

תפלה UPON ספר בן סירא THE INFLUENCE OF

The style and wording of the **פיוט** אמת מה נהדר היה כהן גדול: **פיוט**, written by **יוסי בן יוסי**, an early composer of **פיוטים**, can be traced to chapter 50 of the apocryphal work, **בן סירא**. Here is the chapter:

1. Greatest among his kindred, the glory of his people, was Shimon the priest, son of Yochonon,
2. In whose time the house of G-d was renovated, in whose days the temple was reinforced.
3. In his time also the retaining wall was built for the resident precinct with its temple of the King.
4. In his day the reservoir was dug, the pool with a vastness equal to that of the sea.
5. He took care for his people against brigands and strengthened his city against the enemy.
6. How splendid he was as he looked forth from the Tent, as he came from the house of the veil!
7. Like a star shining among the clouds, like the full moon at the holiday seasons;
8. Like the sun shining on the Temple of the King, like the rainbow appearing in the cloudy sky;
9. Like the blossoms on the branches in springtime, like a lily by running waters;
10. Like the verdure of Lebanon in summer, like the blaze of incense at the sacrifice;
11. Like a vessel of beaten gold studded with an assortment of precious stones;
12. Like a luxuriant olive tree thick with fruit, a plant whose branches run with oil;
13. Wearing his splendid robes, and vested in sublime magnificence,
14. As he ascended the glorious altar and lent majesty to the court of the sanctuary.
15. When he received the sundered victims from his brother priests while he stood before the sacrificial hearth,
16. His sons ringed him about like a garland, like young cedars on Lebanon;
17. And like poplars by the brook they clustered around him, all the sons of Aaron in their dignity,
18. With the offerings to the LORD in their hands, in the presence of the whole assembly of Israel.
19. Until he had completed the service at the altar and arranged the

- 50 גדול אֶחָיו וְתַפְאֶרֶת עָמוֹ שְׁמֵעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָנָן הַכֹּהֵן:
אֲשֶׁר בְּדוֹרוֹ נִפְקַד הַבַּיִת וּבְיָמָיו חֹזֵק הֵיכַל:
אֲשֶׁר בְּדוֹרוֹ נִבְרָה מְקוֹה אִשִּׁית בָּם בְּהִמּוֹנוֹ:
אֲשֶׁר בְּיָמָיו נִבְנְהָ קִיר פְּנוֹת מַעוֹן בְּהֵיכַל מֶלֶךְ:
הַדּוֹאֵג לְעָמוֹ מִחֶתֶף וּמְחֹזֵק עִירוֹ מִצָּר:
מֵה נִהְדָּר בְּהַשְׁגִּיחוֹ מֵאֵהָל וּבְצֵאתוֹ מִבַּיִת הַפְּלִכֶת:
בְּכוֹכֵב אֹזֶר מִבֵּין עָבִים וּכְרִית מְלֵא מִבֵּין יָמֵי מוֹעֵד:
וְכִשְׁמֶשׁ מִשְׁרָקֶת אֶל הֵיכַל הַמֶּלֶךְ וּבִקְשֵׁת נִרְאָתָה בַּעֲנָן:
בְּנֵץ בַּעֲנָפֵי יָמֵי מוֹעֵד וּכְשׁוֹשֵׁן עַל יְבֵלֵי מִים:
כְּפָרַח לִבְנוֹן יָמֵי קִיץ וְכֹאֵשׁ לְבוֹנָה עַל הַמְּנִחָה:
כְּכֹלִי זָהָב [וּבַיִת] אֲנָצִיל הַנֶּאֱחָז עַל אֲבְנֵי חֶפֶץ:
כְּזֵית רֹעֵנָן מְלֵא גִרְגֵר וּבְעֵץ שָׁמֶן מְרוּהָ עֲנָף:
כְּעִמּוֹתַי בְּגָדֵי כְבוֹד וְהִתְלַבְּשׁוּ בְּגָדֵי תַפְאֶרֶת:
כְּעִלּוֹתָהּ עַל מִזְבֵּחַ הוֹד וַיִּהְיֶה עוֹרֹת מְקֻדָּשׁ:
כְּבִקְבָלוֹ נְתָחִים מִיר אֶחָיו וְהוּא נָצַב עַל מַעֲרֻכוֹת:
כְּסִבִּי לוֹ עֲמֻרַת בָּנִים כְּשִׁתִּילֵי אֲרָזִים בְּלִבְנוֹן:
כְּיִקְיֻפוֹתָהּ כְּעֶרְבֵי נָחַל כָּל בְּנֵי אֶהֱרָן בְּכְבוֹדָם:
כְּאִשִּׁי יְיָ בְּיָדָם נִגִּיד כָּל קַהֲלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
כְּעַד בְּלוֹתָהּ לְשֵׁרֵת מִזְבֵּחַ וּלְסִדֵּר מַעֲרֻכוֹת עֲלִיּוֹן:
כְּוִישְׁלַח יָדוֹ עַל תַּקְשׁוּהָ וַיִּסַּךְ מִדָּם עֲנָב:
כְּוִיצָק עַל יְסוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְרִית גִּיחַח לֹאֵל עֲלִיּוֹן:
כְּאִזְיָרְעוֹ בְּנֵי אֶהֱרָן הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּחֻצְרוֹת מְקֻשָּׁה:

