

- 21 Keep them fastened over your heart
always,
tie them around your neck.
- 22 When you lie down they † will watch
over you,
when you wake, they will share your
concerns;
wherever you turn, they will guide
you.
- 23 For the command is a lamp, and the
teaching a light,
and a way to life are the reproofs that
discipline,
- 24 Keeping you from another's wife,
from the smooth tongue of the
foreign woman.*
- 25 Do not lust in your heart after her
beauty,
do not let her captivate you with her
glance!*
- 26 For the price of a harlot
may be scarcely a loaf of bread,
But a married woman
is a trap for your precious life.
- 27 † Can a man take embers into his
bosom,
and his garments not be burned?
- 28 Or can a man walk on live coals,
and his feet not be scorched?
- 29 So with him who sleeps with another's
wife—

† 30–35, twelve lines) draws conclusions from the comparison of adultery with theft: the latter involves property only but adultery destroys one's name and very self. The best protection against such a woman is heeding parental instruction, which is to be kept vividly before one's eyes like a written tablet.

6:22 *They*: Heb. has "she." If this verse is not out of place, then the antecedent of "she" is command (v. 20), or perhaps wisdom.

6:27–29 There is a play on three words of similar sound, *ʾish*, "man," *ʾishshâ*, "woman," and *ʿesh*, "fire, embers." The question, "Can a man (*ʾish*) take embers (*ʿesh*) into his bosom / and his garments not be burned?" has a double meaning. "Into his bosom" has an erotic meaning as in the phrase "wife of one's bosom" (Dt 13:6; 28:54; Sir 9:1). Hence one will destroy one's garments, which symbolize one's public position, by taking fire/another's wife into one's bosom.

6:33–35 The nature of the husband's vengeance is disputed, some believing it is simply a physical beating whereas others hold it is public and involves the death penalty because Lv 20:20 and Dt 22:22 demand the death penalty.

7:1–27 The third and climactic instruction on adultery and seduction is an example story, of the same type as the example story in 24:30–34. By its negative portrayal of the deceitful woman, who speaks in the night to a lone youth, it serves as a foil to trustworthy Wisdom in chap. 8, who speaks in broad daylight to all who pass in the street.

As in 6:20–24, the father warns his son to keep his teaching to protect him from the dangerous forbidden woman. The father's language in 7:4 ("Say to Wisdom, 'You are my sister,' and call Understanding 'Friend'") sets this admonition apart, however; it

none who touches her shall go
unpunished.*

- 30 Thieves are not despised
if out of hunger they steal to satisfy
their appetite.
- 31 Yet if caught they must pay back
sevenfold,
yield up all the wealth of their house.
- 32 But those who commit adultery have no
sense;
those who do it destroy themselves.
- 33 † They will be beaten and disgraced,
and their shame will not be wiped
away;
- 34 For passion enrages the husband,
he will have no pity on the day of
vengeance;
- 35 He will not consider any restitution,
nor be satisfied by your many bribes.

The Seduction †

- 7¹ † My son, keep my words,
and treasure my commands.
- 2 Keep my commands and live, †
and my teaching as the apple of your
eye;
- 3 Bind them on your fingers,
write them on the tablet of your
heart.*
- 4 Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister!" †
Call Understanding, "Friend!"

is the language of courtship and love. If the son makes Woman Wisdom his companion and lover, she will protect him from the other woman. As in chap. 5, loving the right woman protects the man from the wrong woman.

As motivation, the father in vv. 6–23 tells his son of an incident he once observed while looking out his window—a young man went to the bed of an adulterous woman and wound up dead. As in chap. 5, the realistic details—the purposeful woman, the silent youth, the vow, the perfumed bed—have a metaphorical level. Ultimately the story is about two different kinds of love.

7:1–3 Verses 1–3 are artistically constructed. "Keep" in v. 1a recurs in v. 2a; "commands" in v. 1b recurs in v. 2a; the imperative verb "live" occurs in the very center of the three lines; v. 3, on preserving the teaching upon one's very person, matches vv. 1–2, on preserving the teaching internally by memorizing it.

7:2 *Live*: here as elsewhere (Gn 20:7; 42:18; 2 Kgs 18:32; Jer 27:12, 17; Ez 18:32), the imperative ("Live!") is uttered against the danger of death, e.g., "Do such and such and you will live (= survive the danger); why should you die?"

7:4 *You are my sister*: "sister" and "brother" are examples of love language in the ancient Near East, occurring in Egyptian love poetry and Mesopotamian marriage songs. In Sg 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1, the man calls the woman, "my sister, my bride." Intimate friendship with Woman Wisdom saves one from false and dangerous relationships.

5 That they may keep you from a
stranger,
from the foreign woman with her
smooth words.*

6 For at the window of my house,
through my lattice I looked out †

7 And I saw among the naive,
I observed among the young men,
a youth with no sense,

8 Crossing the street near the corner,
then walking toward her house,
in the twilight, at dusk of day,
in the very dark of night.

9 Then the woman comes to meet him,
dressed like a harlot, with secret
designs.

10 She is raucous and unruly,
her feet cannot stay at home;

11 Now she is in the streets, now in the
open squares,
lurking in ambush at every corner.

12 Then she grabs him, kisses him,
and with an impudent look says to
him:

13 "I owed peace offerings,
and today I have fulfilled my vows;
So I came out to meet you,
to look for you, and I have found
you!

14 With coverlets I have spread my couch,
with brocaded cloths of Egyptian
linen;

15 I have sprinkled my bed † with myrrh,
with aloes, and with cinnamon.

18 Come, let us drink our fill of love,
until morning, let us feast on love!

19 For my husband is not at home, †
he has gone on a long journey;

20 A bag of money he took with him,
he will not return home till the full
moon."

21 She wins him over by repeated urging,
with her smooth lips she leads him
astray. †*

22 He follows her impulsively,
like an ox that goes to slaughter;
Like a stag that bounds toward the net,
till an arrow pierces its liver;

23 Like a bird that rushes into a snare,
unaware that his life is at stake.

24 So now, children, listen to me, †
be attentive to the words of my
mouth!

25 Do not let your heart turn to her ways,
do not go astray in her paths;

26 For many are those she has struck down
dead,
numerous, those she has slain.

27 Her house is a highway to Sheol,
leading down into the chambers of
death.*

The Discourse of Wisdom †

8¹ Does not Wisdom call,
and Understanding raise her voice? *

2 On the top of the heights along the
road,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;

7:6-7 *I looked out...I saw...*: the perspective is unusual. The narrator looks through a window upon the drama in the street.

7:17 *Bed*: a bed can designate a place of burial in Is 57:2; Ez 32:25; 2 Chr 16:14. *Myrrh...aloes*: the spices could be used for funerals as for weddings (In 19:39). It is possible that the language is ambivalent, speaking of death as it seems to speak of life. As the woman offers the youth a nuptial feast, she is in reality describing his funerary feast.

7:19-20 *For my husband is not at home*: the woman is calculating. She knows exactly how long her husband will be gone.

7:21 The verbs "to win over" (lit., "to lead astray") and "to lead off" can be used of leading animals such as a donkey (Nm 22:23) or sheep (Jer 23:2 and 50:17). The animal imagery continues as the youth is compared to an ox, a fallow deer, and a bird in the moment they are slaughtered. None of the animals are aware of their impending death.

7:24-27 The father addresses "children," a larger audience than his own son; the story is typical, intended for others as an example. The story is a foil to the speech of the other woman in chap. 8.

8:1-36 Chapter 8 is Wisdom's longest speech in the book. Wisdom is here personified as in 1:20-33. She exalts her grandeur and origin, and invites all (vv. 1-11) to be attentive to her salutary influence in human society (vv. 12-21), for she was privileged to be present at the creation of the world (vv. 22-31). Finally, she promises life and the favor of God to those who are

devoted to her, death to those who reject her.

The poem has four sections, each (except the fourth) with two parts of five lines each:

- | | | |
|------|--------------|--------------|
| I. | A. vv. 1-5 | B. vv. 6-10 |
| II. | A. vv. 12-16 | B. vv. 17-21 |
| III. | A. vv. 22-26 | B. vv. 27-31 |
| IV. | vv. 32-36 | |

Within chaps. 1-9, chap. 8 is the companion piece to Wisdom's first speech in 1:20-33. There she spoke harshly, giving a promise only in the last line; here she speaks invitingly, giving a threat only in the last line.

Chapter 8 is the best-known chapter in Proverbs and has profoundly influenced Jewish and Christian thought. The most explicit and lengthy biblical comment is in Sir 24; it too has thirty-five lines in seven five-line stanzas and develops the theme of Wisdom's intimacy with God and desire to be with human beings. The Gospel of John portrays Jesus in the language of wisdom in Proverbs; Jesus, like Wisdom, calls out to people to listen to him, promises to tell them the truth, seeks disciples, invites them to a banquet, and gives them life. Writers in the patristic period used the language of pre-existent wisdom to express the idea of the pre-existent Word with God.

3 By the gates at the approaches of the
city,
in the entryways she cries aloud:
4 "To you, O people, I call;
my appeal is to you mortals.
5 You naive ones, gain prudence,
you fools,† gain sense.
6 Listen! for noble things I speak;
my lips proclaim honest words.
7† Indeed, my mouth utters truth,
and my lips abhor wickedness.
8 All the words of my mouth are sincere,
none of them wily or crooked;
9 All of them are straightforward to the
intelligent,
and right to those who attain
knowledge.
10 Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice
gold.
11 [For Wisdom is better than corals,
and no treasures can compare with
her.*]
12 I, Wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and useful knowledge I have.
13 [The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil;]
Pride, arrogance, the evil way,
and the perverse mouth I hate.*
14 Mine are counsel and advice;
Mine is strength; I am
understanding.†
15 By me kings reign,
and rulers enact justice;
16 By me princes govern,
and nobles, all the judges of the earth.
17 Those who love me I also love,
and those who seek me find me.
18 With me are riches and honor,*

wealth that endures, and righteousness.
19 My fruit is better than gold, even pure
gold,
and my yield than choice silver.*
20 On the way of righteousness I walk,
along the paths of justice,
21 Granting wealth to those who love me,
and filling their treasures.
22† "The LORD begot me, the beginning of
his works,
the forerunner of his deeds of long
ago;*
23 From of old I was formed,†
at the first, before the earth.*
24† When there were no deeps I was brought
forth,
when there were no fountains or
springs of water;
25 Before the mountains were settled into
place,
before the hills, I was brought forth;
26 When the earth and the fields were not
yet made,
nor the first clods of the world.
27 When he established the heavens, there
was I,*
when he marked out the vault over
the face of the deep;
28 When he made firm the skies above,
when he fixed fast the springs of the
deep;
29 When he set for the sea its limit,
so that the waters should not
transgress his command;
When he fixed the foundations of earth
then was I beside him as artisan;†*
30 I was his delight day by day,

† 8:5 Naive ones...fools: see note on 1:4.

8:7-8 The truth and sincerity of wisdom are absolute because they are of divine origin. They can neither deceive nor tolerate deception. The intelligent understand and accept this. "Straight" and "crooked" in Hebrew and English are metaphors for true, trustworthy and false, deceitful.

8:14 What is here predicated of Wisdom is elsewhere attributed to God (Jb 12:13-16).

8:22-31 Wisdom is of divine origin. She is represented as existing before all things (vv. 22-26), when God planned and created the universe, adorning it with beauty and variety, and establishing its wonderful order (vv. 27-30). The purpose of the two cosmogonies (vv. 22-26 and 27-31) is to ground Wisdom's claims. The first cosmogony emphasizes that she was born before all else (and so deserving of honor) and the second underscores that she was with the Lord during the creation of the universe. The pre-existence of Woman Wisdom with God is developed in Sir 24 and in New Testament hymns to Christ, especially in Jn 1 and Col 1:15-20.

8:23 Formed: since the other verbs of the origin of Wisdom in these verses describe birth, it is likely that the somewhat uncer-

tain verb is to be understood of birth as in Ps 139:13.

8:24-26 Perhaps the formless mass from which God created the heavens and the earth; cf. Gn 1:1-2; 2:4-6.

8:30 Artisan: the translation of the Hebrew word *'āmôn* has been controverted since antiquity. There have been three main opinions: (1) artisan; (2) trustworthy (friend); (3) ward, nursing. The most likely explanation is that *'āmôn* is artisan, related to Akkadian *ummānu*, legendary sages and heroes who brought divine gifts and culture to the human race. *I was his delight*: the chiasmic or ABBA structure of vv. 30-31 unifies the four lines and underscores the analogy between Woman Wisdom's intimate relation to the Lord and her intimate relation to human beings, i.e., "delight" + "playing" parallels "playing" + "delight." She is God's friend and intimate and invites human beings to a similar relationship to God through her.

8:11 Prv 3:15; Wis 7:8.

8:13 Prv 6:16-17; 16:5.

8:18 Prv 3:16.

8:19 Prv 3:14.

8:22 Wis 9:9; Sir 1:1; 24:9

8:23 Sir 1:4.

8:27 Prv 3:19; Sir 24:4-5.

8:30 Wis 9:9.

playing before him all the while,
 31 Playing over the whole of his earth,
 having my delight with human beings.
 32† Now, children, listen to me;
 happy are they who keep my ways.
 33 Listen to instruction and grow wise,
 do not reject it!
 34 Happy the one who listens to me,
 attending daily at my gates,
 keeping watch at my doorposts;
 35 For whoever finds me finds life,*
 and wins favor from the LORD;
 36 But those who pass me by do violence
 to themselves;
 all who hate me love death."

The Two Women Invite Passersby to Their Banquets†

Woman Wisdom Issues Her Invitation

9¹ Wisdom has built her house,†
 she has set up her seven columns;
 2 She has prepared her meat, mixed her
 wine,
 yes, she has spread her table.
 3 She has sent out her maidservants; she
 calls†
 from the heights out over the city: *
 4 "Let whoever is naive turn in here;
 to any who lack sense I say,
 5 Come, eat of my food,

and drink of the wine I have mixed!
 6 Forsake foolishness that you may live;†
 advance in the way of understanding."

Miscellaneous Aphorisms

7 Whoever corrects the arrogant earns
 insults;
 and whoever reproves the wicked
 incurs opprobrium.
 8 Do not reprove the arrogant, lest they
 hate you;
 reprove the wise, and they will love
 you.*
 9 Instruct the wise, and they become still
 wiser;
 teach the just, and they advance in
 learning.
 10 The beginning of wisdom is fear of the
 LORD,
 and knowledge of the Holy One is
 understanding.*
 11 For by me your days will be multiplied
 and the years of your life increased.*
 12 If you are wise, wisdom is to your
 advantage;
 if you are arrogant, you alone shall
 bear it.

Woman Folly Issues Her Invitation

13† Woman Folly is raucous,*
 utterly foolish; she knows nothing.

