

Part 5 : Sirach 24:1 – 33:18

24:3-8

I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was on a pillar of cloud. Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss. Over waves of the sea, over all the land, over every people and nation I held sway.

Among all these I sought a resting place: in whose territory should I abide? Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and he who formed me chose the place for my tent. He said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, in Israel your inheritance.'

The spirit, which is the breath of God, is here identified with Wisdom, and compared to a 'mist covering the earth'. All creation manifests God's spirit, God's Wisdom, and therefore proclaims God's glory.

See John's Prologue which speaks of God's WORD

24:9-12

Before the ages, in the beginning, he created me, and through all the ages I shall not cease to be. In the holy tent I ministered before him, and then I took up my post in Zion. Thus in his city, loved as he loves me, he gave me a resting place: in Jerusalem is my domain. I struck root among the honoured people, in the portion of YHWH is my inheritance.

24:19-22

Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits. ²⁰You will remember me as sweeter than honey, and possessing me as sweeter than the honeycomb. Those who eat of me will hunger for more, and those who drink of me will thirst for more. Whoever obeys me will not be put to shame, and those who work with me will never fail.”

24:32-33

Again will I send my teachings forth shining like the dawn,
to spread their enlightenment far abroad.

I will again pour out teaching like prophecy,
and bequeath it to generations yet to come.

25:24-26

From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.
Allow water no outlet, and be not indulgent to an erring wife.
If she does not go as you direct, separate her from yourself.

28:2-5

Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Should a person harbour anger against another, and expect healing from YHWH? Should a person have no mercy toward another like himself, and then seek pardon for his own sins?

If a mere mortal harbours wrath,
who will make an atoning sacrifice [ἐξιλάσκειν] for his sins?

29:1-2

They do a kindness who lend to their neighbours;
by holding out a helping hand they keep the commandments.
Lend to your neighbour in his time of need.

29:8-11, 20

Be patient with someone in humble circumstances, and do not keep him waiting for your alms. Help the poor because of the commandment, and in their need do not send them away empty-handed. Let your money go for the sake of a brother or a friend, and do not leave it under a stone to rot. Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold ...

Assist your neighbour to the best of your ability, but be careful not to fall yourself.

33:8

Like clay in the hand of the potter, to be moulded as he pleases, so all are in the hand of their Maker, to be given whatever he decides.

Part 6 : Sirach 33:19 - 38:23

34:12-13

I have seen many things in my travels, and I have learned more than I can express. I have often been in danger of death, but have escaped because of what I have learned from these experiences.

34:19-20

The eyes of YHWH are on those who love him,
a mighty shield and strong support,
a shelter from scorching wind and a shade from noonday sun,
a guard against stumbling and a help against falling.
He lifts up the soul and makes the eyes sparkle;
he gives health and life and blessing.

34:25-27

Bread given to the needy means life for the poor;
whoever deprives them of it is a murderer.

To take away a neighbour's living is to commit murder;
to deprive an employee of wages is to shed blood.

35:17-22

YHWH will not ignore the supplication of the orphan, or the widow when she pours out her complaint. Do not the tears of the widow running down her cheek cry out against the one who causes them to fall? The one whose service is pleasing to YHWH will be accepted, and his prayer will reach to the clouds. The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds, and it will not rest until it reaches its goal; it will not desist until the Most High responds and does justice for the righteous, and executes judgment.

36:1-5, 12

Save us, O God of the universe, and put all the nations in dread of you.
Lift up your hand against foreign nations and let them see your might.
As you have used us to show your holiness to them,
so use them to show your glory to us.
Then they will know, as we have known, that there is no God but you...

Crush the heads of hostile rulers who say, “There is no one but ourselves.”

Ben Sira lived through the change of control of Palestine from Egypt to Syria, with the Seleucid victory in 198BC at Panias. When he speaks of the arrogance of the foreign oppressors, he presumably has especially in mind Antiochus III, who ruled Syria from 223-187.

36:13-22

Gather all the tribes of Jacob. Give them their inheritance, as at the beginning. Have compassion on the people called by your name, on Israel, whom you have named your firstborn. Take pity on the city of your sanctuary, Jerusalem, the place of your dwelling. Fill Zion with your majesty, and your temple with your glory. Give evidence of your deeds of old; fulfill the prophecies spoken in your name. Reward those who wait for you and let your prophets be proved true. Hear the prayers of your servants, according to your goodwill toward your people, and all who are on the earth will know that you are the God of the ages.

