

Part 2 : Sirach 4:11 – 6:17

4:11-16

Wisdom lifts up her children and embraces those who seek her.

Whoever loves her loves life,

and those who seek her from early morning are filled with joy.

Whoever holds her fast inherits glory,

and the Lord blesses the place she enters.

Those who serve [λατρευω] her

minister [λειτουργειν] to the Holy One;

the Lord loves those who love her.

Those who obey her will judge the nations,

and all who listen to her will live secure.

If they remain faithful, they will inherit her;

their descendants will also obtain her.

4:17-18

For at first she will walk with them on tortuous paths;
she will bring fear and dread upon them,
and will torment them by her discipline until she trusts them,
and she will test them with her ordinances.

Then she will come straight back to them again and gladden them,
and will reveal [ἀποκαλύπτω] her secrets [κρυπτος] to them.

4:28

Fight [ἀγωνίζομαι] to the death for truth [ἀληθεία],
and YHWH will fight for you.

‘The truth will set you free’(John 8:32)

‘I am with you always, till the end of time’(Matthew 28:20).

5:2-7

Do not count on your mind and strength in pursuing the desires of your heart. Do not say, “Who can prevail against me?” for the Lord will surely punish you. Do not say, “I sinned, yet what has happened to me?” The Lord is slow to anger. Do not be so confident of forgiveness that you add sin to sin. Do not say, “His mercy is great, he will forgive the multitude of my sins,” for both mercy and wrath are with him, and his anger will rest on sinners.

‘Mercy’ is the word we use to speak of God’s faithful love for us sinners. ‘Wrath’ is the word we use to speak of the effects of our failure to welcome this love

Do not delay to turn back to the Lord, and do not postpone it from day to day; for suddenly the wrath of the Lord will come upon you, and at the time of punishment you will perish.

6:14-17

Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter: whoever finds one has found a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price; no sum can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; and those who fear the Lord will find them. Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship aright, for as they are, so are their neighbours also.

Real friendship is possible only to a person who has a profound sense of the sacred, and who is obedient to the Torah. How can we truly love someone if we do not see them as made in the image of God, who is the source of their life and who sustains them in love? If we do not see that, we do not see the person as they really are; our relationship is not built on a sure foundation.

Part 3 : Sirach 6:18 - 14:9

6:24-25

Put your feet into her fetters, and your neck into her collar.

Bend your shoulders and carry her, and do not fret under her bonds.

Ben Sira returns to the image of the plough. It is not easy to bear the yoke of the Torah, but from the hard work of ploughing comes the joy of the harvest. Ben Sira agrees with the author of the third lamentation: 'It is good to bear the yoke from one's youth'(Lam 3:27).

Jesus offers a yoke that is better than the Torah: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'(Matthew 11:28-29).

6:26-31

Draw close to her with all your soul, and keep her ways with all your might. Search her out and discover her, seek her and you will find her; and when you get hold of her, do not let her go.

Then at last you will find the rest she gives, and she will be changed into joy for you. Then her fetters will become for you a strong defence, and her collar a glorious robe. Her yoke will be your golden ornament, and her bonds your purple cord. You will wear her like a glorious robe, and put her on like a splendid crown.

6:37

Reflect on the statutes of the Lord, and meditate at all times on his commandments (see Psalm 1:1-2). It is he who will give insight to your mind, and your desire for wisdom he will grant.

7:1

Do no evil. Do not let evil overtake you.

‘Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good’(Romans 12:21)

7:6

Do not seek to become a judge, if you are not determined to root out crime; or you will be pressured into being partial to the powerful, and so mar your integrity.

7:10

Do not grow weary when you pray; do not neglect to give alms.

10:4-5

The government of the earth is in the hand of God,
and over it he will raise up the right leader for the time.
Overall sovereignty is in the hand of God,
who imparts his majesty to the ruler.

‘God changes times and seasons, deposes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding’(Daniel 2:21)

10:12

The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord;
the heart has withdrawn from its Maker.

11:14

Good things and bad, life and death, poverty and wealth,
come from YHWH.

11:28

Call no one happy before his death; by how he ends, a person is known.

12:1-7 contrast Luke 10:29-37 (and see Matthew 5:43-48)

If you do good, know to whom you are doing it,
and your good deeds will achieve their desired effect.

Do good to the just, and you will be repaid –
if not by them, certainly by YHWH.

No good comes to one who gives to the person who persists in evil,
nor is doing so an act of mercy.

Give to the devout person, but do not help the sinner.

Do good to the lowly, but do not give to the ungodly;
hold back their bread, and do not give it to them,

for by means of it they might overpower you; then you will receive
twice as much evil for all the good you have done to them.

For God himself hates sinners and will inflict punishment on the ungodly.

Give to the devout person, but do not help the sinner.

