admonitions (Sir. 8:1-19). Many passages in Ben Sira include didactic poetry in the tradition of Proverbs 1-9. This book also uses the beatitude form to praise wisdom, as does Proverbs (Prov. 3:13 and cf. Sir. 14:20).⁸⁴ In addition to the proverbial form, Ben Sira includes hymns of praise (1:1-10; 18:1-7; 39:12-35; 42:15-43:33; 50:22-24; 51:1-12), the personification of Lady Wisdom (Sir. 24:3-22), autobiographical narrative (33:16-18; 51:13-15), some autobiographical poems on Wisdom (51:13-30), two petitionary prayers (22:27-23:6; 36:1-22), didactic narrative (44:1-50:24), and a long hymn in praise of the “fathers” (44:1-50:21). But there is no use of the dialogue form in this book.

In scholarship, it is a commonplace that Ben Sira is a reaction against the increase in Hellenism among Jews.⁸⁵ However, as Hengel asserts, Ben Sira, though he is at war with Hellenism and though he refutes the denial of

⁸³ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 156.

⁸⁴ Mathew Goff, “Wisdom Literature,” *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 2010) 1339-42 at 1340.

⁸⁵ Victor Avigdor Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (trans. S. Applebaum; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America / Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1959), 144; Robert T. Siebeneck, “May Their Bones Return to Life! Sirach's Praise of the Fathers,” *CBQ* 21 (1959), 411-28 at 411-12.

free will and “Epicureanism,” shows Greek influence.⁸⁶ Furthermore, John J. Collins explains that although Ben Sira hews to traditional wisdom, like the idea of retribution and the equation of wisdom with the Law of Moses, it was influenced by Stoicism.⁸⁷ For example, when Ben Sira speaks of God, he uses a Stoic expression with pantheistic overtones, “He is all” (Sir. 43:27). Collins maintains that this Stoic view of the immanent God was not entirely alien to Jewish wisdom, having a precedent in the idea of a transcendent creator. Collins argues that, “the immanence implied in Sir 43:27 should not be dismissed, however. There was always a tendency in the wisdom tradition to see the chain of act and consequence as self-regulated, and to regard the role of the deity as that of midwife.”⁸⁸

Although Ben Sira opposes “the dismantling of Judaism” in favor of Greek thought,⁸⁹ the language and forms of non-Judaic tradition that he uses to express his Judaism is an example of the Hebrew Bible’s adaptation of elements from its Near Eastern neighbors.⁹⁰ Thus whether the author of Ben Sira opposed Hellenism or not, it is undeniable that he lived in its milieu and that he exhibits the influence of the international culture of Hellenism.⁹¹

It is important to note that, unlike the biblical wisdom texts Job and Qohelet, which are speculative and underscore the limitations of traditional retributive justice, Ben Sira goes back to the form of instructions and observations which Proverbs offers for directing the reader in the formation of ethical character and in leading a successful life. Whereas Job and Qohelet challenge conventional wisdom, Ben Sira maintains his faith in a just God. Moreover, unlike the general wisdom tradition, such as that represented in

⁸⁶ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 131-53.

⁸⁷ John J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 88-89.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 88: he cites from Klaus Koch, “Is there a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?” in James L. Crenshaw (ed.), *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 57-87.

⁸⁹ Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (Chico., CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 58.

⁹⁰ George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2005) 63.

⁹¹ Jack T. Sanders, *Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom* (Chico., CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 185.

Proverbs, Ben Sira connects divine wisdom to the bond between God and Israel that is represented in the Israelite covenant, Torah.

We can assume that Ben Sira probably wants to encourage his people who are exposed to Hellenistic influence to stand firmly in the faith of Hebrew tradition. If the dialogical form is closely associated with a critical or skeptical point of view (Job and Qohelet), its absence in the Book of Ben Sira may reflect a trend toward unquestioning piety: a sometimes-noted aversion to anti-conventional attitudes.

4.2. *The Wisdom of Solomon*

Regarding the forms of the Wisdom of Solomon, many passages in this book include didactic poetry in the tradition of Proverbs 1-9. As Perdue observes, “while the Wisdom of Solomon affirms the superiority of Judaism in comparison to the pagan religions of the Hellenists, the author still adopts Greek rhetoric and morality,” indeed, in shaping the book, the author makes substantial use of such Greek forms as protreptic (exhortation),⁹² epideictic (praise and blame rhetoric), and encomium (praise), along with several features of Hebrew poetry, including in particular parallelism.⁹³ In the Wisdom of Solomon, a rhetoric of persuasion, in the form of encomium, is prominent in order to convince an audience to pursue a particular course of life.⁹⁴ For example (6:12):

Bright and unfading is Wisdom,
easily beheld by those who love her,
and found by those who seek her.⁹⁵

But there is no use of dialogue in this book.

⁹² See above with reference to Reese.

⁹³ Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 321. Cf. Michael Kolarcik, “Book of Wisdom,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon: 1997), 5.436-600 at 437.

⁹⁴ Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 18-20; J. M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and Its Consequences* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 117-18. Cf. Theodore C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902), 229-30; Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 92.

⁹⁵ Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 151.

5. *Dialogue in Post-Biblical Texts Related to Wisdom Literature (2 Baruch)*

Daewoong Kim indicates that, although 2 Baruch is not Second Temple period wisdom literature, it is fed by several intellectual traditions at once along with a pseudepigraphic apocalypse.⁹⁶ This text does share a theme (apocalypse) and a form (dialogue) with earlier wisdom literature.

