The (Apparent) Absence of Women in the Praise of the Ancestors (Sir 44–49)

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Summary/Abstract: The Praise of the Ancestors (Sir 44–49) offers an interpretation of the story of Biblical Israel as seen through the eyes of Ben Sira. His telling of this story, permeated with God's working, contains the names of male protagonists only. Still, analysis of textual versions of the Praise of the Ancestors (Hebrew, Greek and Syriac) enables us to detect some anonymous allusions to women (Sir 46:13; 47:6,19; 48:19, 49:7). The present article attempts to investigate the reasons why there are no named...
references to Biblical heroines from Israel's history, individuals who are mentioned in other books of the Bible. One answer might be found in the particular focus and educational purpose of the Praise, which was to provide a life model for young boys. Another reason might lie in the genre of the Praise, which was used in reference to women in Greek texts, but not in the Bible, where the name lists of praised heroes contained male names only. However, the most convincing reason for the absence of female names in the Praise of the Ancestors is found in its association with the priesthood of Biblical Israel. For the writer of the book, true high priests of the Jerusalem Temple constituted the ultimate keystone of the covenant between God and his people. Women, being absent from the official priesthood of Israel, are consequently absent from Sir 44–49.

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The Praise of the Ancestors (Sir 44–49) offers an interpretation of the story of Biblical Israel as seen through the eyes of Ben Sira. His telling of this story, permeated with God's working, contains the names of male protagonists only. However, the most convincing reason for the absence of female names in the Praise of the Ancestors is found in its association with the priesthood of Biblical Israel. For the writer of the book, true high priests of the Jerusalem Temple constituted the ultimate keystone of the covenant between God and his people. The Praise of the Ancestors (Sir 44–49) offers an interpretation of the story of Biblical Israel as seen through the eyes of Ben Sira. His telling of this story, permeated with God's working, contains the names of male protagonists only. However, the most convincing reason for the absence of female names in the Praise of the Ancestors is found in its association with the priesthood of Biblical Israel. For the writer of the book, true high priests of the Jerusalem Temple constituted the ultimate keystone of the covenant between God and his people. Immediately people started behaving very strangely. I had already attracted a few sideways glances from some of the Italians on the plane, but here in the actual Italy the Italians stared openly. They formed groups so as to co-ordinate their unblinking scrutiny. At first I thought it was the shoes, but the immigration official couldn't see them from inside his glass booth, and he stared too. Did I bear a startling resemblance to the lost king Vittorio Emanuele IV? Not too fanciful a notion, because it rapidly became apparent that the focus of interest was the beard. I had the only beard in Italy. My ancestors had sown the seeds of culture and civilization throughout the world on their fruitful voyages and wanderings. When I contemplate the small portraits and see in their firmly composed faces the expressions of my ancestors, which compel no more notice of these times, it seems as if we have descended from a high, high ladder—a ladder which we must yet again climb. Nowadays, it is seldom that we can even appear to be like they were. Ordination is the process by which individuals are consecrated, that is, set apart as clergy to perform various religious rites and ceremonies such as celebrating the sacraments. The process and ceremonies of ordination varies by denomination. One who is in preparation for, or who is undergoing the process of ordination is sometimes called an ordinand. The liturgy used at an ordination is sometimes referred to as an ordinal.