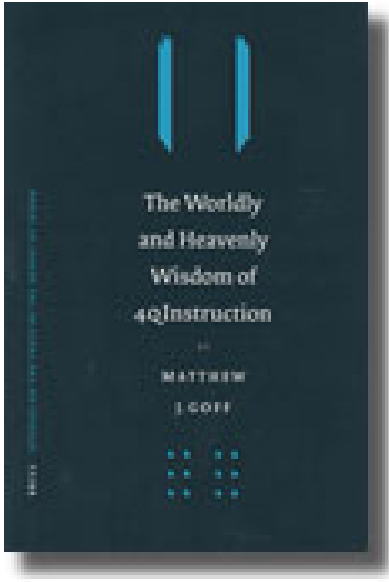


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The Worldly and Heavenly Wisdom of 4QInstruction

Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 50

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While the scholarly study of 4QInstruction is still fairly young, several major studies, including the publication of the text in DJD 34, have tackled this fascinating and sometimes enigmatic wisdom text. Matthew Goff's study, a revision of his doctoral dissertation under John J. Collins, is a fine addition to this growing body of scholarship.

The central feature of Goff's study, and one that has clearly been a prominent concern of scholarship on this text is "how 4QInstruction should be understood in relation to wisdom and apocalypticism" (27). Indeed, 4QInstruction is a text that blurs the traditional boundaries between wisdom and apocalypticism as scholars have traditionally constructed these categories. In chapter 1 Goff provides an excellent and fair review of the major scholarly studies of 4QInstruction. At this stage, such a review is most welcome because, in previous scholarship on the book, we see just the sort of category confusion that 4QInstruction creates. So, for example, Armin Lange (*Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung und Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran* [STDJ 18; Leiden: Brill, 1995]) "understands 4QInstruction as the eschatologizing of biblical wisdom" (10), and he sees the work as support for Gerhard von Rad's contention that apocalypticism is an outgrowth of Israel's wisdom tradition. On the other side, Torleif Elgvin ("An Analysis of 4QInstruction" [diss.; Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997])

argues that the practical wisdom and the apocalyptic elements of the book actually represent two separate strata, and thus 4QInstruction is composite: a wisdom layer and an apocalyptic layer. These two studies, then, exemplify the difficulty that 4QInstruction presents to the standard scholarly construct.

Goff maintains that neither of these studies really gets to the core problem of how wisdom and apocalypticism relate in this text. For Goff, the wisdom and apocalyptic elements cannot be so easily disentangled because they are closely interrelated in 4QInstruction. He remarks,

4QInstruction is a pedagogical composition devoted to the ethical development of its intended audience. It accomplishes this by giving instruction in the tradition of biblical wisdom on practical topics such as debts and family. It also does this by disclosing divine mysteries that provide knowledge on topics such as the extent of God's dominion over the created order and the imminence of his judgment. These teachings reflect its apocalyptic worldview. The author of 4QInstruction wanted the addressee to live in the light of the revelation given to him. The knowledge that had been disclosed was intended to encourage him to live ethically and piously. 4QInstruction's apocalyptic worldview provides the broader theological context in which its concern for the addressee's ordinary life is to be understood. (28)

In the subsequent chapters of the book, Goff explicates this summary argument.

In chapter 2 Goff examines the *raz nihyeh*, or “mystery that is to be.” The *raz nihyeh*, whatever else it might be, is revealed knowledge that has already been given to the book's addressee. The content of the mystery, although not explicitly articulated in the book, appears to include knowledge of God's divine plan for creation up to the eschatological judgment (37). For those who know it, like the addressee, the mystery frames all the teaching of the book and gives it a rationale. Thus, the mystery also pertains, and gives meaning to, all the practical teaching in the book.

Goff sees the intersection between wisdom and apocalypticism in this chapter in the issue of epistemology. He argues that “[t]he epistemology of 4QInstruction is closer to that of apocalypticism than biblical wisdom” (51). Essentially, the difference here is that in 4QInstruction the addressee acquires knowledge through revelation rather than on his or her own. Goff contrasts this approach with that of Ben Sira, for whom esoteric speculation is to be avoided (3:21–24) and revealed and mantic wisdom is deeply problematic (34:1–8). Yet 4QInstruction does offer instruction of a practical sort without

resorting to revelation. For Goff, this observation shows that the book “is more inconsistent in its use of revelation than is generally the case in apocalyptic literature” (53). But he concludes that 4QInstruction “illustrates that in the second century BCE a wisdom text could have an apocalyptic worldview” (66). Goff compares the epistemology of 4QInstruction to Daniel and *1 Enoch*, whose sages “have access to higher wisdom” (50). The sages/seers of these more traditional apocalyptic books have knowledge revealed to them, and thus they represent an epistemology that contrasts with the sapiential contemplation of the natural world from which the sage derives knowledge.