8:32–36 The final appeal of Woman Wisdom to her disciples is similar to the appeal of the father in 7:24–27.

9:1–6, 13–18 Wisdom and folly are represented as women, each inviting people to her banquet. Wisdom's banquet symbolizes joy and closeness to God. Unstable and senseless Folly furnishes stolen bread and water of deceit and vice that bring death to her guests. The opposition between wisdom and folly was stated at the beginning of chaps. 1–9 (folly in 1:8–19 and wisdom in 1:20–33) and is maintained throughout, down to this last chapter.

In comparable literature, gods might celebrate their sovereignty by building a palace and inviting the other gods to come to a banquet and celebrate with them. Presumably, Woman Wisdom is celebrating her grandeur (just described in chap. 8); her grand house is a symbol of her status as the Lord's friend. In order to enter the sacred building and take part in the banquet ("eat of my food"), guests must leave aside their old ways ("forsake foolishness").

Verses 7–12 are unrelated to the two invitations to the banquet. They appear to be based on chap. 1, especially on 1:1–7, 22. The Greek version has added a number of verses after v. 12 and v. 18. In the confusion, 9:11 seems to have been displaced from its original position after 9:6. It has been restored to its original place in the text.

9:1 House: house has a symbolic meaning. Woman Wisdom encourages marital fidelity (2:16–19; 5; 6:20–35; 7), which builds up a household (cf. chap. 5). Some scholars propose that an actual seven-pillared house is referred to, but so far none have been unearthed by archaeologists. Seven may simply connote completeness—a great house.

Some scholars see a connection between the woman's house

here and the woman's house in the final poem (31:10–31). In chap. 9, she invites the young man to enter her house and feast, i.e., to marry her. Chapter 31 shows what happens to the man who marries her; he has a house and enjoys "life" understood as consisting of a suitable wife, children, wealth, and honor.

9:3 She calls: i.e., invites; this is done indirectly through her maidservants, but the text could also mean that Wisdom herself publicly proclaims her invitation.

9:6 That you may live: life or doing one's duty toward God, enjoying health and long life, possessing wealth, good reputation, and a family. Such a life cannot be attained without God's help. Hence Wisdom speaks not of life simply but of life with her; the guest is to live in Wisdom's house.

9:13–18 Woman Folly is the mirror image of Woman Wisdom. Both make identical invitations but only one of the offers is trustworthy. Their hearers must discern which is the true offer. She is depicted with traits of the adulterous woman in 2:16–19; chap. 5; 6:20–35; chap. 7. Woman Folly is restless (cf. 7:11), her path leads to the underworld (2:18; 5:5; 7:27), and she is ignorant (5:6). In this final scene, she appears in single combat with her great nemesis, Woman Wisdom. Though the invitations of the two women appear at first hearing to be the same, they differ profoundly. Wisdom demands that her guests reject their ignorance, whereas Woman Folly trades on their ignorance.

8:35 Prv 3:13–18; 4:22.

Ps 111:10; Sir 1:16.

9:3 Prv 8:1–2.

9:11 Prv 3:2; 16:4, 10;

9:8 Sir 10:27.

10:27.

9:10 Prv 1:7; Jb 28:28;

9:13–18 Prv 7:7–27.

THE WISDOM OF BEN SIRA (ECCLESIASTICUS)

New American Bible, Introduction

The Wisdom of Ben Sira derives its title from the author, "Yeshua [Jesus], son of Eleazar, son of Sira" (50:27). This seems to be the earliest title of the book. The designation "Liber Ecclesiasticus," meaning "Church Book," appended to some Greek and Latin manuscripts, is perhaps due to the extensive use the church made of this book in presenting moral teaching to catechumens and to the faithful. The title "Sirach" comes from the Greek form of the author's name.

The author, a sage who lived in Jerusalem, was thoroughly imbued with love for the wisdom tradition, and also for the law, priesthood, Temple, and divine worship. As a wise and experienced observer of life he addressed himself to his contemporaries with the motive of helping them to maintain religious faith and integrity through study of the books sacred to the Jewish tradition.

The book contains numerous well-crafted maxims, grouped by affinity, and dealing with a variety of subjects such as the individual, the family, and the community in their relations with one another and with God. It treats of friendship, education, poverty and wealth, laws, religious worship, and many other matters that reflect the religious and social customs of the time.

Written in Hebrew in the early years of the second century B.C., the book was finished by ca. 175. The text was translated into Greek by the author's grandson after 117 B.C. He

also wrote a foreword which contains valuable information about the book, its author, and himself as translator. Until the close of the nineteenth century the Wisdom of Ben Sira was known to Christians in translation of which the Greek rendering was the most important. From it the Latin version was made. Between 1896 and 1900, again in 1931, and several times since 1956, incomplete manuscripts were discovered, so that more than two thirds of the book in Hebrew is available. These Hebrew texts agree substantially with the Greek. One such text, from Masada, is pre-Christian in date. *The New American Bible* provides a critical translation based on the evidence of all the ancient texts.

Though not included in the Jewish Bible after the first century A.D., nor, therefore, accepted by Protestants, the Wisdom of Ben Sira has been recognized by the Catholic Church as inspired and canonical. The Foreword, though not properly part of the book, is always included with it because of its antiquity and importance.

The contents of the Wisdom of Ben Sira are of a discursive nature, not easily divided into separate parts. Chapters 1-43 deal largely with moral instruction; 44:1-50:24 contain eulogy of the heroes of Israel. There are two appendixes in which the author expresses his gratitude to God (51:1-12), and invites the unschooled to acquire true wisdom (51:13-30). ■

BEN SIRA

FOREWORD

Inasmuch as many and great truths have been given to us through the Law, the prophets, and the authors who followed them,† for which the instruction and wisdom of Israel merit praise, it is the duty of those who read the scriptures not only to become knowledgeable themselves but also to use their love of learning in speech and in writing to help others less familiar. So my grandfather Jesus, who had long devoted himself to the study of the law, the prophets, and the rest of the books of our ancestors, and had acquired great familiarity with them, was moved to write something himself regarding instruction and wisdom. He did this so that those who love learning might, by accepting what he had written, make even greater progress in living according to the Law.

You are invited therefore to read it with good will and attention, with indulgence for any failure on our part, despite earnest efforts, in the interpretation of particular passages. For words spoken originally in Hebrew do not have the same effect when they are translated into another language. That is true not only of this book but of the Law itself, the prophecies, and the rest of the books, which differ no little when they are read in the original.

I arrived in Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of King Euergetes, and while there, I had access to no little learning. I therefore considered it my duty to devote some diligence

Foreword *The Law, the prophets, and the authors who followed them:* an indication of the eventual tripartite division of the Hebrew Scriptures: Law (*torah*), Prophets (*nebi'im*), and Writings (*ketubim*), shortened in the acronym Tanak. *Thirty-eighth... Euergetes:* 132 B.C. The reference is to Ptolemy VII, Phylakon Euergetes II (170–163; 145–117 B.C.).

1:1–10 This brief poem serves as an introduction to the book. The Lord is the source and preserver of all wisdom, which he pours out upon all. See Jb 28:20–28; Prv 2:6; 8:22–31; Wis 7:25–27.

1:1 *Wisdom:* throughout the book Ben Sira describes in great detail just what wisdom is: sometimes divine (1:6, 8), sometimes a synonym for God's law (24:22–23). Ben Sira makes clear that all wisdom comes from God.

†1:4 Other ancient texts read as v. 5:

The wellspring of wisdom is the word of God in the heights,

and its runlets are the ageless commandments.

†1:6 Other ancient texts read as v. 7:

and industry to the translation of this book. During this time I applied my skill for many sleepless hours to complete the book and publish it for those living abroad who wish to acquire learning and are disposed to live their lives according to the Law.

THE WISDOM OF BEN SIRA

God's Gift of Wisdom†

- 1** All wisdom† is from the Lord and remains with him forever.*
- 2** The sands of the sea, the drops of rain, the days of eternity—who can count them?
- 3** Heaven's height, earth's extent, the abyss and wisdom—who can explore them?
- 4** Before all other things wisdom was created; and prudent understanding, from eternity.‡
- 6** The root of wisdom—to whom has it been revealed? Her subtleties—who knows them?‡*
- 8†** There is but one, wise and truly awesome, seated upon his throne—the Lord.
- 9** It is he who created her, saw her and measured her,* Poured her forth upon all his works, upon every living thing according to his bounty, lavished her upon those who love him.

Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom†

- 11** The fear of the Lord† is glory and exultation,

An understanding of wisdom—to whom has this been disclosed;

her resourcefulness, who has known?

1:8–10 In contrast to Jb 28, wisdom is not only with God, but given to all, especially Israel; see Bar 3:9; 4:4.

1:11–30 This is one of several poems of twenty-two bicola, or poetic lines, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Ben Sira uses the expression "fear of the Lord" twelve times and the noun "wisdom" seven times to emphasize the connection between the two ideas. He describes the blessings that come to those who fear the Lord, i.e., those who practice true religion by loving and serving God and keeping the Law (2:7–10, 15–17; 4:11–16; see Dt 6:1–5, 24). Such blessings recur throughout the book.

1:11 *Fear of the Lord:* Ben Sira identifies wisdom with the fear of the Lord (vv. 26–27).

1:11 Kgs 3:9.

1:6 Bar 3:15;

Jb 28:10, 20.

1:9 Jb 28:27.

- gladness and a festive crown.
- 12 The fear of the Lord rejoices the heart,
giving gladness, joy, and long life.‡
- 13 Those who fear the Lord will be happy
at the end,
even on the day of death they will be
blessed.
- 14 The beginning of wisdom is to fear the
Lord;
she is created with the faithful in the
womb.*
- 15 With the godly she was created from of
old,
and with their descendants she will
keep faith.
- 16 The fullness of wisdom is to fear the
Lord;
she inebriates them with her fruits.*
- 17 Their entire house she fills with choice
foods,
their granaries with her produce.
- 18 The crown of wisdom is the fear of the
Lord,
flowering with peace and perfect
health.‡
- 19 Knowledge and full understanding she
rains down;
she heightens the glory of those who
possess her.
- 20 The root of wisdom is to fear the Lord;
her branches are long life.
- 21 The fear of the Lord drives away sins;
where it abides it turns back all anger.
- 22 Unjust anger can never be justified;
anger pulls a person to utter ruin.
- 23† Until the right time, the patient remain
calm,
then cheerfulness comes back to
them.

- 24 Until the right time they hold back their
words;
then the lips of many will tell of their
good sense.
- 25 Among wisdom's treasures is the model
for knowledge;
but godliness is an abomination to
the sinner.
- 26 If you desire wisdom, keep the
commandments,
and the Lord will bestow her upon
you;
- 27 For the fear of the Lord is wisdom and
discipline;
faithfulness and humility are his
delight.
- 28 Do not disobey the fear of the Lord,†
do not approach it with duplicity of
heart.*
- 29 Do not be a hypocrite before others;
over your lips keep watch.
- 30 Do not exalt yourself lest you fall
and bring dishonor upon yourself;
- For then the Lord will reveal your
secrets
and cast you down in the midst of the
assembly.
Because you did not approach the fear
of the Lord,
and your heart was full of deceit.

Trust in God

- 2¹ My child, when you come to serve the
Lord,†
prepare yourself for trials.*
- 2 Be sincere of heart and steadfast,
and do not be impetuous in time of
adversity.
- 3 Cling to him, do not leave him,
that you may prosper in your last
days.

†1:12 Other ancient texts read as v. 12cd:

Fear of the Lord is the Lord's gift;
also for love he makes firm paths.

‡1:18 Other ancient texts read as v. 18cd:

Both are gifts of God toward peace;
splendor opens out for those who love him.

1:23–24 Ben Sira pays close attention to *kaïros*, the right time,
occurring some sixty times in his book.

1:28–30 Attempting to serve the Lord with duplicity of heart
is hypocrisy and self-exaltation, deserving of public disgrace.

2:1–11 Serving the Lord is not without its trials (v. 1); but no

matter what happens, the genuine believer will remain sincere,
steadfast, and faithful (vv. 2–3). Misfortune and humiliation are
means of purification to prove one's worth (vv. 4–5). Ben Sira be-
lieved that patience and unwavering trust in God are ultimately
rewarded with the benefits of God's mercy and of lasting joy
(vv. 6–11).

1:14 Jb 28:28; Ps 111:10;

Prv 1:7; 9:10.

1:16 Eccl 12:13.

1:28 Jas 1:8; 2:8.

2:12 Tm 3:10–12.

4 Accept whatever happens to you;
in periods of humiliation be patient.

5 For in fire gold is tested,
and the chosen, in the crucible of
humiliation.*

6 Trust in God, and he will help you;
make your ways straight and hope in
him.

7 You that fear the Lord, wait for his
mercy,
do not stray lest you fall.

8 You that fear the Lord, trust in him,
and your reward will not be lost.

9 You that fear the Lord, hope for good
things,
for lasting joy and mercy.

10 Consider the generations long past and
see:
has anyone trusted in the Lord and
been disappointed?
Has anyone persevered in his fear and
been forsaken?
has anyone called upon him and been
ignored?*

11 For the Lord is compassionate and
merciful;
forgives sins and saves in time of
trouble.

12 Woe to timid hearts and drooping
hands,†
to the sinner who walks a double
path!

13 Woe to the faint of heart! For they do
not trust,
and therefore have no shelter!

14 Woe to you that have lost hope!
what will you do at the Lord's
visitation?

15 Those who fear the Lord do not disobey
his words;
those who love him keep his ways.*

16 Those who fear the Lord seek to please
him;
those who love him are filled with his
law.

17 Those who fear the Lord prepare their
hearts
and humble themselves before him.

18 Let us fall into the hands of the Lord
and not into the hands of mortals,
For equal to his majesty is his mercy;
and equal to his name are his
works.*

Responsibilities to Parents†

3¹ Children, listen to me, your father;
act accordingly, that you may be safe.

2 For the Lord sets a father in honor over
his children
and confirms a mother's authority
over her sons.

3 Those who honor their father atone for
sins;
they store up riches who respect their
mother.

4 Those who honor their father will have
joy in their own children,
and when they pray they are heard.

5 Those who respect their father will live a
long life;
those who obey the Lord honor their
mother.

6 Those who fear the Lord honor their
father,
and serve their parents as masters.

7 In word and deed honor your father,
that all blessings may come to you.*

8 A father's blessing gives a person firm
roots,
but a mother's curse uproots the
growing plant.*

9 Do not glory in your father's disgrace,
for that is no glory to you!

10 A father's glory is glory also for oneself;

† 2:12-18 A stern warning to those who compromise their faith in time of affliction; they fail in courage and trust and therefore have no security (vv. 12-14). But those who fear the Lord through obedience, reverence, love, and humility find his "mercy equal to his majesty" (vv. 15-18).

