

by a snake that had killed him (y. *Ta'an.* 4:69a). The Greek version of 3 *Baruch* depicts the serpent's body as Hades. 4 Maccabees calls the serpent "deceitful" and "the destroyer" (18:8).

Philo of Alexandria was familiar with Egyptian valuations of the serpent as a symbol of immortality and wisdom. Yet in his allegorical approach to interpreting Jewish Scripture, he takes the serpent of Genesis 3 to symbolize the temptation of sensual pleasure and the bronze serpent of Numbers 21 to represent the power of self-control (*Leg. Alleg.* 2.71-82). Josephus interpreted Genesis 3 so that the serpent is malicious (*Ant.* 1.1.4), cruel (*Ant.* 17.5.5), and the enemy of humans (*Ant.* 1.1.4). John the Baptizer assails the Pharisees and Sadducees as "offspring of vipers" (Matt. 3:7//Luke 3:7). In Matt. 10:16, Jesus sends out his disciples "among the wolves" and instructs them to "be wise as serpents." The Fourth Gospel draws a typological correspondence between the salvific effects of the bronze serpent of Moses in Numbers 21 and Jesus' being lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15). Paul followed other early Jews in understanding the serpent of Genesis 3 as a liar (2 Cor. 11:3). Finally, the book of Revelation identifies the "great dragon who was thrown down" as "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9; cf. 12:14-15), and depicts its eschatological defeat (Rev. 20:2, 7-10).

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Seth

In biblical tradition, Seth is the third son of Adam and Eve. There are at least two different biblical traditions regarding him. One views him as the firstborn son of Adam and Eve and the explicit heir to Adam's rank of being "in the image and likeness of God" (Gen. 5:3-8; cf. 1 Chron. 1:1). The other attempts to integrate both him and his son Enosh within the formally separate narrative trajectory that posits Cain and Abel as the first male offspring of the protoplasts and Seth as a brother and substitute for the murdered Abel (Gen. 4:25). Neither interpretive stream is subject to further elaboration in the Hebrew Bible.

A curious reference to the future punishment of the "descendants of Seth" (*bēnê Šēt*, literally "sons of Seth") occurs in an eschatological oracle placed in the mouth of Balaam (Num. 24:17) that is recycled almost verbatim in several Second Temple sources (CD 7:20-21 = 4Q266 3 iii 22; 1QM 11:6; 4Q175 line 13). The simplest

interpretive solution, adopted by *Targum Onqelos* and the commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra, is to view the label "descendants of Seth" as an alternative way of expressing the concept of postdiluvian humanity. More recent efforts to parse this phrase as a learned reference to a nomadic tribe named Šütü fail to show how this solution could be meaningful in its present context.

On the basis of the redacted versions of the biblical text, which construct rival kinship lines for Seth and Cain, Christian sources effect a bifurcation of the early generations of humanity into the progeny of Seth and the progeny of Cain in order to confine the emergence of evil to the earthly plane. But an analogous distinction is occasionally visible in Jewish literature, where Seth is deemed the progenitor and ancestor of all the subsequent generations of the righteous, and Cain incurs condemnation for inaugurating all the generations of the wicked and the rebels who revolted against God (*Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* §22). When the flood erases the posterity of Cain from the earth, God then uses the progeny of Seth (*šēt*) to reestablish (*hūštat*) the world (*Num. Rab.* 14:12; cf. *Midrash Bereshit Rabbati* [ed. Albeck, p. 57]), exploiting a wordplay to underscore Seth's importance for the history of the human race.

In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, other sources are replete with traditions that revolve around the figure of Seth. Most of this material is directly tied to the assertion of Seth's resemblance to his father Adam, who was in turn modeled after "the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3). Seth becomes an important link in the chain of transmission of knowledge and divine secrets accumulated by his father, and he himself is alleged to have been favored with revelatory experiences.

Numerous writings purportedly authored by Seth surface in late antiquity and seem to have been especial favorites of those groups whom Christian heresiologists and modern scholars term "Gnostic." Epiphanius claims that the Borborite Gnostics possessed "many books in the name of Seth" (*Panarion* 26.8.1). The same authority provides a report about a group who were called "Sethians" who had "seven books called by the name of Seth" (*Panarion* 39.5.1). Among the Nag Hammadi Codices, several works bearing the name of Seth (*The Three Steles of Seth*; *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*) are ascribed to him (*Gospel of the Egyptians*), or have a strong interest in his character (*The Apocalypse of Adam*; *The Apocryphon of John*).

Manicheism and Mandeism refer to Seth as Sethel, a linguistic indication that Seth's ascribed likeness to divinity has morphed into a type of modal identity. This apotheosis of Seth is also visible in certain schemes which posit a heavenly Seth who periodically visits earth in various human guises for the purpose of imparting revelation to humanity.

An early association of Seth with the preservation and transmission of primeval knowledge is already visible in Josephus. Seth and his immediate progeny are credited with the discovery and wider promulgation of the astronomical sciences thanks to their inscribing them upon two pillars of stone and masonry (*Ant.* 1.69-71). The same tradition surely lies behind the account

of Seth's transcription of the testaments of Adam and Eve on clay and stone tablets in *Vita Adae et Evae* 49-51.