To this point Goff’s analysis is right on the mark, but one matter he does not address that brings the wisdom and apocalyptic traditions closer together is the mechanism of transmission of this revealed knowledge. Goff is not clear about whether he accepts that the *raz nihyeh* is a written composition, and indeed the verbs associated with it are somewhat ambiguous. The addressee is told to “gaze upon” the mystery, a phrase that Goff understands as indicating perhaps some kind of visionary experience, but when the mystery is referred to in the past, it is revealed to the ear of the addressee. Further, one is to meditate on the mystery and study it, verbs that would indicate that the addressee has access to a written text. Thus, although the knowledge given to the addressee is of mysteries and these do not seem to be made public, they still are transmitted as a body of revealed knowledge in some already digested form, either as a written composition or some body of oral teaching (or both?). This same sort of transmission of knowledge and instruction occurs in *1 Enoch*, where Enoch hands down his revelation to his son Methuselah in the form of books (82:1–4) that he will then transmit to his descendants and in Daniel, whose revelation comes to those “at the time of the end” in a book (12:4). Thus, in both sapiential (books such as Proverbs and Ben Sira) and apocalyptic contexts, knowledge is transmitted in organized and digested formats, but the authority that undergirds that teaching/knowledge (and perhaps the epistemological assumptions) differs dramatically between the two.

Chapter 3 takes up one specific passage in 4Q417 that refers to the “vision of Hagu.” Goff understands the “vision of Hagu” to be “associated with a heavenly book in which is inscribed the judgment against the wicked,” and it “seems to provide knowledge of good and evil” (122), knowledge that enables the addressee to conduct himself morally but also that provides the wisdom that he is like the “spiritual people.” 4QInstruction sets these spiritual people over against the “fleshly people,” from whom he has been separated. These two different groups “represent two different ways of being human” (122), and, thus, there is a right and a wrong path set before the addressee. In this way, the “vision of Hagu” constitutes an interface between wisdom and apocalyptic that provides the addressee with revealed knowledge based on an exegesis of Gen 1–3 that enables him to

know angelic wisdom that was also known to Adam *and* that shows him the right path to follow.

Goff devotes chapter 4 to the theme of poverty and the elect status of the addressee, themes that are central to the book. For Goff as for previous scholars, the emphasis on and frequency of claims about poverty provide important indications about the social context of the book. So, for example, the large body of admonitions about how to handle loans and surety indicate that the addressee is not cut off from the rest of society. But, as Goff correctly observes, 4QInstruction does not betray any real interest in “the poor” as a segment of Jewish society. The addressee seems to be the focus of the concern about poverty, and Goff agrees with those scholars who argue that this interest reflects a real state of poverty, although not complete destitution, on the part of the addressee. Goff observes, however, that although the addressee may be poor, “his elect status is portrayed as a form of wealth” (151). He argues that this may be one reason why, in contrast to a work like the Epistle of Enoch, 4QInstruction also does not contain invective against the rich. The addressee may be poor in reality, but he is really wealthy. Yet 4QInstruction treats what Goff calls a “range of different economic positions,” which suggests to him that the book actually has multiple addressees “and that they were at a variety of poverty levels” (162). He deduces from these observations that the book was “addressed to commoners.”

Goff concludes that the implied social context of 4QInstruction, in which the addressee operates “in a free and open economic context,” contrasts with that of the undisputed sectarian works from Qumran, even though the sectarian texts also connect elect status with poverty. But while the social context might be relatively clear, the audience of 4QInstruction is not. First, can we say anything more about the “commoners” who apparently come from a range of economic (but primarily poor) backgrounds and who receive this revealed knowledge? Are they able to read a text like 4QInstruction? If not, how do they have access to its teaching? Second, while scholars usually speak of the *mēbîn* as the addressee of the book (this is also Goff’s preference), his conclusion about multiple economic situations also forces him to refer to a “group of people” for whom the book was meant (167). This confusion, which certainly seems evident in 4QInstruction, could be partly a function of the fragmentary nature of the text’s remains. One implication of this situation, if we take it as reflecting 4QInstruction generally, is that the identity of the “addressee” may shift throughout the work. A statement like, “Some texts clearly present the addressee as a farmer or an artisan,” indicates that Goff is aware of this possibility, but he does not really give it full play. Yet such a conclusion would make sense of the ubiquitous term *mēbîn* together with the evidence that suggests multiple addressees.