3:1-16 Besides the virtues that must characterize our conduct toward God, special duties are enjoined, such as honor and respect toward parents, with corresponding blessings (vv. 1-9). By showing such respect especially to old and infirm parents (vv. 10-13), the sins of children are pardoned (vv. 14-15). Failure to

honor father and mother is blasphemy and merits a curse from God (v. 16). Cf. Ex 20:12; Eph 6:2-3.

2:5 Prv 17:3; Wis 3:6; Is
48:10; 1 Pt 1:7.
2:10 Ps 31:2; 145:18-20.
2:15 Jn 14:23.
2:18 Sir 17:29.

3:8 Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16;
Mt 15:4; 19:19; Mk
7:10; 10:19; Lk 18:20;
Eph 6:2-3.
3:9 Gn 27:27-29;
49:2-27.

and disgrace your upbringing.
Then you will wish you had never been
born
and will curse the day of your birth.
15 Those accustomed to using abusive
language
will never acquire discipline as long as
they live.

Sins of the Flesh†

16 Two types of people multiply sins,
and a third† draws down wrath:
Burning passion is like a blazing fire,
not to be quenched till it burns itself
out;

One unchaste with his kindred
never stops until fire breaks forth.

17 To the unchaste all bread is sweet;
he is never through till he dies.*

18 The man who dishonors his marriage
bed
says to himself, "Who can see me?
Darkness surrounds me, walls hide me,
no one sees me. Who can stop me
from sinning?"*

He is not mindful of the Most High,
fearing only human eyes.
19 He does not realize that the eyes of the
Lord,
ten thousand times brighter than the
sun,

Observe every step taken
and peer into hidden corners.

20 The one who knows all things before
they exist
still knows them all after they are
made.

21 Such a man will be denounced in the
streets of the city;*
and where he least suspects it, he will
be apprehended.

22 So it is with the woman unfaithful to
her husband,
who offers him an heir by another
man.
23 First of all, she has disobeyed the law of
the Most High;
second, she has wronged her
husband;
Third, through her wanton adultery
she has brought forth children by
another man.
24 Such a woman will be dragged before
the assembly,†
and her punishment will extend to
her children.
25 Her children will not take root;
her branches will not bring forth fruit.
26 She will leave behind an accursed
memory;
her disgrace will never be blotted out.
27 Thus all who dwell on the earth shall
know,
all who remain in the world shall
understand,
That nothing is better than the fear of
the Lord,
nothing sweeter than obeying the
commandments of the Lord.* †

Praise of Wisdom

24¹ Wisdom sings her own praises,†
among her own people she proclaims
her glory.

2 In the assembly of the Most High she
opens her mouth,
in the presence of his host she tells of
her glory:

3 "From the mouth of the Most High I
came forth,*
and covered the earth like a mist.

† 23:16–27 Ben Sira treats sexual sins and their consequences. Lust destroys its victims (vv. 16–17, 22–26). A false sense of security aggravates the adulterer's inevitable fate (vv. 18–21).

23:16 Two types... a third: a numerical proverb, as in 25:1–2, 7–11; 26:5–6, 28; 50:25–26; Prv 6:16–19; 30:15b–16, 18–19, 21–23, 29–31. Ben Sira condemns three kinds of sexual sin: incest (v. 16), fornication (v. 17), and adultery (vv. 18–26).

23:24–25 The judgment of the assembly determined the illegitimacy of children born of adultery or incest and excluded them from the "community of the Lord" (Dt 23:3). Cf. Wis 3:16–19; 4:3–6.

†23:27 Other ancient texts read as v. 28:

It is a great glory to follow after God,
and for you to be received by him is length of days.

24:1–29 Wisdom speaks in the first person, describing her origin, her dwelling place in Israel, and the reward she gives her followers. As in Proverbs 8, Wisdom is personified as coming from God, yet distinct from him. This description is reflected in the Johannine *logos*, or Word (Jn 1:1–14). It is used extensively in the Roman liturgy.

23:17 Prv 9:17.
23:18–19 Jb 24:15; Prv 15:3,
11; 17:3; 24:12; Is
29:15; Ez 8:12.
23:21–22 Lv 18:20; 20:10; Dt
22:21–22.

23:27 Sir 1:11–30; Prv
3:1–2.
24:3–6 Sir 1:1–4; Prv
2:6; 8:22–36; Wis
7:24–25.

4 In the heights of heaven I dwelt,
and my throne was in a pillar of
cloud.
5 The vault of heaven I compassed alone,
and walked through the deep abyss.
6 Over waves of the sea, over all the land,
over every people and nation I held
sway.
7 Among all these I sought a resting place.
In whose inheritance should I abide?
8 "Then the Creator of all gave me his
command,
9 and my Creator chose the spot for my
tent.
He said, 'In Jacob make your dwelling,
in Israel your inheritance.'
9 Before all ages, from the beginning, he
created me,
10 and through all ages I shall not cease
to be.
10 In the holy tent I ministered before him,
and so I was established in Zion.
11 In the city he loves as he loves me, he
gave me rest;
11 in Jerusalem, my domain.
12 I struck root among the glorious people,
in the portion of the Lord, his
heritage.
13 "Like a cedar in Lebanon I grew tall,
13 like a cypress on Mount Hermon;
14 I grew tall like a palm tree in Engedi,
like rosebushes in Jericho;
14 Like a fair olive tree in the field,
like a plane tree beside water I grew
tall.
15 Like cinnamon and fragrant cane,
like precious myrrh I gave forth
perfume;
Like galbanum and onycha and mastic,*
like the odor of incense in the holy
tent. †

16 "I spread out my branches like a terebinth,
my branches so glorious and so
graceful.
17 I bud forth delights like a vine;
my blossoms are glorious and rich
fruit. ‡
19 Come to me, all who desire me,
and be filled with my fruits. †
20 You will remember me as sweeter than
honey,
better to have than the honeycomb.
21 Those who eat of me will hunger still, †
those who drink of me will thirst for
more.*
22 Whoever obeys me will not be put to
shame,
and those who serve me will never go
astray."
23 All this is the book of the covenant of
the Most High God,*
the Law which Moses commanded us †
as a heritage for the community of
Jacob. ‡
25 It overflows, like the Pishon, with
wisdom,*
and like the Tigris at the time of first
fruits.
26 It runs over, like the Euphrates, with
understanding,
and like the Jordan at harvest time.
27 It floods like the Nile with instruction,
like the Gihon † at vintage time.
28 The first human being never finished
comprehending wisdom,
nor will the last succeed in fathoming
her.
29 For deeper than the sea are her thoughts,
and her counsels, than the great abyss.
30 Now I, like a stream from a river, †
and like water channeling into a
garden—

24:15 These substances, associated with worship, are mentioned in Ex 30:23–28, 34–35 as the ingredients of the anointing oil and the sacred incense. Israel was a priestly nation (Ex 19:6; Is 61:6).

24:17 Other ancient texts read as v. 18:

I am the mother of fair love, of reverence,
of knowledge, and of holy hope;

To all my children I give

to be everlasting; to those named by Him.

24:19 Mt 11:28–30 contains a similar invitation.

24:21 The paradox of wisdom is that, far from being satiated, those who partake of her will always desire more.

24:23 Ben Sirā now identifies Wisdom and the law of Moses; see also Bar 4:1.

24:23 Other ancient texts read as v. 24:

Do not grow weary of striving with the Lord's help,
but cling to him that he may reinforce you.

The Lord Almighty alone is God,
and apart from him there is no savior.

24:27 *Gihon*: understood by some to have been a name for the Nile; cf. Gn 2:13.

24:30–33 Ben Sirā again speaks about himself. He had at first drawn a small portion of the water of wisdom for his own

24:15 Ex 30:23–28, 34–35.

24:21 Is 55:1; Jn 4:10–14;

6:35.

24:23 Ex 24:7.

24:23–27 Gn 2:11–14.

- 31 I said, "I will water my plants,
I will drench my flower beds."
Then suddenly this stream of mine
became a river,
and this river of mine became a sea.
32 Again I will make my teachings shine
forth like the dawn;
I will spread their brightness afar off.
33 Again I will pour out instruction like
prophecy
and bestow it on generations yet to
come.

Those Who Are Worthy of Praise

25 † With three things I am delighted,
for they are pleasing to the Lord and
to human beings:

- Harmony among relatives, friendship
among neighbors,
and a wife and a husband living
happily together.
2 Three kinds of people I hate,
and I loathe their manner of life:
A proud pauper, a rich liar,
and a lecherous old fool.
3 In your youth you did not gather.
How will you find anything in your
old age?
4 How appropriate is sound judgment in
the gray-haired,
and good counsel in the elderly!
5 How appropriate is wisdom in the aged,
understanding and counsel in the
venerable!
6 The crown of the elderly, wide
experience;
their glory, the fear of the Lord.
7 There are nine who come to mind as
blessed,
a tenth whom my tongue proclaims:†
The man who finds joy in his children,
and the one who lives to see the
downfall of his enemies.

† private benefit, but finding it so useful, he soon began to let others share in this boon by teaching them the lessons of wisdom. Like the words of the prophets, Ben Sira's instruction is valuable for all generations (v. 33). The comparison to prophecy is bold and unique.

25:1-2 A numerical saying in threes.

25:7-11 A numerical proverb (9 + 1), in which the tenth element, "the one who fears the Lord," is the most important.

25:8 *An ox and a donkey combined*: the reference is to a man married to two incompatible women (cf. 37:11a); the imagery derives from Dt 22:10.

- 8 Happy the man who lives with a
sensible woman,
and the one who does not plow with
an ox and a donkey combined.†
Happy the one who does not sin with
the tongue,
who does not serve an inferior.
9 Happy the one who finds a friend,
who speaks to attentive ears.
10 How great is the one who finds wisdom,
but none is greater than the one who
fears the Lord.
11 Fear of the Lord surpasses all else.
To whom can we compare the one
who has it?‡

Wicked and Virtuous Women†

- 13 Any wound, but not a wound of the
heart!
Any wickedness, but not the
wickedness of a woman!
14 Any suffering, but not suffering from
one's foes!
Any vengeance, but not the vengeance
of one's enemies!
15 There is no poison worse than that of a
serpent,
no venom greater than that of a
woman.
16 I would rather live with a dragon or a
lion
than live with a wicked woman.*
17 A woman's wicked disposition changes
her appearance,
and makes her face as dark as a bear.
18 When her husband sits among his
neighbors,
a bitter sigh escapes him unawares.
19 There is hardly an evil like that in a
woman;
may she fall to the lot of the sinner!
20 Like a sandy hill to aged feet
is a garrulous wife to a quiet husband.
21 Do not be enticed by a woman's beauty,

‡25:11 Other ancient texts read as v. 12:

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of loving him,
and fidelity is the beginning of clinging to him.

25:13-26 The harsh statements Ben Sira makes about women reflect the kind of instruction young Jewish males were exposed to in the early second century B.C. His patriarchal perspective is as unfair as it is one-sided.

or be greedy for her wealth.
 22 Harsh is the slavery and great the shame
 when a wife supports her husband.

23 Depressed mind, gloomy face,
 and a wounded heart—a wicked
 woman.
 Drooping hands and quaking knees,
 24 any wife who does not make her
 husband happy.

With a woman sin had a beginning,
 25 and because of her we all die.†

Allow water no outlet,
 26 and no boldness of speech to a
 wicked woman.

If she does not go along as you direct,
 cut her away from you.

26 ¹Happy the husband of a good wife;†
 the number of his days will be
 doubled.*

2 A loyal wife brings joy to her husband,
 and he will finish his years in peace.

3 A good wife is a generous gift
 bestowed upon him who fears the
 Lord.*

4 Whether rich or poor, his heart is content,
 a smile ever on his face.

5 There are three things I dread,
 and a fourth which terrifies me:
 Public slander, the gathering of a mob,
 and false accusation—all harder to
 bear than death.

6 A wife jealous of another wife is
 heartache and mourning;†
 everyone feels the lash of her tongue.

25:24 Ben Sira refers to the story of the first sin in Gn 3:1–6. Cf. 2 Cor 11:3 and 1 Tm 2:14. St. Paul, however, singles out Adam; cf. Rom 5:12–19; 1 Cor 15:22.

26:1–4, 13–18 A good wife is as a gift from God, bringing joy and peace, happiness and contentment to her husband (vv. 1–4) through her thoughtfulness, reserve, modesty and chastity, beauty, grace, and virtue (vv. 13–18).

26:6–12 A repetition of the thought expressed in 25:13–26.

26:17–18 The lampstand and the columns were located in the holy place of the ancient tabernacle (Ex 25:31–40; 26:32).

†26:18 Other ancient texts read as vv. 19–27:

¹⁹My child, keep intact the bloom of your youth,
 and do not give your strength to strangers.

²⁰Seek out a fertile field from all the land,
 and sow it with your own seed, confident in your fine
 stock.

²¹So shall your offspring prosper,
 and grow great, confident in their good descent.

²²A woman for hire is regarded as spittle,
 but a married woman is a deadly snare for her lovers.

7 A wicked wife is a chafing yoke;
 taking hold of her is like grasping a
 scorpion.

8 A drunken wife arouses great anger,
 for she does not hide her shame.

9 By her haughty stare and her eyelids
 an unchaste wife can be recognized.

10 Keep a strict watch over an unruly wife,
 lest, finding an opportunity, she use
 it.*

11 Watch out for her impudent eye,
 and do not be surprised if she betrays
 you:

12 As a thirsty traveler opens his mouth
 and drinks from any water nearby,
 So she sits down before every tent peg
 and opens her quiver for every
 arrow.

13 A gracious wife delights her husband;
 her thoughtfulness puts flesh on his
 bones.

14 A silent wife is a gift from the Lord;
 nothing is worth more than her self-
 discipline.

15 A modest wife is a supreme blessing;
 no scales can weigh the worth of her
 chastity.

16 The sun rising in the Lord's heavens—
 the beauty of a good wife in her well-
 ordered home.

17 The light which shines above the holy
 lampstand—†

a beautiful face on a stately figure.

18 Golden columns on silver bases—
 so her shapely legs and steady feet. ‡

²³A godless wife will be given to the lawless man as his portion,
 but a godly wife will be given to the man who fears the
 Lord.

²⁴A shameless woman wears out reproach,
 but a virtuous daughter will be modest even before her
 husband.

²⁵A headstrong wife is regarded as a bitch,
 but the one with a sense of shame fears the Lord.

²⁶The wife who honors her husband will seem wise to
 everyone,
 but if she dishonors him in her pride, she will be
 known to everyone as ungodly.

Happy is the husband of a good wife,
 for the number of his years will be doubled.