37:13-15

Heed the counsel of your own heart, for no one is more faithful to you than it is. For our own mind sometimes keeps us better informed than seven sentinels sitting high on a watchtower. But above all pray to the Most High that he may direct your way in truth.

38:1-5 (continued on next slide)

Honour physicians for their services, for it is God who has established them in their profession; Their gift of healing comes from God, and they are rewarded by the king. The skill of physicians makes them distinguished, and in the presence of the great they are admired. God makes the earth yield healing herbs, and sensible people will not despise them. Was not water made sweet with a tree in order that its power might be known?

38:6-15 (continued from previous slide)

He gave skill to human beings that he might be glorified in his marvellous works. By them the physician heals and takes away pain; the pharmacist makes a mixture from them. God's works will never be finished; and from him health spreads over all the earth.

My son, when you are ill, do not delay, but pray to God, for it is he who heals. Give up your faults and direct your hands rightly, and cleanse your heart from all sin. Offer a sweet-smelling sacrifice, and a memorial portion of choice flour, and pour oil on your offering, as much as you can afford.

Then let the physician apply his skill, for the Lord created him; do not let him depart, for you need him. There are times when recovery lies in the hands of physicians, for they too pray to God that he grant them success in diagnosis and that their treatment will bring about a cure. He who sins against his Maker, will be defiant toward the physician.

Part 7 : Sirach 38:24 - 43:33

39:5-II

The scribe sets his heart to rise early to seek YHWH his Maker, and to petition the Most High; he opens his mouth in prayer and asks pardon for his sins. If it pleases the Almighty YHWH, he will be filled with the spirit of understanding; he will pour forth his own words of wisdom and give thanks to YHWH in prayer. God will direct his counsel and knowledge, as he meditates on his mysteries. He will show the wisdom of what he has learned, and will glory in the law of the YHWH's covenant.

Many will praise his understanding; his fame can never be effaced. His memory will not disappear, and his name will live through all generations. Nations will speak of his wisdom, and the congregation will proclaim his praise. While he lives he is one out of a thousand, and when he dies he leaves a good name.

39:32-35 Epilogue to his hymn of praise

This is why from the beginning I have been convinced of all this and have thought it out and left it in writing: All the works of God are good, and he will supply every need in its time. No one can say, “This is not as good as that,” for everything proves good in its appointed time. So now sing praise with all your heart and voice, and bless the name of the Holy One.

O death, how bitter is the thought of you to the one at peace in his home, who has nothing to worry about and is prosperous in everything, and still is vigorous enough to enjoy life's pleasures! O death, how welcome is your sentence to one who is weak and failing in strength, worn down by age and anxious about everything; with sight gone and hope lost. Do not fear death's decree for you; remember those who went before you and those who will come after. This is God's decree for all flesh; why then should you reject the will of the Most High? Whether life lasts for ten years or a hundred or a thousand, there are no questions asked in Hades.

42:II-14

See that there is no lattice in your daughter's room,
no spot that overlooks the approaches to the house.
Do not let her parade her beauty before any man,
or spend her time among married women;
for just as moths come from garments,
so from a woman comes woman's wickedness.
Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman's goodness,
but better a religious daughter than a shameless son.

42:15 - 43:33 Hymn in praise of the Creator

43:27

We could say more but could never say enough;
let the final word be: "He is the all."

Part 8 : Sirach 44:1 - 50:24

44:1-2

Let us now sing the praises of men, faithful to the covenant, each in his own time. The Most High apportioned to them great glory, the glory that was his from ancient days:

Having extolled the praises of God the creator of the beautiful universe, Ben Sira now turns to extol the wonder of God's action in the famous ancestors of his people.

In verses 3-6 he lists twelve categories of heroes. What they have in common is that they were 'faithful to the covenant' (Hebrew *hesed*). Their lives were resplendent with God's glory

44:16	Enoch
44:17-18	Noah
44:19-21	Abraham
44:22	Isaac
44:22-23	Jacob
44:23 - 45:5	Moses
45:6-22	Aaron
45:23-26	Phinehas (Aaron's grandson)
46:1-10	Joshua & Caleb
46:11-20	Samuel
47:1-11	David
47:12-23	Solomon

48:I-II	Elijah
48:I2-I5	Elisha
48:I5-22	Hezekiah
48:23-25	Isaiah
49:I-4	Josiah
49:7	Jeremiah
49:8	Ezekiel
49:9	Job
49:IO	The 12 Prophets
49:II-I2	Zerubbabel & Jeshua
49:I3	Nehemiah

49:I4-I6

Few have ever been created on earth like Enoch, for he was taken up from the earth. Nor was anyone ever born like Joseph; even his bones were cared for. Shem and Seth and Enosh were honoured, but above every other created living being was Adam.