If chapter 4 highlights certain sapiential aspects of 4QInstruction, chapter 5 moves in the other direction. Goff notes, “4QInstruction is distinguished from traditional wisdom by its eschatological perspective” (168). Here again 4QInstruction problematizes the categories of wisdom and apocalypticism. The text frequently refers to judgment, and “the addressee is understood to already have had some eschatological instruction” (171). Goff argues that the text’s eschatology draws on ancient Israelite traditions about theophanic judgment and that it “encourages people to improve their conduct in this world.” Thus, he concludes, “4QInstruction’s ethical teachings are rooted in an eschatological perspective” (215).

The chapter also takes up 4QInstruction’s relationship to *1 Enoch*, Daniel, and the Qumran sectarian literature. Goff grants that the author of 4QInstruction might have been familiar with Enochic literature, but if he was, “he took from it general ideas without alluding to Enochic literature directly” (189). Goff successfully shows that while there are similarities among *1 Enoch*, Daniel, Qumran, and 4QInstruction, the differences are also quite pronounced. 4QInstruction has a different understanding of history from Daniel and *1 Enoch*, and, although a number of similarities might connect the Qumran sectarian texts and 4QInstruction, their different social contexts and the prominence of eschatological motifs in the Qumran texts that are absent from 4QInstruction cause Goff to deemphasize any connections between the Qumranites and the author and audience of 4QInstruction (171).

In chapter 6 Goff draws out the implications of the previous chapters and tries to situate 4QInstruction within Second Temple Judaism at large. He argues that the language of 4QInstruction reveals “a sectarian mentality” and asks about the relationship with the Qumran community. Even though a number of features of 4QInstruction are compatible with the sectarian texts from Qumran, “4QInstruction has no red-flag markers of provenance from the Dead Sea sect” (223). He concludes, however, that the text has some relationship with the Qumran group. It was popular among them, as the number of copies indicates, and the group certainly would have found many of its ideas congenial. Goff ultimately concludes that the Qumran community read it with interest and borrowed from it.

As to its date and social location, Goff argues that 4QInstruction was written in the second century B.C.E. While he notes that a number of factors might indicate an early second-century date, there are enough uncertainties to remain more general. Goff distinguishes 4QInstruction’s social location from that of a work like Ben Sira. Whereas all indications are that Ben Sira originated in an aristocratic setting, 4QInstruction betrays no such location. Its emphasis on poverty, its instruction to women (or at least one woman), and its lack of any clear aristocratic interest convince Goff that its audience

was “commoners.” 4QInstruction was written for people brought together by the economic circumstances that they faced, not by theological disputes or foreign oppression. “4QInstruction offers its intended audience a way to find dignity and respect amidst degrading circumstances” (229).

4QInstruction also brings into the foreground the problem of the relationship between wisdom and apocalypticism in Second Temple texts. Goff demonstrates effectively that much of previous scholarship on this text is constrained by the categories that scholars have created. He has shown conclusively, in my estimation, that in 4QInstruction we have a text that integrates sapiential and apocalyptic material. The two cannot be neatly separated into discrete literary strata, for, as Goff has shown, they depend on one another in this work. 4QInstruction may be a wisdom book, but it transforms wisdom by situating it in an apocalyptic worldview. It thus represents a “trajectory” of Jewish wisdom in the Second Temple period that differs from that of works like Sirach, even though the two works share much in common.

One question that Goff’s conclusions raise is whether there is any connection between the social context that he reconstructs for 4QInstruction and its combined use of wisdom and apocalyptic. Does the use in 4QInstruction of various aspects of apocalypticism, such as knowledge by revelation, eschatological judgment, or inclusion among the spiritual people/elect have anything to do with the addressees’ relatively low socioeconomic status and social vulnerability? Does the claim that election is a form of wealth reflect the audience’s apparent inability to do anything to change the status quo? A contrast may be found in Ben Sira, a person of higher status than the *mēbîn*, who warns his apparently aristocratic students of the dangers of seeking revealed knowledge (3:21–24). The way in which 4QInstruction sets up eschatological reward for proper ethical behavior now does seem somewhat analogous, for instance, to the expectations of the Epistle of Enoch that the rich and poor will receive eschatological recompense, even if the two works’ respective attitudes toward the wealthy differ. While admittedly Goff does not set out to address this issue, his analysis of 4QInstruction, especially his discussions of the work’s audience and social location, raises questions of this sort.

The combination of wisdom and apocalypticism in 4QInstruction, as much as in any text from the Second Temple period, highlights how much our modern scholarly categories are explanatory constructs but constructs nonetheless. Goff’s excellent study reminds us of the extent to which we often reify those categories when we look at ancient Jewish texts. In this book, Goff treats a wide range of issues connected with 4QInstruction, only a few of which I have highlighted in this review. 4QInstruction will certainly continue to attract scholarly attention, and scholars who grapple with this wisdom text will most certainly need to engage Goff’s important study at the same time.