²⁷A loud-mouthed and garrulous wife will be regarded
 as a trumpet sounding the charge,
 And every person who lives like this
 will spend his life in the anarchy of war.

Dangers to Integrity and Friendship

28† Two things bring grief to my heart,
and a third arouses my anger:
The wealthy reduced to want,
the intelligent held in contempt,
And those who pass from righteousness
to sin—
the Lord prepares them for the
sword.*

29 A merchant can hardly keep from
wrongdoing,
nor can a shopkeeper stay free from
sin;

27 ¹For the sake of profit many sin,
and the struggle for wealth blinds the
eyes.*

2 A stake will be driven between fitted
stones—
sin will be wedged in between buying
and selling.

3 Unless one holds fast to the fear of the
Lord,
with sudden swiftness will one's
house be thrown down.

4 When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear;
so do people's faults when they
speak.†

5 The furnace tests the potter's vessels;
the test of a person is in
conversation.*

6 The fruit of a tree shows the care it has
had;
so speech discloses the bent of a
person's heart.*

7 Praise no one before he speaks,
for it is then that people are tested.

8 If you strive after justice, you will attain it,
and wear it like a splendid robe.

9 Birds nest with their own kind,
and honesty comes to those who
work at it.

10 A lion lies in wait for prey,
so does sin for evildoers.

11 The conversation of the godly is always
wisdom,
but the fool changes like the moon.

12 Limit the time you spend among the
stupid,
but frequent the company of the
thoughtful.

13 The conversation of fools is offensive,
and their laughter is wanton sin.

14 Their oath-filled talk makes the hair
stand on end,
and their brawls make one stop the
ears.

15 The wrangling of the proud ends in
bloodshed,
and their cursing is painful to hear.*

16 Whoever betrays a secret destroys
confidence,†
and will never find a congenial
friend.*

17 Cherish your friend, keep faith with him;
but if you betray his secrets, do not go
after him;

18 For as one might kill another,
you have killed your neighbor's
friendship.

19 Like a bird released from your hand,
you have let your friend go and
cannot recapture him.

20 Do not go after him, for he is far away,
and has escaped like a gazelle from a
snare.

21 For a wound can be bandaged, and an
insult forgiven,
but whoever betrays secrets does
hopeless damage.*

† **26:28–27:15** From proper conduct in family life, Ben Sira proceeds to social morality, warning especially against injustice in business (26:29–27:3), and perversity of speech in daily life (27:4–7). The pursuit of justice in these matters is all the more meritorious as it is difficult (27:8–10). The discourses of the godly are marked with wisdom, but the conversations of the wicked with offense, swearing, cursing, quarrels, and even bloodshed (27:11–15).

27:4–7, 11–15 The importance of effective speech is a favorite wisdom topic; e.g., cf. 20:1–8, 18–20; 22:27–23:15.

27:16–28:11 Betrayal of confidence through indiscretion destroys friendship and does irreparable harm (27:16–21); cf. 22:22. False friendship based on hypocrisy and deceit is hateful

to Ben Sira and, he adds, to God as well (27:22–24); it soon becomes a victim of its own treachery (27:25–27). The same fate awaits the malicious and vengeful (27:28–28:1). They can obtain mercy and forgiveness only by first forgiving their neighbor, being mindful of death and of the commandments of the Most High (28:2–7). And they must avoid quarrels and strife (28:8–11).

26:28 Ez 18:24–29.

27:1 Sir 7:18; 31:5–6; Prv 30:7–9.

27:5 1 Pt 1:7.

27:6 Mt 7:20.

27:15 Sir 23:8–15.

27:16 Prv 11:13; 20:19.

27:21 Sir 22:20.

Malice, Anger and Vengeance

- 22 Whoever has shifty eyes plots mischief
and those who know him will keep
their distance;
- 23 In your presence he uses honeyed talk,
and admires your words,
But later he changes his tone
and twists the words to your ruin.*
- 24 I have hated many things but not as
much as him,
and the Lord hates him as well.*
- 25 A stone falls back on the head of the
one who throws it high,*
and a treacherous blow causes many
wounds.
- 26 Whoever digs a pit falls into it,
and whoever lays a snare is caught in
it.†
- 27 The evil anyone does will recoil on
him
without knowing how it came upon
him.
- 28 Mockery and abuse will befall the
arrogant,
and vengeance lies in wait for them
like a lion.
- 29 Those who rejoice in the downfall of the
godly will be caught in a snare,
and pain will consume them before
they die.
- 30 Wrath and anger, these also are
abominations,
yet a sinner holds on to them.

28 †The vengeful will face the Lord's
vengeance;
indeed he remembers their sins in
detail.*

- 2 Forgive your neighbor the wrong done
to you;
then when you pray, your own sins
will be forgiven.*

- 3 Does anyone nourish anger against
another
and expect healing from the LORD?*
- 4 Can one refuse mercy to a sinner like
oneself,
yet seek pardon for one's own sins?
If a mere mortal cherishes wrath,
who will forgive his sins?
- 6 Remember your last days and set enmity
aside;
remember death and decay, and cease
from sin!*
- 7 Remember the commandments and do
not be angry with your neighbor;
remember the covenant of the Most
High, and overlook faults.
- 8 Avoid strife and your sins will be fewer,
for the hot-tempered kindle strife;
- 9 The sinner disrupts friendships
and sows discord among those who
are at peace.*
- 10 The more the wood, the greater the fire,*
the more the cruelty, the fiercer the
strife;
The greater the strength, the sterner the
anger,
the greater the wealth, the greater the
wrath.
- 11 Pitch and resin make fire flare up,
and a hasty quarrel provokes
bloodshed.

The Evil Tongue†

- 12 If you blow on a spark, it turns into
flame,
if you spit on it, it dies out;
yet both you do with your mouth!
- 13 Cursed be gossips and the double-
tongued,
for they destroy the peace of many.*
- 14 A meddlesome tongue subverts many,
and makes them refugees among
peoples.
It destroys strong cities,

tongues (vv. 22–23). Therefore, guard your mouth and tongue as
you would guard treasure against an enemy (vv. 24–26).

27:26 This expresses a popular idea of act and consequence;
an evil (or good) deed is repaid by an evil (or good) result. The
frequent metaphor is the digging of a hole for another to fall into;
cf. Prv 26:27; Ps 7:14; 9:16; Eccl 10:8.

28:12–26 Further treatment of sins of the tongue and the
havoc that results; cf. 5:9–6:1; 19:5–17; 20:18–26; 23:7–15.
Gossips and the double-tongued destroy domestic peace (vv.
12–16). The whip, the sword, chains, even Sheol, are not so
cruel as the suffering inflicted by an evil tongue (vv. 17–21). Not
the godly but those who forsake the Lord are victims of their evil

* 27:23 Prv 26:24–28.

27:24 Prv 6:16–19.

27:25–27 Ps 7:16–17; Prv

26:27; Eccl 10:8.

28:1 Dt 32:35; Rom 12:19.

28:2 Mt 6:14.

28:3 Mt 18:23–35.

28:6 Sir 7:36; 38:20.

28:9 Prv 15:18.

28:10–11 Prv 26:20–21.

28:13 Sir 5:13–6:1.

- 22 When one is wise to his own advantage,
the fruits of knowledge are seen in his
own person.
- 23 When one is wise to the advantage of
people,
the fruits of knowledge are lasting.*
- 24 One wise for himself has full enjoyment,
and all who see him praise him.
- 25 The days of one's life are numbered,
but the life of Israel, days without
number.
- 26 One wise among the people wins a
heritage of glory,
and his name lives on and on.*
- 27 My son, while you are well, govern your
appetite,†
and see that you do not allow it what
is bad for you.
- 28 For not everything is good for everyone,
nor is everything suited to every
taste.*
- 29 Do not go to excess with any
enjoyment,*
neither become a glutton for choice
foods;
- 30 For sickness comes with overeating,
and gluttony brings on nausea.
- 31 Through lack of self-control many have
died,
but the abstemious one prolongs life.

Sickness and Death

- 38** 1 Make friends with the doctor, for he
is essential to you;†
God has also established him in his
profession.
- 2 From God the doctor has wisdom,
and from the king he receives
sustenance.
- 3 Knowledge makes the doctor
distinguished,
and gives access to those in authority.
- 4 God makes the earth yield healing herbs
which the prudent should not neglect;

- 5 Was not the water sweetened by a twig
so that all might learn his power?*
- 6 He endows people with knowledge,
to glory in his mighty works,
7 Through which the doctor eases pain,
8 and the druggist prepares his
medicines.
Thus God's work continues without
cease
in its efficacy on the surface of the
earth.
- 9 My son, when you are ill, do not delay,
but pray to God, for it is he who
heals.*
- 10 Flee wickedness and purify your hands;
cleanse your heart of every sin.
- 11 Offer your sweet-smelling oblation and
memorial,
a generous offering according to your
means.*
- 12 Then give the doctor his place
lest he leave; you need him too,
- 13 For there are times when recovery is in
his hands.
- 14 He too prays to God
That his diagnosis may be correct
and his treatment bring about a cure.
- 15 Whoever is a sinner before his Maker
will be defiant toward the doctor.
- 16 My son, shed tears for one who is dead,
with wailing and bitter lament;
As is only proper, prepare the body,
and do not absent yourself from the
burial.
- 17 Weeping bitterly, mourning fully,
pay your tribute of sorrow, as
deserved:
A day or two, to prevent gossip;
then compose yourself after your grief.
- 18 For grief can bring on death,
and heartache can sap one's strength.
- 19 When a person is carried away, sorrow is
over;

† 37:27–31 Temperance and self-control should govern appetite for food, which is intended not to destroy but to preserve life.
38:1–15 The profession of medicine comes from God, who makes the earth yield healing herbs and gives the physician knowledge of their power (vv. 1–8). In illness the sick should cleanse their soul from sin and petition God for help through an offering of sacrifice; the physician, too, does well to invoke God that he may understand the illness and apply the proper remedy (vv. 9–14). The sinner, in contrast, defies both his Maker and the doctor (v. 15).

38:16–23 A period of mourning for the deceased and care for their burial are proper (vv. 16–17). But grief should not be excessive, for it cannot help the dead, who will not return, and may do harm to the living. The mourner should be realistic (vv. 18–23).

37:23 Sir 39:10–11.

37:26 Sir 39:9; 44:13–16.

37:28 1 Cor 6:12; 10:23.

37:29–31 Sir 31:13, 16–21.

38:5 Ex 15:25.

38:9 Is 38:1–3.

38:11 Lv 2:1–3.

38:18 Prv 12:25; 15:13;

17:22.

and the life of the poor one is
grievous to the heart.

20 Do not turn your thoughts to him again;
cease to recall him; think rather of the
end.*

21 Do not recall him, for there is no hope
of his return;
you do him no good, and you harm
yourself.*

22 Remember that his fate will also be
yours;
for him it was yesterday, for you
today.*

23 With the dead at rest, let memory cease;
be consoled, once the spirit has gone.

Vocations of the Skilled Worker and the Scribe†

24 The scribe's wisdom increases wisdom;
whoever is free from toil can become
wise.

25 How can one become learned who
guides the plow,
and thrills in wielding the goad like a
lance,

Who guides the ox and urges on the
bullock,
and whose every concern is for cattle?

26 His concern is to plow furrows,
and he is careful to fatten the
livestock.

27 So with every engraver and designer
who, laboring night and day,
Fashions carved seals,
and whose concern is to vary the
pattern.

His determination is to produce a
lifelike impression,
and he is careful to finish the work.

28 So too the smith sitting by the anvil,
intent on the iron he forges.
The flame from the fire sears his flesh,
yet he toils away in the furnace heat.
The clang of the hammer deafens his
ears;

his eyes are on the object he is
shaping.

His determination is to finish the work,
and he is careful to perfect it in
detail.

29 So also the potter sitting at his labor,
revolving the wheel with his feet.
He is always concerned for his products,
and turns them out in quantity.

30 With his hands he molds the clay,
and with his feet softens it.
His determination is to complete the
glazing,
and he is careful to fire the kiln.

31 All these are skilled with their hands,
each one an expert at his own work;

32 Without them no city could be lived in,
and wherever they stay, they do not go
hungry.

33 But they are not sought out for the
council of the people,
nor are they prominent in the
assembly.

They do not sit on the judge's bench,
nor can they understand law and
justice.

They cannot expound discipline or
judgment,
nor are they found among the rulers.

34 Yet they maintain the fabric of the
world,
and their concern is for exercise of
their skill.

39 How different the person who
devotes himself
to the study of the law of the Most
High!

1 He explores the wisdom of all the
ancients
and is occupied with the prophecies;
2 He preserves the discourses of the
famous,
and goes to the heart of involved
sayings;

†38:24–39:11 Ben Sira has a balanced view of the various vocations of skilled laborers—the farmer, engraver, smith and potter—but the profession of scribe is more excellent (38:24–34). He studies and meditates on the law of the Most High, seeks him in prayer of thanksgiving, petition and repentance for sin (39:1, 5, 7), explores the wisdom of the past and present, travels abroad to observe the conduct of many peoples, and attends rulers and

great men. Through the spirit of understanding granted by God, he will show forth his wisdom to the glory of God's law, gaining renown for generations to come (39:2–4, 6–11).

- 3 He seeks out the hidden meaning of proverbs,
and is busied with the enigmas found in parables.
- 4 He is in attendance on the great,
and appears before rulers.
He travels among the peoples of foreign lands
to test what is good and evil among people.
- 5 His care is to rise early
to seek the Lord his Maker,
to petition the Most High,
To open his mouth in prayer,
to ask pardon for his sins.
- 6 If it pleases the Lord Almighty,
he will be filled with the spirit of understanding;
He will pour forth his words of wisdom
and in prayer give praise to the Lord.
- 7 He will direct his knowledge and his counsel,
as he meditates upon God's mysteries.
- 8 He will show the wisdom of what he has learned
and glory in the Law of the Lord's covenant.
- 9 Many will praise his understanding;
his name can never be blotted out;
Unfading will be his memory,
through all generations his name will live;*
- 10 Peoples will speak of his wisdom,
and the assembly will declare his praise.
- 11 While he lives he is one out of a thousand,
and when he dies he leaves a good name.

Praise of God the Creator†

- 12 Once more I will set forth my theme
to shine like the moon in its fullness!