sacrificial hearth for the Most High,

20. And he stretched forth his hand for the cup, to offer blood of the grape,

21. And poured it out at the foot of the altar, a sweet smelling aroma to G-d the Most High,

22. The sons of Aaron, the priests, would sound a blast using the trumpets of beaten metal;

23. A blast to resound mightily as a reminder before the most High

24. Then all the people with one accord would quickly fall prostrate to the ground

25. In adoration before the Most High, before the Holy One of Israel.

26. Then hymns would reecho, and over the throng, sweet strains of praise resound.

27. All the people of the land would shout for joy, praying to the Merciful One,

28. As the high priest completed the service of the altar by presenting to G-d the sacrifice due;

29. Then coming down, he would raise his hands over all the congregation of Israel;

30. The blessing of the LORD would be upon his lips, the name of the LORD would be his glory.

31. Then again the people would lie prostrate, receiving the blessing from the Most High.

32. And now, bless the G-d of all, who has done stupendous things on earth;

33. Who makes humans grow from their mother's womb and does with them according to His will!

34. May He grant you wisdom of heart, and may He abide among you in peace;

35. May His kindness toward Simeon be lasting; may He fulfill for him the covenant with Pinchos

36. So that it may not be abrogated from him or from his descendants, while the heavens last.

כב ויריעו וישמיעו קול אדיר להזכיר לפני עליון:

כד כל בשר יחדו נמהרו ויפלו על פניהם ארצה:

כה להשתחוות לפני עליון לפני קדוש ישראל:

כו ויתן השיר קולו ועל המון העריכו גרו:

כז וירנו כל עם הארץ בתפלה לפני רחום:

כח עד בלותו לשרת מזבח ומשפטיו הגיע אליו:

כט אז ירד ונשא ידיו על כל קהל ישראל:

ל וברכת יי בשפתיו ובשם יי יתפאר:

לא וישנו לנפל שנית ל מפניו:

לב עתה ברכו נא את יי

אלהי ישראל המפליא לעשות בארץ:

לג המגדל אדם מרחם ויעשהו ברצונו:

לד יתן לבם חכמת לבב ויהי בשלום ביניהם:

לה יאמן עם שמעון חסדו ויקם לו ברית פינחס:

לו אשר לא יפרת לו ולירעו בימי שמים:

Who was **בן סירא** and when did he live?

Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran, By: Lawrence H. Schiffman, Jewish Publication Society, 1994, pages 198-199:

THE BOOK OF BEN SIRA

Chief among the Second Temple period wisdom texts before the discovery of the Qumran scrolls was the Book of Ben Sira. This work was preserved in Greek as part

of the Apocrypha of the Septuagint -- the Greek Bible. Ben Sira is also known as Ecclesiasticus, not to be confused with the biblical Book of Ecclesiastes, Kohelet in Hebrew. When the manuscripts from the Cairo genizah began to reach Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, manuscripts of a Hebrew version of Ben Sira were found among the fragments. These texts sparked a vigorous debate. While many scholars maintained that they were indeed manuscripts representing the original Hebrew text of Ben Sira, others considered them no more than a medieval Hebrew translation from the Greek or from a Latin translation based on the Greek.

This debate was conclusively settled with the discovery of fragments of Ben Sira in cave 2 at Qumran, a portion of the book cited in the Psalms Scroll, and an independent manuscript of Ben Sira, preserving substantial portions of the last part of the book (chapters 38-44), at Masada. These manuscripts showed beyond a doubt that the medieval texts were for the most part descended from the original Hebrew, even though they showed signs of some revision and textual variation. Now, after combining the ancient and medieval fragments of this book, we can be fairly certain that the vast majority of it is now in our hands in a Hebrew text.

