

BEN SIRAH

Ben Sirah allows us for a precise date and we have a precise name. Yes, it certainly is an exact date. That date is the correct date no matter what. Then the problem is, we do not know exactly which of two possible dates it was. It is an exact date because it specifically mentions the High Priest, saying that there were two High Priests name Simon. Two who were about a century apart; one around 300 to 280 and the other around 200 to 180 BCE.

How did this difficulty come [about], in view of the fact that in the introduction to the book, written by his grandson, apparently, he makes the date absolutely of service by saying that he had came to Egypt in the 18th year in the reign of Ugartes? Ugartes is a known king, so you go back and get the data of Ugartes and then you go back two generations, to the grandson. Therefore, you have the real date; but there were two Ugartes, living equivalently the same 100 years apart.

It does not say Ugartes I or Ugartes II. So scholars have had to choose between the two dates. But as you might already have come to assume, of the two dates, they picked the least likely date as being the consensus date. And seemingly, the preferable date is the one that they don't pay much attention to. The problem is that when they translated all this, they ran circles around the Greek word *epi. Epi*. Sometimes one sentence is all you need to solve a monumental problem. Sometimes one word, one mistranslated word, can make the difference between putting a source at a time that it really comes from, or later.

You will come out later when we deal with the Pharisees. One word, the Greek word *haeresis*. Mistranslated in the first English translation of Josephus, that fixed for all future generations until our own day, an image of the Pharisees as a sect, because they mistranslated the word *haeresis* to mean sect rather than school of thought. The Pharisees were not a sect; they were a school of thought. If a sect, they could not be normative. So you usually read when they talk about the sect. The sect of the Pharisees is without any Justification whatsoever, because the term *secthaeresis* meaning sect does not emerge until the rise of Christianity. Which was a long time after that; when it referred to a sectarian, a school of thought within Christianity, which was denied legitimacy, so they said that is a *haeresis*. This is where the term heretic comes from.

But in Josephus' day, *haeresis* did not mean a sect because there were no heresies in polytheism: Everyone could have all the gods they wanted. *Haeresis* in Josephus' day was used for the philosophers. You had the school of Plato; you had the school of Aristotle. And they do sectarianism simply meant another school of thought, so we know that that must be its meaning, because the only synonym that Josephus ever uses for *haeresis* is philosophy. He says there were three philosophies. Three *haeresis* and three philosophies.

Then, when a new philosophy emerged, a new group emerged. A new *haeresis* emerged. Josephus said that this was a Fourth Philosophy, a fourth *haeresis*. So it was so absolutely contrary (to the other interpretation). And because of that original mistranslation, it is hard to shake it off and say, "Can you see that Josephus is the only source?" Not the other translators. All the other translators kicked it out.

It is very interesting that a translator like the Loeb and the Loeb Cosivar Library, that is the most definitive translation. It was translated by masters in Greek in Oxford, etc. that I cannot even begin to come anywhere near them in their knowledge of Greek. And everyone one of them, sometimes translated *haeresis* to mean a school of thought, sometimes sect; as though Josephus uses a different word. If you are going to have a critical translation, you have to translate the Greek the same wherever you find it. If you use school of thought, it all has to be school of thought.

Because a critical translation for scholars and so on should be read so you can translate from the translation back to the Greek. You can't do this if you think they are different synonyms, if you think that they are two different words, when it is really the same word.

Question

If there is a concept “sect”, is there a different Greek word used for sect?

Yes! There are other kinds of words.

Question

Which of the two dates was the correct one?

I will finish up with the date and then I will.....

I do want to finish the date. That is that the consensus goes for the later date __. But I really want to explain about the word *epi*. You have a sentence which is it says that this grandson came to Egypt in the 18th year Epi Ugartes. Most translators say in the 18 year of Ugartes. When it really means is, “when I was 18 years old and Ugartes was king.” *Epi* is rarely, if ever, used to mean the number of years of anything. It means under such and such a year.

If you wanted to say the 40th year of a king, you would not use the word *epi*; you would use a genitive. *Epi* means while, during, under, [for example]: While Ugartes was king.

From internal evidence within Ben Sirah itself, which indicates that this is a very surreal period. It could not have been the eve of the Hasmonian Revolt, when all of society was agitated and the Aaronide system was really beginning to totter into collapse.

You will read these texts and we will look at them together. The date that I use is 300 to 280, the less common. Around that time, we do not know the exact year it was completed. But whether it is the earlier date or the later date, Ben Sirah still is the only source we have for an Aronide society in boom, because even in the earlier date 300, it was still was not in boom. It is only a little later that it was in collapse.

The date that most scholars go for is 200 to 180.