Happy are those who do not blunder with their lips,
and whose heart brings them no remorse.

Happy are those whose inner being does not condemn them,
and who have not given up their hope.

The focus of 'blessed' is on what God does, whereas the focus of 'happy' is on what we are to do (or are doing) to receive God's blessing by being faithful to the covenant (see the beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-11).

To declare someone 'happy' is to rejoice with them that they are behaving in such a way as to be in a state of communion with God.

14:11-19

My son, treat yourself well, according to your means, and enjoy it as best you can. Remember that death does not tarry, and the decree of Hades has not been shown to you. Do good to friends before you die, and reach out and give to them as much as you can. Do not deprive yourself of a day's enjoyment; do not let your share of desired good pass by you. Will you not leave the fruit of your labours to another, and what you acquired by toil to be divided by lot? Give, and take, and indulge yourself, because in Hades one cannot look for luxury.

All living beings become old like a garment, for the decree from of old is, "You must die!" Like abundant leaves on a spreading tree that sheds some and puts forth others, so are the generations of flesh and blood: one dies and another is born. Every work decays and ceases to exist, and the one who made it will pass away with it.

Part 4 : Sirach 14:20 - 23:27

14:20-27

Happy is the person who meditates on wisdom and reasons intelligently,
who reflects in his heart on her ways and ponders her secrets,
pursuing her like a hunter, and lying in wait on her paths;
who peers through her windows and listens at her doors;
who camps near her house and fastens his tent peg next to her walls;
who pitches his tent near her, and lives as her welcome neighbour;
who builds his nest in her leafy branches, and lodges in her boughs;
who takes refuge from the heat in her shade, and dwells in her home.

15:1-6

Whoever fears YHWH will do this,
and whoever is practised in the law will obtain wisdom.
She will come to meet him like a mother,
and like a young bride she will embrace him.
She will feed him with the bread of learning,
and give him the water of insight to drink.
He will lean on her and not stumble;
he will rely on her and not be put to shame.
She will exalt him above his neighbours,
and will give him eloquence in the midst of the assembly.
He will find gladness and a crown of rejoicing,
and she will endow him with an everlasting name.

15:11-13

Do not say, “It was God’s doing that I fell away”; for he does not do what he hates. Do not say, “It was he who led me astray”; for he has no need of the violent. The Lord hates all abominations; he does not let them befall those who fear him.

Ben Sira asserts God’s control and human freedom. He doesn’t try to see how one fits with the other. Rather he humbly speaks of God’s wisdom. While acknowledging God’s power, and knowledge, he opposes any effort to avoid responsibility for the choices we make.

17:11-12

YHWH has set before human beings knowledge,
a law pledging life as their inheritance.
He has established with them an eternal covenant,
and revealed to them his decrees.

17:17

He appoints a ruler for every nation, but Israel is YHWH's own portion.

segullâ [סְגֻלָּה; see Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4; Malachi 3:17].

17:24

To those who repent he grants a return,
and he encourages [παρακαλέω]
those who are in danger of losing patience.

17:27-29

Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades in place of the living who give thanks? From the dead, as from one who has never existed, thanksgiving has ceased; those who are alive and well sing YHWH's praises. How great are YHWH's acts of kindness, and his restoring to communion [ἐξιλασμός] those who return to him!

18:8-14

What are human beings, and of what use are they? What is good in them, and what is evil? The number of days in their life is great if they reach one hundred years. Like a drop of water from the sea and a grain of sand, so are these few years among the days of eternity.

That is why YHWH is large-hearted with them and pours out his mercy upon them.

He sees and recognises that their end is miserable;

therefore he grants them a restoration of communion all the more.

The compassion of human beings is for their neighbours, but the compassion of the Lord is for every living thing, rebuking, disciplining, teaching, and directing them, as a shepherd his flock.

He has compassion on those who accept his discipline and who are eager to carry out his precepts.

19:20

The whole of wisdom is fear of YHWH;
the fulness of wisdom is the fulfilment of the law.

20:6-7

Some people keep silent because they have nothing to say,
while others keep silent because they know when to speak.
The wise remain silent until the right moment,
but a boasting fool misses the right moment.

21:1-3

Have you sinned, my son? Do so no more, and ask forgiveness for
your past sins. Flee from sin as from a snake; for if you approach sin,
it will bite you. Its teeth are lion's teeth, and can destroy human lives.
All lawlessness is like a two-edged sword; there is no healing for the
wound it inflicts.

23:1

YHWH, Father and Master of my life, do not abandon me to their designs,
and do not let me fall because of them!

23:27

Those who survive her will recognise that nothing is better than the
fear of YHWH, and nothing sweeter than to heed his commandments.

Verse 27 neatly sums up the main theme of the first four sections of
the book (from 1:1 to 23:26). The fear of YHWH essentially means
heeding his commands.