

SIRACH – SHORT VERSION

Introduction. Due to the fact that this book of the Bible has a prologue written by the grandson of the author, we know the author's name, Jesus Ben Sira, whom we call Sirach. The book is also known as Ecclesiasticus from the Latin "Liber Ecclesiasticus," meaning "Church Book," because it was used frequently in the early church to instruct catechumens and the faithful. The book was originally written in Hebrew in Jerusalem between 200-175BC. Around 132BC, the author's grandson translated the book into Greek for Greek-speaking Jews living in Alexandria in Egypt. Sirach is one of the seven books of the Old Testament not found in the Protestant Canon of the Bible.

Jesus Ben Sira lived at a time of great change in his homeland. He witnessed many of his people deserting traditional Jewish beliefs for Greek ideas and practices. Ben Sira believed a book underlining the superiority of Jewish wisdom was needed. So he collected his class notes into a single volume and offered it to those, especially the young, who wanted to learn. When his grandson translated the book into Greek, it was made available to the Greek-speaking Jews living outside the homeland. In its introduction to this book, the *New American Bible* reads:

The author, a sage who lived in Jerusalem, was thoroughly imbued with love for the law, the priesthood, the 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 holy books, and through tradition.

The book contains numerous maxims formulated with care, 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, in the law, religious worship, and many other matters which reflect the religious and social customs of the time (p.771).

Division of Chapters

The book is most often divided in the following way:

PART 1: PRAISE OF WISDOM AND GENERAL MORAL TEACHING (Chapters 1-43)

PART 2: PRAISE OF ISRAEL'S ANCESTORS (Chapters 44-50)

CONCLUDING POEM (Chapter 51)

CHAPTER 3: Honor parents; Humility; Almsgiving

CHAPTER 6:5-17: True friendship

CHAPTERS 19-22: Evils of gossip; Fraternal correction; Laziness

CHAPTER 30: Training children; Health; Cheerfulness

CHAPTERS 31:12-31: Table etiquette

CHAPTERS 36:18 to 39:11: Social Relationships