50:1-24 Simeon, son of Johanan, high piest 219-196BC

50:23-24

May he grant you wisdom of heart, and may he abide among you as peace. May his kindness towards Simeon be lasting, and may he fulfil for him the covenant with Phinehas so that it may not be taken from him or his descendants, while the heavens last.

When his grandson translated Ben Sira's work into Greek, he altered verses 23-24, since Simeon's priestly line came to an end with the assassination of his son, Onias II (see 2Maccabees 4:34).

My whole being loathes two nations, the third is not even a people:
Those who live in Seir and Philistia, and the foolish people that live
in Shechem.

Jewish hatred for the Edomites has a long history (see Psalm 137:7; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15; Obadiah 1:10-14; Malachi 1:2-5; Lamentations 4:21; Judith 7:8-18). When the Edomites took advantage of Judah's defeat by the Babylonians, and occupied the southern part of Judah, this antipathy grew.

Philistia no longer existed at the time of Ben Sira. He is speaking here of those of his own day who live in Judah, but have abandoned Judaism in favour of Greek culture. They are the inheritors of the traditions of the Philistines.

His deepest contempt is for the Samaritans. The Jews (wrongly) saw them as the heretical descendants of the mixed population of the north, even though the vast majority were descended from the Yahwists of the northern kingdom.

Training in wise conduct, and nicely balanced proverbs I have written in this book of Yeshua ben Eleazar ben Sira, who poured them out from his understanding heart. Happy are those who concern themselves with these things, and those who lay them to heart will become wise. For if they put them into practice, they will be equal to anything, for the fear of YHWH is profound.

In his postscript Ben Sira follows Greek practice by signing his name as the author. He speaks of himself in the third person, modelling himself on Proverbs 1:1-3 and Ecclesiastes 12:9-10.

I sent up my prayer from the dust, my plea from the gates of Sheol.

¹⁰I cried out to YHWH, “You are my Father; my mighty Saviour, only you! Do not forsake me in the days of trouble, the days of ruin and desolation. ¹¹I will praise your name continually, singing to you with my prayer!”

YHWH heard my voice, he listened to my plea! ¹²He redeemed me from destruction and rescued me in time of trouble. For this reason I thank you and praise you, and I bless the name of YHWH.

51:13-17 Acrostic poem

[א]

While I was still young and innocent, I kept seeking wisdom.

[ב]

She came to me in her beauty,
and I will continue to cultivate her to the end.

[ג]

From the first blossom to the ripening grape my heart delighted in her;

[ד]

my feet walked on the straight path;
for from my youth I followed her steps.

[ה]

In the short time of my heeding her, I encountered much instruction.

[ו]

Since I have profited in this way, I will give grateful praise to my Teacher.

51:18-20 Acrostic poem

[י]

I resolved to live according to wisdom,
I was zealous for the good, and I will not turn back.

[ח]

I burned with desire for her, and never let up.

[ט]

I became preoccupied with her, never weary of extolling her.

[י]

I spread out my hand on high, never weary of extolling her.

[כ]

For her I lived a pure life; in cleanliness I attained her

[ל]

At first acquaintance with her, I gained understanding,
such that I will never forsake her.

51:21-25 Acrostic poem

[נ]

My whole being was stirred to seek her;
therefore I have made her my prize possession.

[נ]

The Lord gave me my tongue as a reward, and I will praise him with it.

[ס]

Draw near to me, you who are uneducated,
and lodge in the house of instruction.

[ע]

How long will you stay deprived of wisdom's food?
How long will you put up with such bitter thirst?

[פ]

I open my mouth and speak of her:
acquire wisdom for yourselves without money.

51:26-29 Acrostic poem

[ז]

Submit your neck to her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction;

[ך]

She is close to those who seek her,
and the one who is in earnest finds her.

[ה]

See for yourselves! I have laboured but little and have found much.

[ש]

Hear but a little of my instruction,
and through it you will acquire silver and gold.

[ת]

Let your whole being rejoice in the mercy of God,
and be not ashamed to give him praise.

51:30

[פ]

Work at your tasks in due season,
and in his own time God will give you your reward.

Ben Sira concludes with a line beginning with a פ.

If we take the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet [א]

and the middle letter [ל],

and conclude with a [פ]

we form the word אלה [= א] , taking us back to the beginning.

In this way Ben Sira stresses the all-embracing and ongoing nature of the praise that is God's due. When אלה, is used as a verb it means 'to teach'.

In this way he summarises the intent of his book.