



## Sirach

(also known as Ben Sirach, the Wisdom of Sirach or Ecclesiasticus)

Sirach is a collection of wise sayings and ethical teachings from 'Jesus son of Eleazar son of Sirach of Jerusalem' (Sirach 50.27, the Hebrew word for son is 'ben' hence the name Ben Sirach). It is most like the book of Proverbs with its collection of apparently unconnected sayings. Sirach is known for its disillusionment of experience and nostalgia for days gone by.



### How long will it take?

**Reading time:** Around 3 hours.  
**Short of time?** Just read The Prologue;  
 1.1-24; 6.1-17; 38.24-39.11;  
 42.15-43.33



### Genre

Wisdom literature



### Anything tricky?

Sirach is not particularly tricky but it is not easy to read. It's lack of structure makes it hard to follow.



### Inspiring quotes

<sup>28</sup>Wine drunk at the proper time and in moderation is rejoicing of heart and gladness of soul. <sup>29</sup>Wine drunk to excess leads to bitterness of spirit, to quarrels and stumbling.

*(Sirach 31.28-29)*

<sup>13</sup>And heed the counsel of your own heart, for no one is more faithful to you than it is. <sup>14</sup>For our own mind sometimes keeps us better informed than seven sentinels sitting high on a watchtower. <sup>15</sup>But above all pray to the Most High that he may direct your way in truth.

*(Sirach 37.13-15)*



## About the Author

The author is given as Joshua son of Sirach (Hebrew name) or Jesus the son of Sirach (Greek version).

### *What do we know about him?*

He was a Jewish scribe who had lived in Jerusalem but may have written this book in Alexandria in Egypt. He is thought to have set up a school where he taught along the lines found in this book. Joshua ben Sirach was unusual among Jewish writers because he signed his work.



## About the times

Sirach is thought to have been written in the second century BC and translated around 50 years later by his grandson who then wrote the prologue to the whole book.



## What kind of Book is it?

Wisdom literature. Like many works of wisdom literature, Sirach contains a collection of wise sayings and teachings.



## How is it structured?

One of the striking features of the book is that it contains no obvious structure. Instead it wanders around touching on a wide range of themes.



## Look out for...

As in the other wisdom books, look out for how the author defines wisdom. What do you think wisdom is to Joshua ben Sirach?

The author ranges over many different topics returning to them more than once. Look out for the different themes as you read.

The author shows little compassion for either women or slaves you might want to keep an eye out for this too.



## What could this mean for me?

Sirach contains a wide range of advice from inspiring to troubling. Make a note of the wisdom that resonates with you and your life – there's lots!



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## Discussion group questions

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- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- What was your favourite quote as you read? Share what you liked the most as you read your way through the book.
- 'For wisdom is like her name; she is not readily perceived by many.' (Sirach 6.22) Why do we struggle so much to perceive true wisdom do you think?
- What did you think about Sirach's attitude to women and slaves? Why do you think he wrote about them as he did?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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