Early rabbinic tradition prohibited the reading of the Book of Ben Sira, presumably as part of a public ritual. Indeed, rabbinic teaching forbade the reading of any noncanonical apocryphal books. This ban derived from the Rabbis' effort to assert the exclusive sanctity and canonicity of the biblical books. Yet since rabbinic literature quotes some verses from Ben Sira in Hebrew or Aramaic, this book obviously influenced the rabbis and was at least partially known to them.

Fascination with this book in the Middle Ages led to the composition of various pseudepigraphical Ben Sira texts, such as the Alphabet of Ben Sira, all of which are essentially aggadic works. These texts have no real connection with the original book but were composed by authors who knew of the sage and his reputation and sought to fill the void caused by the virtual loss of the book to the Jewish community.

The prologue to the Greek translation of the book explicitly states that the author, named Joshua (or according to some manuscripts Simeon) ben Sira, composed the book in Hebrew in the Land of Israel in about 180 B.C.E. and that his grandson subsequently translated it into Greek in about 130 B.C.E. These dates have been universally accepted as accurate by scholars. From the book, we can gather that the author functioned as a wisdom teacher in pre-Maccabean Jerusalem and ran a school to which young students came. Much of the text was no doubt composed for or based upon the lessons he gave those students.

Ben Sira is essentially a wisdom anthology, much of it composed in the style of the biblical Book of Proverbs. It provides practical advice on interpersonal relations,

especially concerning the family, the raising of children, the conduct of business, and a variety of ethical teachings.

שמונה ספר בן סירא also provides us with a text that could represent an early form of **תפלה**. The text includes words that later became part of other **ברכות** found in **עשרה**:

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to the G-d deserving of our praises, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to the Guardian of Israel, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to Him who formed all things, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to the Redeemer of Israel, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to Him who has gathered Israel's dispersed, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to Him who rebuilt His city and His sanctuary, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to Him who cultivates the pride of the house of David, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to Him who has chosen the sons of Zadok as His priests, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to the Shield of Abraham, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to the Rock of Isaac, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to the Mighty One of Jacob, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to Him who has chosen Zion, for His mercy endures forever;
Give thanks to the King of the Kings of Kings, for His mercy endures forever;
He has cultivated salvation for His people, be this His praise from all His dutiful ones,
For the children of Israel, the people close to him. Praise the Lord!

נא	הודו לי יי פי טוב	פי לעולם חסדו:
בב	הודו לאל התשבחות	פי לעולם חסדו:
גג	הודו לשומר ישראל	פי לעולם חסדו:
דד	הודו ליוצר הכל	פי לעולם חסדו:
הה	הודו לגואל ישראל	פי לעולם חסדו:
וו	הודו למקבץ נדחי ישראל	פי לעולם חסדו:
זז	הודו לבונה עירו ומקדשו	פי לעולם חסדו:
חח	הודו למצמיח קרן לבית דוד	פי לעולם חסדו:
טט	הודו לבוחר בבני צדוק לכהן	פי לעולם חסדו:
י	הודו למגן אברהם	פי לעולם חסדו:
יא	הודו לצור יצחק	פי לעולם חסדו:
יב	הודו לאביר יעקב	פי לעולם חסדו:
יג	הודו לבוחר בציון	פי לעולם חסדו:
יד	הודו למלך מלכי מלכים	פי לעולם חסדו:
יה	וידם קרן לעמו	תהלה לכל חסידיו
	לבני ישראל עם קרבו	הללויה:

Moshe Tzvi Segal, on page 256 of his book: **ספר בן-סירא השלם**, Mossad Bialik, 4th edition, 1997, provides the following comments concerning this poem:

מזמור זה נבנה בתבניתו של ההלל הגדול שספר תהלים (מזמור קלו). שנים מפסוקיו, הראשון והאחרון (פסוק כ"א, פסוק ל"ה) נעתקו בשלמותם מתוך מזמורים אחרים שבתהלים. גם הלל זה כמו ההלל הגדול שבתהלים נתחבר בעקרו בשביל תפלה בציבור, כמו שברור מן הקריאה בכל פסוק: הודו. וכבר שערנו למעלה שהשתמשו במזמור זה בתפילה שבמקדש בדורו של בן סירא. אולם כשעברה הכהונה מבית צדוק לבית השמונאי בטל שימוש של המזמור, אבל כמעט כל פסוקיו נשתרו בתפילות עתיקות שלנו, כמו שנראה להלן. פסוק כט' מוכיח בהוכחה גמורה שהמזמור נתחבר בימי כהונתם של בני

להבין את התפלה

צדוק, ולפיכך אין להטיל כל ספק שבן סירה הוא מחברו של המזמור ושמפני כך נספח לספרו בסופו. בטור תפלת הציבור לא היה מקום למזמור זה בתוך גוף הספר, כמו גם לשיר הקודם.