- 13 Listen to me, my faithful children: open
up your petals,
like roses planted near running
waters;
- 14 Send up the sweet odor of incense,
break forth in blossoms like the lily.
Raise your voices in a chorus of praise:
bless the Lord for all his works!
- 15 Proclaim the greatness of his name,
loudly sing his praises,
With music on the harp and all stringed
instruments;
sing out with joy as you proclaim:
- 16 The works of God are all of them good;
he supplies for every need in its own
time.*
- 17 At his word the waters become still as in
a flask;
he had but to speak and the reservoirs
were made.*
- 18 He has but to command and his will is
done;
nothing can limit his saving action.
- 19 The works of all humankind are presented
to him;
nothing is hidden from his eyes.*
- 20 His gaze spans all the ages:
is there any limit to his saving action?
To him, nothing is small or
insignificant,
and nothing too wonderful or hard
for him.
- 21 No cause then to say: "What is the
purpose of this?"
Everything is chosen to satisfy a need.
- 22 His blessing overflows like the Nile;
like the Euphrates it enriches the
surface of the earth.
- 23 Even so, his wrath dispossesses the
nations
and turns fertile land into a salt
marsh.*
- 24 For the virtuous his paths are level,
to the haughty they are clogged with
stones.

† 39:12–35 Ben Sira invites his disciples to join him in joyfully proclaiming his favorite theme: The works of God are all good; God supplies for every need in its own time (vv. 12–16, 32–35). The sage describes God's omniscience, supreme power and wisdom, whereby all created things, good in themselves, are ever present to him, obey him, and fulfill their intended purpose (vv. 17–21), bringing blessing to the virtuous, but evil and pun-

ishment to the wicked who misuse them (vv. 22–31). Cf. similar hymns of praise, 36:1–22; 42:15–43:33.

39:9 Sir 37:26; 44:14.

39:19 Sir 15:18–19;

39:16 Sir 39:33; Gn

42:18–20.

1:29–31; Eccl 3:11.

39:23 Gn 13:10; 19:24–28

39:17 Gn 1:6–10; Ex 14:21–

Dt 29:22; Jos 1:2–6;

22; Jos 3:15–16.

Ps 107:34; Wis 10:7

25 Good things for the good he provided
 from the beginning,
 but for the wicked good things and
 bad.

26 Chief of all needs for human life
 are water and fire, iron and salt,
 The heart of the wheat, milk and honey,
 the blood of the grape, and oil, and
 clothing.*

27 For the good all these are good,
 but for the wicked they turn out evil.

28 There are stormwinds created to
 punish;
 in their fury they can dislodge
 mountains.

In a time of destruction they hurl their
 force
 and calm the anger of their Maker.

29 Fire and hail, famine and disease:
 these too were created for
 punishment.

30 Ravenous beasts, scorpions, vipers,
 and the avenging sword to
 exterminate the wicked:
 All these were created to meet a need,
 and are kept in his storehouse for the
 proper time.

31 When he commands them, they rejoice,
 in their assigned tasks they do not
 disobey his command:

32 That is why from the first I took my
 stand,
 and wrote down as my theme:

33 The works of God are all of them good;
 he supplies for every need in its own
 time.*

34 There is no cause then to say: "This is
 not as good as that";
 for each shows its worth at the proper
 time.

35 So now with full heart and voice
 proclaim
 and bless his name!

40:1-17 The former idyllic description of the universe is contrasted with the picture of the evils afflicting humanity. Every person, high or low, is burdened from birth to death with tears, anxieties, and troubles, by day and often by night, the time appointed for rest (vv. 1-7). For sinners, the suffering is much greater (vv. 8-10). What they gained by violence and injustice is quickly destroyed; but righteousness will prevail (vv. 14-17).

40:1. *Mother of all the living*: the earth from which human beings were taken. Cf. Gn 2:7; 3:19-20; Jb 1:21; Ps 139:15.

Joys and Miseries of Life

40 ¹A great anxiety has God allotted,†
 and a heavy yoke, to the children of
 Adam,*

From the day they leave their mother's
 womb
 until the day they return to the
 mother of all the living.†

2 Troubled thoughts and fear of heart are
 theirs
 and anxious foreboding until death.

3 Whether one sits on a lofty throne
 or grovels in dust and ashes,

4 Whether one wears a splendid crown
 or is clothed in the coarsest of
 garments—

5 There is wrath and envy, trouble and
 dread,
 terror of death, fury and strife.
 Even when one lies on his bed to rest,
 his cares disturb his sleep at night.

6 So short is his rest it seems like none,
 till in his dreams he struggles as he
 did by day,
 Troubled by the visions of his mind,
 like a fugitive fleeing from the
 pursuer.

7 As he reaches safety, he wakes up,
 astonished that there was nothing to
 fear.

8 To all flesh, human being and beast,
 but for sinners seven times more,

9 Come plague and bloodshed, fiery heat
 and drought,
 plunder and ruin, famine and death.*

10 For the wicked evil was created,
 and because of them destruction
 hastens.

11 All that is of earth returns to earth,
 and what is from above returns
 above.†

12 All that comes from bribes or injustice
 will be wiped out,

40:11 *All that is of earth...returns above*: a reference to bodily mortality and to the divine origin of life. Cf. 41:10; Gn 2:7; 3:19; Jb 34:14-15; Ps 104:29-30; 146:4; Eccl 12:7. The Greek and the Latin render the second half of the verse: "all waters shall return to the sea."

39:26 Sir 29:21.

39:33 Sir 39:16; Gn

1:29-31; Eccl 3:11.

40:1 Gn 3:17-19; Jb 7:1;

14:1-2; Eccl 2:23.

40:9 Sir 39:28-31.

but loyalty remains forever.
 13 Wealth from injustice is like a flooding wadi,
 like a mighty stream with lightning and thunder,
 14 Which, in its rising, rolls along the stones,
 but suddenly, once and for all, comes to an end.*
 15 The offshoot of violence will not flourish,
 for the root of the godless is on sheer rock.
 16 They are like reeds on riverbanks,
 withered before all other plants;
 17 But goodness, like eternity, will never be cut off,
 and righteousness endures forever.
 18 Wealth or wages can make life sweet,†
 but better than either, finding a treasure.
 19 A child or a city will preserve one's name,
 but better than either, finding wisdom.
 Cattle and orchards make a person flourish;
 but better than either, a devoted wife.*
 20 Wine and strong drink delight the soul,
 but better than either, love of friends.*
 21 Flute and harp offer sweet melody,
 but better than either, a pure tongue.
 22 Grace and beauty delight the eye,
 but better than either, the produce of the field.
 23 A friend and a neighbor are timely guides,
 but better than either, a sensible wife.
 24 Relatives and helpers for times of stress;
 but better than either, charity that rescues.
 25 Gold and silver make one's way secure,
 but better than either, sound judgment.

26 Wealth and vigor make the heart exult,
 but better than either, fear of God.
 In the fear of the Lord there is no want;
 whoever has it need seek no other support.
 27 The fear of God is a paradise of blessings;
 its canopy is over all that is glorious.
 28 My son, do not live the life of a beggar;
 better to die than to beg.
 29 When one has to look to a stranger's table,
 life is not worth living.
 The delicacies offered bring revulsion of spirit,
 and to the intelligent, inward torture.
 30 In the mouth of the shameless begging is sweet,
 but within him it burns like fire.
41 ¹O death! How bitter is the thought of you†
 for the one at peace in his home,
 For the one who is serene and always successful,
 who can still enjoy life's pleasures.
 2 O death! How welcome is your sentence to the weak, failing in strength,
 Stumbling and tripping on everything, with sight gone and hope lost.*
 3 Do not fear death's decree for you;
 remember, it embraces those before you and those to come.*
 4 This decree for all flesh is from God;
 why then should you reject a law of the Most High?
 Whether one has lived a thousand years, a hundred, or ten,
 in Sheol there are no arguments about life.
 5 The children of sinners are a reprobate line,*
 and witless offspring are in the homes of the wicked.

† **40:18–27** Of the many treasures making life sweet, such as children, friends, music, vigor, the best are called true married love, wisdom, and above all, fear of God; cf. 25:6–11.

40:28–30 Among the Jews, begging was considered degrading to human dignity; it was agreeable only to the shameless, who had lost their sense of honor. Cf. 29:22–23.

41:1–13 Whether death seems bitter to one who enjoys peace, success, and pleasure, or welcome to one who is weak and in despair, it comes to all and must be accepted as the will

of God (vv. 1–4). The human body passes away (v. 11). Sinners as well as their offspring pass away as if they had never been (vv. 5–10). Only the good name of the virtuous endures (vv. 11–13).

40:14 Sir 23:25–26; Wis 4:3–6.

40:19 Prv 18:22; 19:14.

40:20 Ps 104:15.

40:27 Is 4:5–6.

40:29 Sir 29:24.

41:2 Sir 30:17.

41:3 Sir 38:20–22.

41:5–10 Sir 3:9–11; Wis 3:16–19.

6 The inheritance of children of sinners
will perish,
and on their offspring will be
perpetual disgrace.

7 Children curse their wicked father,
for they suffer disgrace because of
him.

8 Woe to you, O wicked people,
who forsake the Law of the Most
High.

9 If you have children, calamity will be
theirs;
and if you beget them, it will be only
for groaning.

When you stumble, there is lasting joy;
and when you die, you become a
curse.

10 All that is nought returns to nought,
so too the godless—from void to
void.*

11 The human body is a fleeting thing,
but a virtuous name will never be
annihilated.*

12 Have respect for your name, for it will
stand by you
more than thousands of precious
treasures.*

13 The good things of life last a number of
days,
but a good name, for days without
number.

True and False Shame†

14b Hidden wisdom and concealed treasure,
of what value is either?

15 Better is the person who hides his folly
than the one who hides his wisdom.

14a My children, listen to instruction about
shame;

16a judge of disgrace according to my
rules,

16b Not every kind of shame is shameful,
nor is every kind of disgrace to be
recognized.

17 Before father and mother be ashamed of
immorality,

before prince and ruler, of falsehood;

18 Before master and mistress, of deceit;

before the public assembly, of crime;
Before associate and friend, of disloyalty,
19 and in the place where you settle, of
theft.

Be ashamed of breaking an oath or a
covenant,
and of stretching your elbow at
dinner;

Of refusing to give when asked,
of rebuffing your own relatives;

21 Of defrauding another of his appointed
share,

20a of failing to return a greeting;

21c Of gazing at a man's wife,

20b of entertaining thoughts about
another woman;*

22 Of trifling with a servant girl you have,
of violating her bed;

Of using harsh words with friends,
of following up your gifts with
insults;*

42 ¹Of repeating what you hear,
of betraying any secret.*

Be ashamed of the right things,
and you will find favor in the sight of
all.

But of these things do not be ashamed,
lest you sin to save face:*

2 Of the Law of the Most High and his
precepts,

3 or of justice that acquits the ungodly;
Of sharing the expenses of a business or
a journey,

4 of dividing an inheritance or property;

4 Of accuracy of scales and balances,
of tested measures and weights;*

5 Of acquiring much or little,
of bargaining in dealing with a
merchant;

Of constant training of children,
of beating the sides of a wicked
servant;*

6 Of a seal to keep a foolish wife at home,
of a key where there are many hands;

7 Of numbering every deposit,
of recording all that is taken in and
given out;

† 41:14-42:8 Ben Sira illustrates the subject of true and false shame with numerous and detailed examples of wrongdoing (41:14-22) and virtue (42:1-8), following the norm of the commandments.

* 41:10 Sir 40:11; Wis 4:19.

41:11 Prv 10:7.

41:12 Prv 22:1; Eccl 7:1.

41:20 Sir 9:8; Mt 5:28.

41:22 Sir 18:15; 20:14.

42:1 Sir 27:16.

42:1 Prv 24:23; Jas 2:1.

42:4 Lv 19:35; Prv 11:1;

16:11; 20:10.

42:5 Sir 30:1-13;

33:25-33.

8 Of chastisement for the silly and the foolish,
for the aged and infirm answering for wanton conduct.
Thus you will be truly refined
and recognized by all as discreet.

A Father's Care for His Daughter†

9 A daughter is a treasure that keeps her father wakeful,
and worry over her drives away sleep.*
Lest in her youth she remain unmarried,
or when she is married, lest she be childless;
10 While unmarried, lest she be defiled,
or in her husband's house, lest she prove unfaithful;
Lest she become pregnant in her father's house,
or be sterile in that of her husband.
11 My son, keep a close watch on your daughter,
lest she make you a laughingstock for your enemies,
A byword in the city and the assembly of the people,
an object of derision in public gatherings.*
See that there is no lattice in her room,
or spot that overlooks the approaches to the house.

12 Do not let her reveal her beauty to any male,*
or spend her time with married women;
13 For just as moths come from garments,
so a woman's wickedness comes from a woman.
14 Better a man's harshness than a woman's indulgence,
a frightened daughter than any disgrace.

The Works of God in Nature†

15 Now will I recall God's works;
what I have seen, I will describe.

By the LORD's word his works were brought into being;
he accepts the one who does his will.*
16 As the shining sun is clear to all,
so the glory of the LORD fills all his works;
17 Yet even God's holy ones must fail in recounting the wonders of the LORD,
Though God has given his hosts the strength
to stand firm before his glory.
18 He searches out the abyss and penetrates the heart;
their secrets he understands.
For the Most High possesses all knowledge,
and sees from of old the things that are to come.
19 He makes known the past and the future,
and reveals the deepest secrets.
20 He lacks no understanding;
no single thing escapes him.*
21 He regulates the mighty deeds of his wisdom;
he is from all eternity one and the same,
With nothing added, nothing taken away;
no need of a counselor for him! *
22 How beautiful are all his works,
delightful to gaze upon and a joy to behold!
23 Everything lives and abides forever;
and to meet each need all things are preserved.
24 All of them differ, one from another,
yet none of them has he made in vain;
25 For each in turn, as it comes, is good;
can one ever see enough of their splendor?*

† 42:9–14 Ben Sira considers a daughter to be a source of anxiety to her father, lest she fail to marry, or be defiled, or lest, marrying, she be childless, prove unfaithful, or find herself sterile (vv. 9–10). He is advised to keep a close watch on her and on her companions, lest he suffer on her account among the people (vv. 11–12). The exhortations, which take into account only a father's concern, are quite unflattering to young women. The concluding statements (vv. 13–14) show the limitations of Ben Sira's perspective in the male-oriented society of his day.

42:15–43:33 These verses comprise another hymn; cf. 16:24–18:14. In them Ben Sira contemplates God's power, beauty,

and goodness as manifested in the mighty work of creating and preserving the universe (42:15–17, 22–25; 43:1–26), his omniscience (42:18–20), perfect wisdom and eternity (42:21). The conclusion is a fervent hymn of praise (43:27–31).

* 42:9 Sir 7:24–25.

42:11 Dt 22:20–21.

42:12–13 Sir 9:1–9.

42:15 Ps 77:12–13.

42:20 Sir 39:19; Wis 1:6–9.

42:21 Wis 9:13; Is 40:13.

Rom 11:34; 1 Cor

2:11.

42:25 Sir 33:15.