The significance of 2 Baruch in relation to the Hebrew wisdom tradition is its congeniality to Job and Qohelet in many terminological and ideological points. For example, their theological skepticism on the futility of wisdom and theodicy is very similar to Job and Qohelet. Another similarity between 2 Baruch and Job and Qohelet is the form of dialogue. It is interesting, because in post-biblical wisdom literature (the Book of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon) the form of dialogue is not used.

Perdue points out that 2 Baruch takes up the sapiential form of dialogue, but finds the answer to its questions in an apocalyptic vision in which human history and the salvation of the Jews are eschatologically realized in the final judgment.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the author of 2 Baruch positions the apocalypse in the ancient literary tradition of dialogue. Especially, the eschatological vision arises as a solution for the crisis that the Judaism behind 2 Baruch suffers. The eschatology of this book suggests that the present time is only part of the divinely predetermined reality, in which the author's Jewish community yearns for the coming of the end-time and the eschatological resurrection.

There is a continuous dialogue between God and Baruch, told from Baruch's perspective (13:1-20:6; 22:1-30:5; 48:26- 52:7).⁹⁸ The dialogue in 2 Baruch combines elements from both the wisdom dialogue and the prophetic disputation. Like the wisdom dialogue, the exchange between God and Baruch is deeply personal, since much of what Baruch brings to bear is based

⁹⁶ Kim, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic in 2 Baruch," 250.

⁹⁷ Purdue, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 364.

⁹⁸ Matthias Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel: Reading 'Second Baruch' in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 128.

on his personal experience as presented in the book's narrative frame. Conflicting viewpoints between the divine and the human interlocutor are often merely juxtaposed, and the resulting tension is hardly, if ever, resolved to the satisfaction of the reader. In the end, many of Baruch's questions remain unanswered, answers are given that do not seem to respond to any of the questions, and the debate is left open-ended.⁹⁹ For example:

2 Bar. 52:1-7

1 And I answered and said: How can they forget those for whom the woe is preserved then?

2 And why, then, do we mourn further over those who die, or why do we weep over those who go to Sheol?

3 Let the lamentations be preserved for the beginning of that future torment, and let the tears be laid in place for the advent of that destruction that will then be.

4 But even in face of these [things], I will say:

5 The righteous—what will they do now?

6 Delight in the suffering that you suffer now! Why do you look for the decline of those who hate you?

7 Prepare yourselves for that which is preserved for you, and be ready for the reward that is laid up for you.¹⁰⁰

This discourse is reminiscent of the dialogue in Job—where God does not really respond to Job's question. It is, therefore, interesting that the dialogue in 2 Baruch somewhat resembles the dialogue between Job and God, but not the argument over the question of divine justice that we find in the debates between Job and his companions.

6. Conclusion

As we have seen above, dialogue is a staple of ancient Near Eastern and biblical wisdom, and is a well-established rhetorical form in classical Greek

⁹⁹ Michael Stone puts it well: "It is certainly true that 4 Ezra's questions are much more interesting than the answers given by angels"; *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 36.

¹⁰⁰ Stone and Henze, *4 Ezra and 2 Baruch*, 118.

literature. Leo Strauss writes of how subversive ideas can be conveyed through one side of a dialogue. Strauss claims that every dialogue is deliberately one-sided.¹⁰¹ Of course, one cannot assume that the overall point of a work will be in line with the subversive side of the dialogue (so Greenstein but otherwise Newsom). Oshima claims, against earlier views, that the Babylonian *Theodicy* takes the side of the pious friend against that of the complaining sufferer.

It is remarkable that the form of dialogue is not used in post-biblical wisdom literature, the Book of Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon. How can this be explained? The wane of dialogue can be reasonably attributed to the influences of changes in thinking and sensibility from one historical and social situation to another. On the other hand, we find the form of dialogue in 2 Baruch. Similar to the dialogue in Job—where God does not really respond to Job's question—2 Baruch's questions to God are left unanswered (2 Bar. 52:1-7). However, unlike the debates between Job and his companions, there is no argument over the question of divine justice in 2 Baruch.

Van der Toorn's assertion would explain the wane of dialogue in post-biblical wisdom literature: "The literary dialogues developed into a conventional vehicle of critical reflection upon traditional values and beliefs."¹⁰² In other words, if the dialogical form is closely associated with a critical or skeptical point of view, its absence from post-biblical wisdom may reflect an aversion to anti-conventional attitudes. While in Job and Qohelet the dialogical form is closely associated with a critical or skeptical point of view, its absence in Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon, and the absence of debate in 2 Baruch, reflect their maintaining traditional values and beliefs. Theological criticism, such as that which emerges in wisdom dialogues, was apparently regarded as impious. In the absence of the wisdom dialogue in

¹⁰¹ Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium*, 57.

¹⁰² Van der Toorn, "The Ancient Near Eastern Literary Dialogue as a Vehicle of Critical Reflection," 59-75 at 75.

post-biblical wisdom we find a clear expression of this trend toward a simpler piety than we find in such biblical works as Job and Qohelet.

We may conclude that new questions issuing from a skeptical or paradoxical frame of mind in the period, from the Babylonian Exile (586 BCE) into the Hellenistic period and Diaspora (from about 330 BCE) helped bring about such changes and innovations in Hebrew wisdom. Dialogue wanes in Hellenistic Jewish literature because dialogue has two sides, one of which tends to be critical; and in the post-Hebrew Bible period, Jewish literature stressed piety.