Translation: This poem is modeled on the chapter of Tehillim that is known as the Great Hallel (Tehillim 136). Two of the verses within the poem, the first and the last, were lifted in their entirety from two other chapters of Tehillim. This poem of praise, like the Great Hallel of Tehillim, was composed primarily to be recited as a communal prayer as is evidenced by the response of Hodu provided for at the end of each line. We have already suggested that this poem was recited as a communal prayer in the Beis Hamikdash during the era of Ben Sira. Nevertheless, once the leadership of the Kohanim was transferred from the House of Zadok to the house of the Hasmonaim, the use of this poem as a communal prayer in the Beis Hamikdash ceased. Needless to say, almost of all its lines reappeared as part of some of our oldest prayers as we will see later. Verse 29 is strong evidence that the poem was composed during the period in which the priesthood was controlled by the House of Zadok. That leaves no doubt that the author of the poem was Ben Sira and it was he who added this prayer as an epilogue to his poem anthology. This poem as well as the previous poem, chapter 49, did not appear within the body of his anthology because the two poems served as communal prayers and not as lessons.

One more link between the poems of **בן סירה** and **שמונה עשרה** is worth noting. That connection concerns the **ברכה** known as **ברכת המינים**. Much has been written lately about this **ברכה**, particularly by Professor Ruth Langer in her book: *Cursing The Christians*, Oxford University Press, 2012. I was greatly disappointed that Professor Langer failed to note that the theme of praying for the destruction of the enemies of the Jewish People which she describes as “cursing” did not appear in Jewish prayer for the first time after the rise of Christianity but was very much a part of Jewish prayer during the **בית שני** era as is evidenced by the following excerpts from **ספר בן סירה**, chapters 35 and 36:

*G-d indeed will not delay, and like a warrior, will not be still
Till He breaks the backs of the merciless and wreaks vengeance upon
the nations;
Till He destroys the scepter of the proud and breaks off short the staff
of the wicked;
Till He requites humankind according to its deeds and repays people
according to their thoughts;
Till He defends the cause of His people, and gladdens them by His
saving help.
Welcome is His mercy in time of distress as rain clouds in times of
drought.*

י"ג גַּם אֵל לֹא יִתְמָהֶמָּה וְכִנְבוֹר לֹא יִתְאַפֵּק:
י"ד עַד יִמְחֵץ מַתְנֵי אֲבָרֵי י"ג וְלִגְוִים יָשִׁיב נָקָם:
כ"א עַד יִדְרִישׁ שִׁבְטֵי זָדוֹן וְיִמְחֶה רֶשַׁע גְּדוֹעַ יִגְדַּע:
כ"ב עַד יָשִׁיב לְאִנּוּשׁ פָּעֻלוֹ וְיִמּוֹל אֶדְם בְּמִזְמוֹתָו:
כ"ג עַד יִרְיֵב רִיב עַמּוֹ וְשִׁמְחֵם בִּישׁוּעָתוֹ:
כ"ד עַד יִנָּאֵחַ חֶסְדּוֹ בְּעֵת מִצּוֹקָה בְּעֵת חַיִּיִּים בְּעֵת בְּצוּרָתוֹ:

G-d of the universe, come and place all the nations in dread of You!

Raise Your hand against the foreign folk, that they may see Your mighty deeds.

As You have used us to show them Your holiness, so now use them to show us Your glory.

Thus they will know, as We know, that there is no G-d but You.

Give new signs and work new wonders; show forth the splendor of Your right hand and arm;

Rouse Your anger, pour out Your wrath, humble the enemy, scatter the foe.

Hasten the ending, appoint the time when Your mighty deeds are to be proclaimed:

Let raging fire consume the fugitive, and Your people's oppressors meet destruction;

Smash the heads of the hostile rulers, who say, "There is no one besides me!"