- 43¹ The beauty of the celestial height
and the pure firmament,*
heaven itself manifests its glory.
- 2 The sun at its rising shines at its fullest,
a wonderful instrument, the work of
the Most High!
- 3 At noon it scorches the earth,
and who can bear its fiery heat?
- 4 Like a blazing furnace of solid metal,
the sun's rays set the mountains
aflake;
its fiery tongue consumes the world;
the eyes are burned by its fire.
- 5 Great indeed is the LORD who made it,
at whose orders it urges on its steeds.
- 6 It is the moon that marks the changing
seasons,
governing the times, their lasting
sign.*
- 7 By it we know the sacred seasons and
pilgrimage feasts,
a light which wanes in its course:
- 8 The new moon like its name† renews
itself;
how wondrous it is when it changes:
A military signal for the waterskins on
high,
it paves the firmament with its
brilliance,
- 9 The beauty of the heavens and the glory
of the stars,
a shining ornament in the heights of
God.*
- 10 By the LORD's command the moon keeps
its appointed place,
and does not fade as the stars keep
watch.
- 11 Behold the rainbow! Then bless its
Maker,
for majestic indeed is its splendor;*
- 12 It spans the heavens with its glory,
the hand of God has stretched it out
in power.
- 13 His rebuke marks out the path for the
hail,
and makes the flashes of his judgment
shine forth.
- 14 For his own purposes he opens the
storehouse
and makes the rain clouds fly like
vultures.
- 15 His might gives the clouds their
strength,
and breaks off the hailstones.
- 16 The thunder of his voice makes the earth
writhe;
by his power he shakes the mountains.
- 17 A word from him drives on the south
wind,
whirlwind, hurricane, and stormwind.
He makes the snow fly like birds;
it settles down like swarms of locusts.
- 18 Its shining whiteness blinds the eyes,
the mind marvels at its steady fall.
- 19 He scatters frost like salt;
it shines like blossoms on the
thornbush.
- 20 He sends cold northern blasts
that harden the ponds like solid
ground;
Spreads a crust over every body of water,
and clothes each pool with a coat of
armor.
- 21 When mountain growth is scorched by
heat,
and flowering plains as by fire,
22 The dripping clouds restore them all,
and the scattered dew enriches the
parched land.
- 23 His is the plan that calms the deep,
and plants the islands in the sea.
- 24 Those who go down to the sea recount
its extent,
and when we hear them we are
thunderstruck;*
- 25 In it are his creatures, stupendous,
amazing,
all kinds of life, and the monsters of
the deep.
- 26 For him each messenger succeeds,
and at his bidding accomplishes his
will.*
- 27 More than this we need not add;
let the last word be, he is the all!†

43:8 *Like its name*: there is a play in the Hebrew text on the words for moon and renewal. *Waterskins*: clouds as source of rain.

43:27 *The all*: the perfections reflected in creation are found in a transcendent way in God, who alone is their source.

43:1–12 Ps 19:2–5.

43:6 Lv 23:5; Nm
28:11–14; Ps 81:4–6.

43:9 Ps 8:4.

43:11 Gn 9:13.

43:24–25 Ps 104:25–26.

43:26 Ps 33:6.

WISDOM

I. THE REWARD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS†

Exhortation to Righteousness, the Key to Life

- 1** ¹ Love righteousness, † you who judge the earth;*
 think of the LORD in goodness,
 and seek him in integrity of heart;*
- ² Because he is found by those who do not test him,
 and manifests himself to those who do not disbelieve him.*
- ³ For perverse counsels separate people from God,
 and his power, put to the proof,
 rebukes the foolhardy;*
- ⁴ † Because into a soul that plots evil wisdom does not enter,
 nor does she dwell in a body under debt of sin.*
- ⁵ For the holy spirit of discipline † flees deceit
 and withdraws from senseless counsels
 and is rebuked when unrighteousness occurs.*
- ⁶ For wisdom is a kindly spirit,
 yet she does not acquit blasphemous lips;
 Because God is the witness of the inmost self*
 and the sure observer of the heart
 and the listener to the tongue.*
- ⁷ For the spirit of the LORD fills the world,*

† **1:1-6:21** The reward is the gift of immortality, to the righteous (1:15; 3:1-3), but not to the wicked (5:1-13). Contrasts between these two groups dominate chaps. 1-5. The philosophy of the wicked and their persecution of the righteous are dramatically presented in 1:16-2:24. New light is shed on the suffering of the righteous (3:1-9), childlessness (3:13-15), and premature death (4:7-16)—in contrast to the fate of the wicked (3:10-12, 16-19; 4:3-6, 17-20).

1:1 *Righteousness*: not merely the cardinal virtue of justice (cf. 8:7), but the universal moral quality which is the application of wisdom to moral conduct. *You who judge*: “judges” and “kings” (cf. 6:1) are addressed in accordance with the literary customs of the times and with the putative Solomonic authorship, but the real audience is the Jewish community.

1:4 In these verses personified Wisdom is identified with the spirit of the Lord; so also in 9:17.

1:5 *Discipline*: here and elsewhere, another name for Wisdom.

- is all-embracing, and knows whatever is said.
- ⁸ Therefore those who utter wicked things will not go unnoticed,
 nor will chastising condemnation pass them by.*
- ⁹ For the devices of the wicked shall be scrutinized,
 and the sound of their words shall reach the LORD,
 for the chastisement of their transgressions;
- ¹⁰ Because a jealous ear hearkens to everything,*
 and discordant grumblings are not secret.
- ¹¹ Therefore guard against profitless grumbling,
 and from calumny † withhold your tongues;
 For a stealthy utterance will not go unpunished,
 and a lying mouth destroys the soul.
- ¹² Do not court death † by your erring way of life,
 nor draw to yourselves destruction by the works of your hands.
- ¹³ Because God did not make death,*
 nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.
- ¹⁴ For he fashioned all things that they might have being,
 and the creatures of the world are wholesome;
 There is not a destructive drug among them
 nor any domain of Hades † on earth,
- ¹⁵ For righteousness is undying. † *

1:11 *Calumny*: speech against God and divine providence is meant.

1:12 *Death*: as will become clear, the author is not speaking of physical death but of spiritual death, the eternal separation from God.

1:14 *Hades*: the Greek term for the Hebrew Sheol, the dwelling place of the dead.

1:15 *Undying*: immortality is not seen as an innate quality of the soul but as a gift of God to the righteous.

1:11 Chr 29:17; Ps 2:10;

Is 26:9.

1:1-2 Sir 1:25.

1:21 Chr 28:9.

1:3 Is 59:2.

1:4 Sir 15:7-8; Rom 7:14.

1:5 Is 63:10.

1:6 Jer 17:10.

1:6-7 Jer 23:24-25.

1:7 Wis 12:1.

1:8 Prv 19:5.

1:10-11 Nm 14:27-28.

1:13-14 Ez 18:32; 33:11; 2 Pt

3:9.

1:15 Is 51:6-8.

The Wicked Reject Immortality and Righteousness Alike

16 It was the wicked who with hands and words invited death, considered it a friend, and pined for it, and made a covenant with it, because they deserve to be allied with it.*

2 For, not thinking rightly, they said among themselves:†
 "Brief and troubled is our lifetime;* there is no remedy for our dying, nor is anyone known to have come back from Hades.

2 For by mere chance were we born, and hereafter we shall be as though we had not been;

Because the breath in our nostrils is smoke, and reason a spark from the beating of our hearts,

3 And when this is quenched, our body will be ashes and our spirit will be poured abroad like empty air.*

4 Even our name will be forgotten in time, and no one will recall our deeds. So our life will pass away like the traces of a cloud,

and will be dispersed like a mist Pursued by the sun's rays and overpowered by its heat.

5 For our lifetime is the passing of a shadow; and our dying cannot be deferred because it is fixed with a seal; and no one returns.*

6 Come, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are here, and make use of creation with youthful zest.*

7 Let us have our fill of costly wine and perfumes,

and let no springtime blossom pass us by;

8 let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither.

9 Let no meadow be free from our wantonness; everywhere let us leave tokens of our merriment, for this is our portion, and this our lot.*

10 Let us oppress the righteous poor; let us neither spare the widow nor revere the aged for hair grown white with time.*

11 But let our strength be our norm of righteousness; for weakness proves itself useless.

12† Let us lie in wait for the righteous one, because he is annoying to us; he opposes our actions, reproaches us for transgressions of the law† and charges us with violations of our training.*

13 He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself a child of the LORD.*

14 To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us,* because his life is not like that of others, and different are his ways.

16 He judges us debased; he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure.

He calls blest the destiny of the righteous and boasts that God is his Father.*

17 Let us see whether his words be true; let us find out what will happen to him in the end.*

18 For if the righteous one is the son of God, God will help him and deliver him from the hand of his foes.*

2:1-20 In this speech the wicked deny survival after death and indeed invite death by their evil deeds.
 2:12-5:23 From 2:12 to 5:23 the author draws heavily on Is 52-62, setting forth his teaching in a series of characters or types taken from Isaiah and embellished with additional details from other texts. The description of the "righteous one" in 2:12-20 seems to undergird the New Testament passion narrative.
 2:12 Law: the law of Moses; "training" has the same meaning.

* 1:16 Is 28:15.
 2:1 Jb 14:1; 7:9.
 2:3 Jb 7:9; Jas 4:14.
 2:5 Ps 144:4.
 2:6 Is 22:13; 1 Cor 15:32.
 2:9 Jer 13:25.
 2:10 Ex 22:21-23; Lv 19:32.
 2:12 Hos 8:1.
 2:13 Mt 27:43; Jn 8:55; 10:36-39.
 2:14 Mt 9:4.
 2:16 Jer 6:30.
 2:17 Gn 37:20.
 2:18 Ps 22:9; Is 42:1; Mt 27:43; Jn 5:18.

- 19 With violence and torture let us put him
to the test
that we may have proof of his
gentleness
and try his patience.
- 20 Let us condemn him to a shameful
death;
for according to his own words, God
will take care of him.*
- 21 These were their thoughts, but they
erred;
for their wickedness blinded them,*
- 22† And they did not know the hidden
counsels of God;
neither did they count on a
recompense for holiness
nor discern the innocent souls'
reward.*
- 23 For God formed us to be imperishable;
the image of his own nature he made
us.*
- 24 But by the envy† of the devil, death
entered the world,
and they who are allied with him
experience it.*

The Hidden Counsels of God†

A. ON SUFFERING†

- 3** 1 The souls of the righteous are in the
hand of God,*
and no torment shall touch them.
- 2 They seemed, in the view of the foolish,
to be dead;
and their passing away was thought
an affliction
- 3 and their going forth from us, utter
destruction.

- But they are in peace.*
- 4 For if to others, indeed, they seem
punished,
yet is their hope full of immortality;
Chastised a little, they shall be greatly
blessed,
because God tried them
and found them worthy of himself.*
- 5 As gold in the furnace, he proved
them,
and as sacrificial offerings† he took
them to himself.*
- 6 In the time of their judgment† they shall
shine
and dart about as sparks through
stubble,*
- 7 They shall judge nations and rule over
peoples,
and the LORD shall be their King
forever.*
- 8 Those who trust in him shall understand
truth,
and the faithful shall abide with him
in love:
Because grace and mercy are with his
holy ones,*
and his care is with the elect.
- 9 But the wicked shall receive a
punishment to match their
thoughts,†
since they neglected righteousness and
forsook the LORD.
- 10 For those who despise wisdom and
instruction are doomed.*
Vain is their hope, fruitless their labors,
and worthless their works.*
- 11 Their wives are foolish and their
children wicked,
accursed their brood.*

† 2:22 This verse announces the subject of the next section.
2:24 *Envy*: perhaps because Adam was in the image of God or because Adam had control over all creation. *Devil*: the first biblical text to equate the serpent of Gn 3 with the devil.

3:1-4:19 The central section of chaps. 1-6. The author begins by stating that immortality is the reward of the righteous, and then in the light of that belief comments on three points of the traditional discussion of the problem of retribution (suffering, childlessness, early death) each of which was often seen as a divine punishment.

3:1-12 The author affirms that, for the righteous, sufferings are not punishments but purification and opportunities to show fidelity, whereas for the wicked suffering is truly a punishment.

3:6 *Offerings*: the image is that of the burnt offering, in which the victim is completely consumed by fire.

3:7 *Judgment*: the Greek *episkopē* is God's loving judgment of those who have been faithful to him; the same word is used

in 14:11 for the punishment of the wicked at God's judgment. Cf. also v. 13.

3:10 *To match their thoughts*: a fate as empty as that which they describe in 2:1-5.

2:20 Jas 5:6.

2:21 Rom 1:21.

2:22 Ps 18:24-25; Prv 11:18; Mt 11:25.

2:23 Gn 1:26-27; Is 54:16 LXX.

2:24 Gn 3:1-24; Rom 5:12.

3:1 Jb 12:10.

3:3 Is 57:2.

3:5 Tb 12:13; 2 Cor 4:17; 1 Pt 1:6-7.

3:6 Ps 51:19; Prv 17:3; Sir 2:5; Is 48:10.

3:7 Dn 12:3; Ob 18; Mal 3:3; Mt 13:43.

3:8 Wis 8:14; Prv 8:16; Dn 7:22; 1 Cor 6:2; Rev 20:4.

3:9 Wis 4:15; Jb 10:12; Jn 15:10.

3:11 Prv 1:7.

3:11-12 Sir 41:8.

3:12 Dt 28:18.

B. ON CHILDLESSNESS†

13 Yes, blessed is she who, childless and undefiled,
 never knew transgression of the marriage bed;
 for she shall bear fruit at the judgment of souls.†

14 So also the eunuch whose hand wrought no misdeed,
 who held no wicked thoughts against the LORD—
 For he shall be given fidelity's choice reward†
 and a more gratifying heritage in the LORD's temple.*

15 For the fruit of noble struggles is a glorious one;
 and unailing is the root of understanding.†*

16 But the children of adulterers† will remain without issue,
 and the progeny of an unlawful bed will disappear.*

17 For should they attain long life, they will be held in no esteem,
 and dishonored will their old age be in the end;

18 Should they die abruptly, they will have no hope
 nor comfort in the day of scrutiny;
 for dire is the end of the wicked generation.*

4¹ Better is childlessness with virtue;
 for immortal is the memory of virtue,
 acknowledged both by God and human beings.*

2 When it is present people imitate it,
 and they long for it when it is gone;
 Forever it marches crowned in triumph,
 victorious in unsullied deeds of valor.