Eastern Christian sources amplify these traditions to make Seth in effect the literary executor of Adam's estate. Early Muslim tradents of prophetic lore, who rely largely on information gleaned from a wide variety of Jewish and Christian sources, attribute fifty works to the authorial and/or secretarial hand of Seth, whose name they often gloss in accordance with Gen. 4:25 as "a gift from God" (Hibat Allāh).

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Sexuality

Multiple difficulties beset any attempt to describe sexuality in early Judaism. The Hellenistic and early Roman periods belong to the long era "before sexuality," that is, before the construction of erotic experience and practice as central to identity and oriented on opposing poles of heterosexuality and homosexuality. It is always difficult to gauge the relationship between what people say about sex and what they do, and evidence that survives from the period is very limited. Celebrations of *erōs* comparable to those in Greek and Latin love poetry are rare. The highly colored description of Sarah in the *Genesis Apocryphon* (col. 20) and Philo's brief description of the creation of Eve (*De Opificio Mundi* 152) are passages that suggest a lost literature.

In early Jewish texts, sex is usually addressed in attempts to explain or regulate practice through engagement with biblical tradition or in apologetics that vilify unbelievers or defend Jewish practice against similar vilifications. As is the case with rabbinic texts (Satlow 1995), early Jewish texts are highly rhetorical. Further, as Roman domination of the Mediterranean grew, moral evaluations of sexual practice similar to those in contemporaneous Greek and Latin sources increasingly characterized early Jewish ones. Concerned with the obligations and rights of the free male head of the household, early Jewish writers promote marriage and childbearing, express anxiety over sexual contact with relatives, construct sex between males on the lines of pederasty, condemn males who allow themselves to be penetrated, express concern with self-control, and manifest the beginnings of interest in sexual asceticism as care of the self.

Hellenistic Period

From the late third century B.C.E. on, sex and the spirit world played an important mythic role in early Jewish apocalyptic tradition, particularly in the legend of the fallen angels or Watchers, which explained evil and sin as originating in the rape or seduction of human

women by the Watchers and the illicit knowledge communicated by them and their offspring the Giants (Gen. 6:1-6; *1 Enoch* 1-36; *Jub.* 4:22; 5:1-11; 7:2-23; 20:3-5; *Book of the Giants* [4Q203 frg. 8]). Scholars explain the original function of the myth variously as a polemic against improper marriages (especially by priests), a protest against divination, or a parody of the wars among Alexander the Great's successors, the Diadochi, and their claims of divine origin (see Loader 2007: 43-49). In *Jubilees*, the legend is used against intermarriage (20:3-5). Fear of sexual contact with the spirit world appears in other texts of the era (*1 Enoch* 106-7; Tob. 6:14-8:4).

In *Jubilees* other important issues of sexual practice are grounded in a "rewriting" of the book of Genesis. Endogamy is warranted by Rebecca's complaints about Esau's Hittite wives (Gen. 26:34-35; 27:46; *Jub.* 25:1-23; 27:7-11) and by the rape of Dinah (Gen. 33:17-34:31; *Jub.* 30:1-17). The second creation account in Genesis 2 warrants purification after childbirth (*Jub.* 3:8-12; cf. Lev. 12:2-5), and forbidden relations are reinforced in *Jubilees'* version of the notice about Reuben having sex with his father's concubine Bilhah (Gen. 35:22; *Jub.* 33:1-20) and in its reworking of the Judah and Tamar episode (Genesis 38; *Jub.* 41:23-24). The (unspecified) fornication of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-29) and the sin of Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38) incur equal condemnation (*Jub.* 16:7-9).

Ben Sira (early second century B.C.E.) offers typically sapiential advice on avoiding sex with wicked women and prostitutes, temptations to incest, and the company of other men's wives (Sir. 9:1-9). The sage delineates and condemns the sexually profligate man and wife (23:16-27), contrasts bad women and good wives (25:15-26:17), and warns against the sexuality of daughters (7:23-26; 22:4-5; 26:10-12; 42:9-14). A reference to a wife's jealousy seems to imply polygamy (26:6).

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In other sources, apologetic motifs dominate. The *Letter to Aristeas* (late second century B.C.E.) contrasts the Jews with other nations who sexually approach (or, in one emendation, prostitute) males and who violate both mothers and their daughters (*Letter of Aristeas* 152). The third *Sibylline Oracle* (ca. 160-50 B.C.E.) "predicts" Roman war crimes, highlighting Romans' indulgence in male-male sex and the prostitution of boys in brothels (*Sib. Or.* 3.175-78, 182-87). This stigmatization of the Romans as prone to sex with boys appears at the same time that Romans were expressing their own anxieties about sex with boys in the *lex Sca(n)tina*, which appears to have criminalized sex with a freeborn boy and sex between free males who submitted to penetration. By contrast, the "pious race" is concerned with holy unions and abstains from sex with boys (*Sib. Or.* 3.594-600). The Sibyl urges the Greeks to follow this Jewish example, abstaining from adultery and pederasty and rearing all their children (3.762-66).

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