Gather all the tribes of Jacob, that they may inherit the land as in days of old.

Show mercy to the people called by Your name: Israel, whom You named Your first born.

Fill Zion with Your majesty; Your temple with Your glory.

Give evidence of Your deeds of old; fulfill the prophecies spoken in Your name,

Reward those who have placed their hope in You, and let Your prophets be proven true.

Hear the prayers of Your servants, for You are ever gracious to Your people;

Thus it will be known to all the ends of the earth that You are the eternal G-d.

לְךָ יְיָ הוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ אֱלֹהֵי הַכָּל וְנִשְׁמָע פְּחָדְךָ עַל כָּל הַגּוֹיִם:

בְּהִנֵּיךָ עַל עַם נֶכֶד וְיִרְאוּ אֶת גְּבוּרֹתֶיךָ:

גְּבֻרָתְךָ נִקְדְּשָׁתָה לְעֵינֵיהֶם בָּנוּ בֵּן לְעֵינֵינוּ הַכֶּבֶד בָּנוּ:

דְּרֹשׁוּ בְּאִשְׁרֵי יִדְעֵנוּ כִּי אֵין אֱלֹהִים וּלְתִיד:

הַחֲדָשׁ אוֹת וּשְׁנָה מוֹפֵת הָאֲדָר יָד וְאִמְצָן זְרוֹעַ וְיָמִין:

וְהַעִיר אֶף וּשְׁפוֹךְ חֲמָה וְהִכְנִיעַ [צָרָה] וְהָרוּץ אוֹיֵב:

יְהִי שְׁחִיטָה קֶזֶן וּפְקֻדָּה מוֹעֵד כִּי מִי יֹאמֶר לָךְ מָה תַעֲשֶׂה:

כִּי [בְּאֶף] אֵשׁ יֵאָכֵל שָׂרִיד וּמְרֵעֵי עַמְּךָ יִמָּצְאוּ שָׁתָה:

טְהַרְשֵׁת לְרֹאשׁ פְּאֵתִי מוֹאֵב הָאוֹמֵר אֵין וּלְתִי:

יְהִי אֶסּוּף כָּל שְׂבָטֵי יַעֲקֹב וְיִתְנַחֲלוּ בְיָמֵי קָדְשׁ:

יִי רַחֵם עַל עַם נִקְרָא בְשִׁמְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכֹר בְּיִנְיָתָה:

יב רַחֵם עַל קְרִיַת קִדְשְׁךָ יְרוּשָׁלַם מְכוֹן שְׁבִתֶיךָ:

יג מִלֵּא צִיּוֹן אֶת הוֹדְךָ וּמִכְבוֹדְךָ אֶת הִיכָלְךָ:

יד תֵּן עֲדוֹת לְמִרְאֵשׁ מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וְהִקֵּם חֻזֵּן דְּבַר בְּשִׁמְךָ:

יז תֵּן אֶת פְּעֻלַת קוֹיֶיךָ וּנְבִיאֶיךָ יֵאֱמִינוּ:

יח תִּשְׁמַע אֶת תְּפִלַת עַבְדֶּיךָ בְּרִצּוֹנְךָ עַל עַמְּךָ:

יט וְיִדְעוּ כָּל אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ כִּי אַתָּה אֵל [עוֹלָם]:

Notes

1. The translation for the excerpts from **ספר בן סירא** was borrowed from the The Anchor Bible edition of the Wisdom Of Ben Sira, Doubleday, 1987.

2. The practice of choosing the **כהן גדול** from the family of **צדוק** was initiated by **ז"ל**, **שלמה המלך**, as evidenced in the following:

מלכים א', ב', כז- ויגרש שלמה את אביתר מהיות כהן לה' למלא את דבר ה' אשר דבר על בית עלי בשלה.

מלכים א', ב', לה- ויתן המלך את בניהו בן יהוידע תחתיו על הצבא ואת צדוק הכהן נתן המלך תחת אביתר.

The family of **צדוק** was later replaced by the family of the **חשמונאים** after the victory of the **חשמונאים** over the **יוונים**.

3. From Chapter 50 of **ספר בן סירא**, we can confirm that throughout the **בית שני** era the **כהן גדול** was recognized by both the Jewish People and the ruling government as the political leader of the Jews in Israel. That explains why the **חשמונאים** did not hesitate to appoint themselves monarchs once an independent Jewish state was established after their victory.