3 But the numerous progeny of the wicked shall be of no avail;
 their spurious offshoots shall not strike deep root
 nor take firm hold.*

4 For even though their branches flourish for a time,
 they are unsteady and shall be rocked by the wind
 and, by the violence of the winds, uprooted;*

5 Their twigs shall be broken off untimely,
 their fruit useless, unripe for eating, fit for nothing.

6 For children born of lawless unions give evidence of the wickedness of their parents, when they are examined.

C. ON EARLY DEATH†

7 But the righteous one, though he die early, shall be at rest.*

8 For the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time,*
 nor can it be measured in terms of years.

9 Rather, understanding passes for gray hair,
 and an unsullied life is the attainment of old age.

10† The one who pleased God was loved,*
 living among sinners, was transported—

11 Snatched away, lest wickedness pervert his mind
 or deceit beguile his soul;*

12 For the witchery of paltry things obscures what is right
 and the whirl of desire transforms the innocent mind.*

13 Having become perfect in a short while,
 he reached the fullness of a long career;

of the wicked, however, will not be honorable.
 4:10-11 There are allusions here to Enoch (Gn 5:21-24), who was young by patriarchal standards, and to Lot (Gn 19:10-11; 2 Pt 2:7-8). Cf. also Is 57:1-2.

3:13-4:6 The true fruit of life is not children but virtue which leads to immortality. The many children of the wicked will be a disappointing fruit.
 3:13 See vv. 7-9.
 3:14 Fidelity's choice reward: cf. Is 56:1-8. More gratifying: better than sons and daughters; cf. Is 56:5.
 3:15 Root of understanding: the root that is understanding (wisdom).
 3:16 Adulterers: understood here as a type of sinners in general; cf. Is 57:3-5.
 4:7-19 Early death is not a punishment for the righteous because genuine old age is the attainment of perfection and early death is a preservation from corruption. The old age and death

3:14 Is 56:2-5.
 3:15 Sir 1:18.
 3:16 2 Sm 12:14.
 3:19 Ps 34:22.
 4:1 Prv 3:3-4; Sir 16:1-3.
 4:3 Sir 23:25.
 4:4 Sir 40:15; Is 40:24.
 4:7 Wis 3:3.
 4:8 Jb 12:12; 32:9; Sir 25:4-6.
 4:10 Gn 5:24; Sir 44:16; Heb 11:5.
 4:11 Is 57:1-2.
 4:12 Wis 2:21; Dn 13:9.

14 for his soul was pleasing to the LORD,
therefore he sped him out of the
midst of wickedness.*
But the people saw and did not
understand,
nor did they take that consideration
into account.†
16 Yes, the righteous one who has died will
condemn
the sinful who live;
And youth, swiftly completed, will
condemn
the many years of the unrighteous
who have grown old.*
17 For they will see the death of the wise
one
and will not understand what the
LORD intended,
or why he kept him safe.
18 They will see, and hold him in
contempt;
but the LORD will laugh them to
scorn.*
19 And they shall afterward become
dishonored corpses*
and an unceasing mockery among the
dead.
For he shall strike them down speechless
and prostrate*
and rock them to their foundations;
They shall be utterly laid waste
and shall be in grief
and their memory shall perish.

The Judgment of the Wicked

20 Fearful shall they come, at the counting
up of their sins,
and their lawless deeds shall convict
them to their face.

5† Then shall the righteous one with great
assurance confront*
his oppressors who set at nought his
labors.*

2 Seeing this, the wicked shall be shaken
with dreadful fear,

and be amazed at the unexpected
salvation.
3 They shall say among themselves, rueful
and groaning through anguish of
spirit:
"This is the one whom once we held as
a laughingstock
and as a type for mockery,
fools that we were!
His life we accounted madness,
and death dishonored.
5 See how he is accounted among the
heavenly beings;†
how his lot is with the holy ones!*"
6 We, then, have strayed from the way of
truth,*
and the light of righteousness did not
shine for us,
and the sun did not rise for us.*
7 We were entangled in the thorns of
mischief and of ruin;
we journeyed through trackless desert
but the way of the LORD we never
knew.
8 What did our pride avail us?
What have wealth and its boastfulness
afforded us?*"
9 All of them passed like a shadow
and like a fleeting rumor;*"
10 Like a ship traversing the heaving water
when it has passed, no trace can be
found,
no path of its keel in the waves.
11 Or like a bird flying through the air,
no evidence of its course is to be
found—
But the fluid air, lashed by the beating
of pinions,
and cleft by the rushing force
Of speeding wings, is traversed;
and afterward no mark of passage can
be found in it.
12 Or as, when an arrow has been shot at
mark,
the parted air straightway flows
together again

† 4:14 Verse 15 is omitted because it repeats the last two lines of 3:9.

5:1–13 In contrast to their speech in chap. 2 the wicked now regret their assessment of life and righteousness.

5:5 Heavenly beings: lit., "sons of God." These are the holy ones, members of the heavenly court, among whom the righteous are to be found. A bodily resurrection does not seem to be envisioned.

4:14 Gn 19:22, 29; 2 Pt 2:7.

4:16 Mt 12:41–42.

4:18 Ps 37:13.

4:19 Neh 1:10 LXX; Ps 18:8; Is 14:19; Jer 23:39–40.

4:19 2 Mc 3:29.

5:1–2 2 Thes 1:6–7.

5:1 Col 2:15.

5:5 Acts 26:18; Col 1:12

5:6 Prv 4:18–19; Jn 12:3

5:6–7 Prv 22:5; Is 59:6–14

5:8 Ps 49:7; Prv 10:2.

5:9–12 1 Chr 20:15; Jb

9:25–26 LXX; Ps 144:4.

so that none discerns the way it
went—
13 Even so, once born, we abruptly came to
nought
and held no sign of virtue to display,
but were consumed in our
wickedness.*

14† Yes, the hope of the wicked is like chaff
borne by the wind,
and like fine, storm-driven snow;
Like smoke scattered by the wind,
and like the passing memory of the
nomad camping for a single day.*
15 But the righteous live forever,
and in the LORD is their recompense,
and the thought of them is with the
Most High.*

16 Therefore shall they receive the splendid
crown,
the beautiful diadem, from the hand
of the LORD,

For he will shelter them with his right
hand,
and protect them with his arm.*

17 He shall take his zeal for armor*
and arm creation to requite the
enemy,

18 Shall put on righteousness for a
breastplate,

wear sure judgment for a helmet,
19 Shall take invincible holiness for a
shield,*

20 and sharpen his sudden anger for a
sword.

The universe will war with him against
the foolhardy;

21 Well-aimed bolts of lightning will go
forth

and from the clouds will leap to the
mark as from a well-drawn bow;*

22 and as from a sling, wrathful

hailstones shall be hurled.

The waters of the sea will be enraged

and flooding rivers will overwhelm
them;*

23 A mighty wind will confront them
and winnow them like a tempest;
Thus lawlessness will lay waste the
whole earth
and evildoing overturn the thrones of
the mighty.*

Exhortation to Seek Wisdom†

6 † Hear, therefore, kings, and understand;*
learn, you magistrates† of the earth's
expanse!

2 Give ear, you who have power over
multitudes

and lord it over throngs of peoples!

3 Because authority was given you by the
Lord

and sovereignty by the Most High,
who shall probe your works and
scrutinize your counsels!*

4 Because, though you were ministers of
his kingdom, you did not judge
rightly,

and did not keep the law,†
nor walk according to the will of God,

5 Terribly and swiftly he shall come
against you,

because severe judgment awaits the
exalted—

6 For the lowly may be pardoned out of
mercy*

but the mighty shall be mightily put
to the test.

7 For the Ruler of all shows no partiality,
nor does he fear greatness,*

Because he himself made the great as
well as the small,

and provides for all alike;

8 but for those in power a rigorous
scrutiny impends.

9 To you, therefore, O princes, are my
words addressed*

5:14–23 A picture of the reward of the righteous which develops into an apocalyptic description of the divine warrior's destruction of evil. The author utilizes Is 59–62.

6:1–21 The first part of the book closes with an exhortation comparable to 1:1–15, and it leads into "Solomon's" personal comments on wisdom in chaps. 7–9.

6:1 Kings . . . magistrates: note the inclusion with v. 21 ("kings"). The address to earthly powers is in accord with the opening (1:1), but the true audience remains the Jewish community.

6:4 Law: that of Moses; cf. 2:12; 6:10.

5:13 Ez 33:10.

5:14 Jb 21:18; Ps 1:4;

37:20; Is 17:13.

5:15 Is 62:11; Ez 18:9.

5:16 Ex 33:22; Is 62:3;

2 Tm 4:8; 1 Pt 5:4.

5:17 Is 59:17.

5:19–20 Dt 32:40–43.

5:21 Hb 3:9–11.

5:22 Dt 11:4.

5:23 Wis 11:20; Sir
10:13–14.

6:1–2 Wis 1:1; Ps 2:10; Sir
33:19; Mi 3:1, 9.

6:3 2 Chr 36:23; Prv

8:15–16; Jn 19:11;

Rom 13:1.

6:6–7 Lk 12:48.

6:7 Dt 1:17; Prv 22:2.

6:9–11 Dt 4:10; Ps 2:12; Sir
32:14; 1 Jn 3:7.

11 For she knows and understands all things,
and will guide me prudently in my affairs
and safeguard me by her glory;*
12 Thus my deeds will be acceptable,
and I will judge your people justly
and be worthy of my father's throne.*
13 For who knows God's counsel,
or who can conceive what the Lord intends? *
14 For the deliberations of mortals are timid,
and uncertain our plans.
15† For the corruptible body burdens the soul
and the earthly tent weighs down the mind with its many concerns.*
16 Scarcely can we guess the things on earth,
and only with difficulty grasp what is at hand;
but things in heaven, who can search them out? *
17 Or who can know your counsel, unless you give Wisdom
and send your holy spirit from on high? *
18† Thus were the paths of those on earth made straight,
and people learned what pleases you,
and were saved by Wisdom.*

Wisdom Preserves Her Followers

10†¹ She preserved the first-formed father† of the world*
when he alone had been created;*
And she raised him up from his fall,
2 and gave him power to rule all things.*
3 But when an unrighteous man† withdrew from her in his anger,

he perished through his fratricidal wrath.*

4 When on his account the earth was flooded, Wisdom again saved it,
piloting the righteous man† on frailest wood.*

5 She, when the nations were sunk in universal wickedness,
knew the righteous man,† kept him blameless before God,
and preserved him resolute against pity for his child.*

6 She rescued a righteous man† from among the wicked who were being destroyed,*
when he fled as fire descended upon the Pentapolis—

7 Where as a testimony to its wickedness, even yet there remain a smoking desert,
Plants bearing fruit that never ripens,
and the tomb of a disbelieving soul,†

a standing pillar of salt.*

8 For those who forsook Wisdom not only were deprived of knowledge of the good,

But also left the world a memorial of their folly,
so that they could not even be hidden in their fall.

9 But Wisdom rescued from tribulations those who served her.*

10 She, when a righteous man† fled from his brother's anger,*

guided him in right ways,
Showed him the kingdom of God and gave him knowledge of holy things;

She prospered him in his labors

† 9:15–17 Although the expressions in v. 15 draw on the language of Plato concerning the human condition, the conclusion is very biblical: God remains a mystery (Jb 38–39; Eccl 8:17; Is 40:12–14; Rom 11:33–34). The plight of humankind is clearly one of ignorance, unless the “holy spirit” is sent from God.

9:18 An announcement of the next section.

10:1–21 This chapter prepares for the following section (Wis 11:2–19:22) on the history of Israel in the exodus, by reviewing the dealings of Wisdom with the patriarchs. It has a parallel in Sir 44–50; cf. also Wis 18:9.

10:1–2 Adam.

10:3 Cain.

10:4 Noah.

10:5 Abraham.

10:6 Lot. Pentapolis: the five cities, including Sodom; cf. Gn 14:2.

10:7 Disbelieving soul: Lot's wife; cf. Gn 19:26.

10:10–12 Jacob.

9:11 Wis 8:8.

9:12 1 Kgs 3:6–9.

9:13 Is 40:13; Bar 3:31.

9:15 Jb 4:19.

9:16 Sir 1:3; Jn 3:12.

9:17 Jn 14:26.

9:18 Wis 10:9; Prv 28:26.

10:1–16 Heb 11:17–27.

10:1 Wis 7:1.

10:2 Gn 1:28.

10:3 Gn 4:1–16.

10:4 Wis 14:5–6; Gn 6:5–9.

10:5 Gn 22:7–10.

10:6 Gn 18:22–33; 19:15–25; 2 Pt 2:6–7.

10:7 Gn 19:26; Lk 17:32.

10:9 Wis 16:8.

10:10 Gn 27:43–45;

28:12–15.

and made abundant the fruit of his works,
 11 Stood by him against the greed of his defrauders,
 and enriched him;*
 12 She preserved him from foes,
 and secured him against ambush,
 And she gave him the prize for his hard struggle
 that he might know that devotion to God† is mightier than all else.*

13 She did not abandon a righteous man† when he was sold,*
 but rescued him from sin.*
 14 She went down with him into the dungeon,
 and did not desert him in his bonds,
 Until she brought him the scepter of royalty
 and authority over his oppressors,
 Proved false those who had defamed him,
 and gave him eternal glory.

15 The holy people and their blameless descendants—it was she
 who rescued them from the nation that oppressed them.*
 16 She entered the soul of the Lord's servant,†
 and withstood fearsome kings with signs and wonders;*
 17 she gave the holy ones the reward of their labors,*
 Conducted them by a wondrous road,
 became a shelter for them by day
 a starry flame by night.
 18 She took them across the Red Sea
 and brought them through the deep waters.
 19 Their enemies she overwhelmed,

and churned them up† from the bottom of the depths.
 20 Therefore the righteous despoiled the wicked;
 and they sang of your holy name,
 Lord,
 and praised in unison your conquering hand,*
 21 Because Wisdom opened the mouths of the mute,
 and gave ready speech to infants.*

11 †She prospered their affairs through the holy prophet.*

III. SPECIAL PROVIDENCE OF GOD DURING THE EXODUS†

Introduction

2 They journeyed through the uninhabited desert,
 and in lonely places they pitched their tents;*
 3 they withstood enemies and warded off their foes.*
 4 When they thirsted, they called upon you,
 and water was given them from the sheer rock,
 a quenching of their thirst from the hard stone.
 5 For by the things through which their foes were punished
 they in their need were benefited.*

First Example: Water Punishes the Egyptians and Benefits the Israelites

6 Instead of a river's† perennial source,
 troubled with impure blood*
 7 as a rebuke to the decree for the slaying of infants,
 You gave them abundant water beyond their hope,

†10:12 *Devotion to God*: in the Greek this signifies "piety" or "religion," and is the equivalent of the Hebrew "fear of the Lord"; cf. Prv 1:7.

10:13–14 Joseph.
 10:16 Moses.

10:19 *Churned them up*: casting their bodies on the shore.
 11:2–19:22 Few verses in chaps. 11–19 can be fully understood without consulting the passages in the Pentateuch which are indicated in the cross-references. The theme of this part of the book is expressed in v. 5 and is illustrated in the following chapters by five examples drawn from Exodus events.

11:6–8 *River*: the Nile; the contrast is between the first plague of Egypt (Ex 7:17–24) and the water drawn from the rock in Horeb (Ex 17:5–7; Nm 20:8–11).

10:11 Gn 30:29–30;
 31:5–12.

10:12 Gn 32:24–29; 1 Tm
 4:8.

10:13–14 Gn 37–45.

10:13 Gn 39:7–10.

10:15 Ex 3:9; 14:30; 19:6.

10:16 Wis 1:4; 7:27; Ex
 4:10; Ps 76:13.

10:17–19 Wis 14:3; 19:7; Ex
 13:21–22; Ex 14–15;
 Ps 77:20–21; 78:13,
 53; Is 4:5–6.

10:20 Ex 12:35–36;
 15:1–21.

10:21 Ex 4:10–15; Ps 8:3;
 Mt 11:25.

11:1 Dt 2:7; Hos 12:14.

11:2–5 Ex 17:2–6; Nm
 20:1–13; Ps 63:2;

107:4–7; Jer 2:6.

11:3 Ex 17:8–16; Nm
 21:1–3, 21–35; 31:1–

12; Ps 118:10–12.
 11:5 Wis 16:1–2.

11:6–8 Wis 18:5; Ex 1:22;
 7:17–24.

8 after you had shown by the thirst they
experienced
how you punished their
adversaries.
9 For when they had been tried, though
only mildly chastised,*
they recognized how the wicked,
condemned in anger, were being
tormented.
10 You tested your own people,
admonishing them as a father;
but as a stern king you probed and
condemned the wicked.
11 Those near and far were equally
afflicted:†
12 for a twofold grief‡ took hold of
them*
and a groaning at the remembrance of
the ones who had departed.
13 For when they heard that the cause of
their own torments
was a benefit to these others, they
recognized the Lord.
14 For though they had mocked and
rejected him who had been cast
out and abandoned long ago,
in the final outcome, they marveled at
him,
since their thirst proved unlike that of
the righteous.*

Second Example: Animals Punish the Egyptians and Benefit the Israelites

15 In return for their senseless, wicked
thoughts,
which misled them into worshiping
dumb† serpents and worthless
insects,
You sent upon them swarms of dumb
creatures for vengeance;*
16 that they might recognize that one
is punished by the very things
through which one sins.*

Digression on God's Mercy

17 For not without means was your
almighty hand,*
that had fashioned the universe from
formless matter,†
to send upon them many bears or
fierce lions,
18 Or newly created, wrathful, unknown
beasts
breathing forth fiery breath,
Or pouring out roaring smoke,
or flashing terrible sparks from their
eyes.
19 Not only could these attack and
completely destroy them;
even their frightful appearance itself
could slay.
20 Even without these, they could have
been killed at a single blast,
pursued by justice
and winnowed by your mighty spirit.
But you have disposed all things by
measure and number and
weight.*
21 For great strength is always present with
you;
who can resist the might of your
arm?*
22 Indeed, before you the whole universe is
like a grain from a balance,†
or a drop of morning dew come down
upon the earth.*
23† But you have mercy on all, because you
can do all things;
and you overlook sins for the sake of
repentance.*
24 For you love all things that are made;
and loathe nothing that you have
made;
for you would not fashion what you
hate.*

† 11:12 *Twofold grief*: the double distress described in vv. 13–14.

11:15 *Dumb*: that is, irrational.

11:17 *Formless matter*: a Greek philosophical concept is used to interpret the chaos of Gn 1:2.

11:22 *Grain from a balance*: a tiny particle used for weighing on sensitive scales.

11:23 The combination of divine mercy and power is an unusual paradox, but cf. 12:15–18; Ps 62:12–13; Sir 2:18. The main emphasis is on a creating that is motivated by love; the divine “imperishable spirit” (either Wisdom as in 1:4, 7, or perhaps the breath of life as in Gn 2:7) is in everything (12:1).

11:9–11 Wis 3:5; 16:3–4; Dt 8:2–5; 2 Mc 6:12–16; Ps 6:2; Prv 3:12.

11:11 Ps 6:2.

11:12–13 Wis 16:8; Ex 14:4, 18.

11:14 Ex 2:3.

11:15 Wis 12:23–24; 15:18–

16:1; Ex 7:26–8:11.

11:16 Wis 12:23, 27; Ex

10:16; Prv 1:31–32;

26:27.

11:17–19 Wis 12:8–9; 16:1, 5; Gn 1:1–2; Dt 32:4; 2 Kgs 17:25–26; Hos 13:4–8.

11:20 Jb 4:9.

11:21 Wis 12:12; 2 Chr

20:6.

11:22 Hos 13:3.

11:23 Wis 12:10; Dt 9:27;

Acts 17:30; Rom 2:4;

11:32; 2 Pt 3:9.

11:24 Ps 145:9.

25 How could a thing remain, unless you
willed it;
or be preserved, had it not been called
forth by you?*

26 But you spare all things, because they
are yours,
O Ruler and Lover of souls,*
for your imperishable spirit is in all
things!*

12 Therefore you rebuke offenders little
by little,
warn them, and remind them of the
sins they are committing,
that they may abandon their
wickedness and believe in you,
Lord!

3 For truly, the ancient inhabitants of your
holy land,*

4 whom you hated for deeds most
odious—
works of sorcery and impious
sacrifices;

5 These merciless murderers of children,
devourers of human flesh,†
and initiates engaged in a blood
ritual,

6 and parents who took with their own
hands defenseless lives,*

You willed to destroy by the hands of
our ancestors,
7 that the land that is dearest of all to
you
might receive a worthy colony of
God's servants.*

8 But even these you spared, since they
were but mortals
and sent wasps as forerunners of your
army
that they might exterminate them by
degrees.*

9 Not that you were without power to
have the wicked vanquished in
battle by the righteous,

or wiped out at once by terrible beasts
or by one decisive word;*

10 But condemning them by degrees, you
gave them space for repentance.

You were not unaware that their origins
were wicked

and their malice ingrained,*
And that their dispositions would never
change;

11 for they were a people accursed from
the beginning.

Neither out of fear for anyone
did you grant release from their sins.*

12 For who can say to you, "What have you
done?"

or who can oppose your decree?

Or when peoples perish, who can
challenge you, their maker;

or who can come into your presence
to vindicate the unrighteous?*

13 For neither is there any god besides you
who have the care of all,

that you need show you have not
unjustly condemned;*

14 Nor can any king or prince confront
you on behalf of those you have
punished.*

15 But as you are righteous, you govern all
things righteously;

you regard it as unworthy of your
power

to punish one who has incurred no
blame.*

16 For your might is the source of
righteousness;

your mastery over all things makes
you lenient to all.*

17 For you show your might when the
perfection of your power is
disbelieved;

and in those who know you, you
rebuke insolence.†*

18 But though you are master of might, you
judge with clemency,
and with much lenience you govern us;

12:5 The horrible crimes here attributed to the Canaanites (cf. also 14:23) were not unheard of in the ancient world.

12:17 The brunt of divine anger and justice is borne by those who know God but defy divine authority and might. Cf. 1:2; 15:2, but also 12:27; 18:13.

11:25 Is 41:4.

11:26 Wis 12:16; Is 63:9.

12:1 Wis 1:7.

12:3-6 Wis 14:23; Dt 18:9-

12; Ps 5:6; 106:28,

34-39; Jer 19:4-5; Ez

16:3, 20-21, 36.

12:6 Nm 33:52.

12:7 Dt 11:12.

12:8 Ex 23:28-30; Dt

7:17-24.

12:9 Wis 11:18; 18:15; Nm

16:21.

12:10 Wis 11:23; Ps 55:20;

Sir 16:9.

12:11 Gn 9:25.

12:12 Sm 16:10; Eccl 8:4;

Sir 46:19; Is 45:9; Dn

4:32; Rom 9:19-21.

12:13 Wis 6:7; Dt 3:24;

32:39; Is 44:6, 8.

12:14 Jer 49:19; 50:44.

12:15 Gn 18:23-32; Dt

32:4.

12:16 Wis 2:11; 11:26; Ps

103:19.

12:17 Wis 15:2-3; Ex 9:16.

- for power, whenever you will, attends you.
- 19 You taught your people, by these deeds,* that those who are righteous must be kind;
And you gave your children reason to hope
that you would allow them to repent for their sins.
- 20 For these were enemies of your servants, doomed to death;
yet, while you punished them with such solicitude and indulgence, granting time and opportunity to abandon wickedness,
- 21 With what exactitude you judged your children,
to whose ancestors you gave the sworn covenants of goodly promises!*
- 22 Therefore to give us a lesson you punish our enemies with measured deliberation
so that we may think earnestly of your goodness when we judge,
and, when being judged, we may look for mercy.

Second Example Resumed

- 23 Hence those unrighteous who lived a life of folly,
you tormented through their own abominations.*
- 24 For they went far astray in the paths of error,
taking for gods the worthless and disgusting among beasts,
being deceived like senseless infants.*
- 25 Therefore as though upon unreasoning children,
you sent your judgment on them as a mockery;*

- 26 But they who took no heed of a punishment which was but child's play
were to experience a condemnation worthy of God.
- 27 For by the things through which they suffered distress,
being tortured by the very things they deemed gods,
They saw and recognized the true God whom formerly they had refused to know;
with this, their final condemnation† came upon them.*

Digression on False Worship

A. NATURE WORSHIP†

- 13¹ Foolish by nature were all who were in ignorance of God,
and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing the one who is,†
and from studying the works did not discern the artisan;*
- 2 Instead either fire, or wind, or the swift air,
or the circuit of the stars, or the mighty water,
or the luminaries of heaven, the governors† of the world, they considered gods.*
- 3 Now if out of joy in their beauty they thought them gods,
let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than these;
for the original source of beauty fashioned them.*
- 4 Or if they were struck by their might and energy,
let them realize from these things how much more powerful is the one who made them.*

† 12:27 *Condemnation*: the death of Egyptian firstborn and the destruction of their army in the sea.

13:1-9 The author holds a relatively benign view of the efforts of the philosophers to come to know God from various natural phenomena. This is not a question of proving the existence of God in scholastic style. The author thinks that the beauty and might of the world should have pointed by analogy (v. 5) to the Maker. Instead, those "in ignorance of God" remained fixed on the elements (v. 2, three named, along with the stars). His Greek counterparts are not totally blameless; they should have gone further and acknowledged the creator of nature's wonders (vv. 4-5). Cf. Rom 1:18-23; Acts 17:27-28.

13:1 *One who is*: this follows the Greek translation of the sacred name for God in Hebrew; cf. Ex 3:14.

13:2 *Governors*: the sun and moon (cf. Gn 1:16).

12:19-20 Wis 11:23; Sir 17:24.

12:21 Wis 18:22; Gn 50:24; Dt 7:6-14; Ps 105:8-11.

12:23 Wis 11:16; 16:1; 12:24 Dt 11:28; Jer 5:28; Rom 1:23.

12:25 Jer 4:22.

12:27 Wis 16:16; Ex 14:4, 28.

13:1 Acts 14:17; Eph 4:17-19.

13:2 Gn 1:14-19; Dt 4:19; Jb 31:26-28.

13:3 Ps 8:4.

13:4 Jer 10:2; Bar 6:39.

5 For from the greatness and the beauty of
 created things
 6 their original author, by analogy, is
 seen.
 6 But yet, for these the blame is less;†
 7 For they have gone astray perhaps,
 though they seek God and wish to
 find him.
 7 For they search busily among his works,
 but are distracted by what they see,
 because the things seen are fair.
 8 But again, not even these are
 pardonable.
 9 For if they so far succeeded in
 knowledge
 that they could speculate about the
 world,
 how did they not more quickly find
 its Lord?

B. IDOLATRY†

10 But wretched are they, and in dead
 things are their hopes,
 who termed gods things made by
 human hands:
 Gold and silver, the product of art, and
 images of beasts,
 or useless stone, the work of an
 ancient hand.*

The Carpenter and Wooden Idols

11 A carpenter may cut down a suitable
 tree*
 and skillfully scrape off all its bark,
 12 And deftly plying his art
 produce something fit for daily use,*
 12 And use the scraps from his handiwork
 in preparing his food, and have his
 fill;
 13 Then the good-for-nothing refuse from
 these remnants,
 crooked wood grown full of knots,
 he takes and carves to occupy his
 spare time.*
 This wood he models with mindless
 skill,

and patterns it on the image of a
 human being
 14 or makes it resemble some worthless
 beast.
 When he has daubed it with red and
 crimsoned its surface with red
 stain,
 and daubed over every blemish in it,*
 15 He makes a fitting shrine for it
 and puts it on the wall, fastening it
 with a nail.*
 16 Thus he provides for it lest it fall down,
 knowing that it cannot help itself;
 for, truly, it is an image and needs
 help.*
 17 But when he prays about his goods or
 marriage or children,*
 he is not ashamed to address the
 thing without a soul.
 For vigor he invokes the powerless;
 18 for life he entreats the dead;
 For aid he beseeches the wholly
 incompetent;
 for travel, something that cannot even
 walk;
 19 For profit in business and success with
 his hands
 he asks power of a thing with hands
 utterly powerless.

14 1 Again, one preparing for a voyage
 and about to traverse the wild
 waves
 cries out to wood more unsound than
 the boat that bears him.*
 2 For the urge for profits devised this latter,
 and Wisdom the artisan produced it.
 3† But your providence, O Father! guides it,
 for you have furnished even in the sea
 a road,
 and through the waves a steady path,*
 4 Showing that you can save from any
 danger,
 so that even one without skill may
 embark.*

† 13:6 *The blame is less:* the greater blame is incurred by those mentioned in v. 10; 15:14–16.

13:10–19 The second digression is an example of the polemic against idolatry (cf. Is 44:9–20; Jer 10:3–9; Ps 135:15–18). Whether the idols be of wood or clay, they were made by human beings and have become the source of evil.

14:3–6 The wooden ship mentioned in vv. 1–2 prompts a short meditation on the providence of God, who in fact has watched over boats in their dangerous courses. The wood as

described in v. 7 became a favorite patristic type for the wood of the cross.

* 13:10 Wis 3:11; 15:5, 17; Dt 4:25–28; 7:25; 27:15; Ps 115:4; Hos 14:4; Acts 17:29.

13:11–19 Is 44:9–20.

13:11 Wis 15:7; Bar 6:58.

13:13 Dt 4:16.

13:14 Jer 10:9.

13:15 Is 40:20; 41:7; 44:13.

13:16 1 Sm 5:3–5; Bar 6:57.

13:17–19 Wis 15:15.

14:1 Is 46:7.

14:3 Ps 107:23–30; Is 43:16.

14:4 Wis 16:8.