

SIRACH 38:24 – 43:33

²⁴The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure; only the one who is free from toil can become wise.

²⁵How can one become wise who handles the plough, and who glories in the shaft of a goad, who drives oxen and is occupied with their work, and whose talk is about bulls?

²⁶He sets his heart on ploughing furrows, and he is careful about fodder for the livestock.

²⁷So it is with every engraver and designer who labours by night as well as by day; those who cut the signets of seals, careful to ensure the variety of each marking as they set their heart on painting a lifelike image, and they are careful to finish their work.

²⁸So it is with the smith, sitting by the anvil, intent on his iron-work; the flame of the fire melts his flesh, and he toils away in the heat from the furnace; the sound of the hammer deafens his ears, and his eyes are on the object he is forming. He sets his heart on finishing his handiwork, and he is careful to complete its every detail.

²⁹So it is with the potter sitting at his work and turning the wheel with his feet; he is always deeply concerned over his products, and he produces them in quantity. ³⁰He moulds the clay with his hands and makes it pliable with his feet; he sets his heart to finish the glazing, and he takes care in firing the kiln.

Only verses 24-28 of chapter 38 of the Hebrew text has been recovered. Ben Sira's interest is in the skill of a scribe (סֹפֵר; verse 24). The point he wants to make here is that to become a scribe a person needs the leisure to study the Scriptures and traditions. This puts it out of the reach of those who are involved in manual labour. This labour is necessary for the functioning of a community, but it leaves no leisure for study.

He begins with the work of a farmer (verses 25-26).

He goes on to describe the craft of an engraver and designer. This is less arduous than the life of a farmer, but demands all a person's attention. It leaves no room for the commitment required of a scribe.

The work of a smith is very demanding. It, too, demands all a man's energy (verse 28).

A potter, too, has to give his whole attention to his craft (verses 29-30).

The trades noted in the previous verses are essential for the maintenance of the community, and those who are skilled in them will always find work. But their trade does not equip them for a role in public life.

³¹All these rely on their hands, and all are skillful in their own work. ³²Without them no city can be lived in, and wherever they live, they will not go hungry.

Yet they are not sought out for the council of the people, ³³nor do they attain eminence in the public assembly. They do not sit in the judge's seat, nor do they understand the decisions of the courts; they cannot expound discipline or judgment, and they are not found among the rulers. ³⁴But they maintain the fabric of the world, and their concern is for the exercise of their trade.

In the final sentence in verse 34, Ben Sira returns to his topic, which is the work of a scribe, who uses the leisure given him to devote himself to 'the fear of God' (see 1:11-21, pages 19-23, and 34:14-20, page 136), and to 'the study of the law of the Most High'.

How different the one who devotes himself to the fear of God and to the study of the law of the Most High!

Ezra the scribe is described in similar terms:

Ezra was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that YHWH the God of Israel had given ... Ezra had set his heart to study the law of YHWH, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.

– Ezra 7:6, 10

¹He studies the wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with prophecies. ²He preserves the sayings of the famous and penetrates the subtleties of parables. ³He seeks out the hidden meanings of proverbs and is at home with the obscurities of parables.

⁴He serves among the great and appears before rulers. He travels in foreign lands and learns what is good and evil in the human lot. ⁵He 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.

⁶If 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. ⁷God will direct his counsel and knowledge, as he meditates on his mysteries.

⁸He will show the wisdom of what he has learned, and will glory in the law of the YHWH's covenant.

⁹Many will praise his understanding; his fame can never be effaced. His memory will not disappear, and his name will live through all generations. ¹⁰Nations will speak of his wisdom, and the congregation will proclaim his praise. ¹¹While he lives he is one out of a thousand, and when he dies he leaves a good name.

Ben Sira goes on to describe the life of a scribe. None of this is extant in Hebrew. Besides the Torah, the scribe must study the Wisdom literature and the Prophets, and become adept in interpreting the metaphorical language of proverbs and parables (verses 1-3).

Leisure opens up for the scribe the possibility of travel (verse 4), and exposes him to the wisdom of other cultures. Only prayer will make him truly wise (verse 5). Ben Sira knows that sin is the main obstacle to the acquiring of wisdom, for it separates a person from God, wisdom's source. For this reason the scribe 'asks pardon for his sins'(verse 5).

Ben Sira acknowledges that all wisdom comes from 'the Almighty YHWH'(κύριος ὁ μέγας). Out of his prayer flows inspired wisdom (verse 6). 'God will direct his counsel and knowledge as he meditates on his mysteries'(verse 7). He will share with others the wisdom he has learned, basing his teaching on 'YHWH's covenant as expressed in 'the law'(verse 8).

His contribution to the community is such that he will hold a position of honour and experience the praise that is his due, from the Gentiles as well as from the congregation (ἐκκλησία) of Israel (verses 9-11).

The recovered Hebrew text for chapter 39 runs from verse 15 to the end.

In verses 12-15 Ben Sira invites the reader to proclaim with joy the greatness of YHWH.

Verse 16 states the theme of the praise: 'all God has made, all God does, is very good' (see Genesis 1:31). We cannot comprehend what things are or why things happen. All we need to know is that everything is in God's hands, and is right for its time. Everything is an expression of God's 'saving power' (verse 18).

The Nile and the Euphrates were noted for their importance to agriculture. Verse 23 recalls God's expelling the Canaanites from the land promised to Israel, and the destruction brought upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Sinners share in the good things of creation, but they also experience God's punishment (verse 25).

Of special interest is Ben Sira's list of 'the basic necessities of human life' in his day (verse 26).

¹²Once more I will set forth my theme to shine like the moon when it is full. ¹³Listen to me, my faithful children, and blossom like a rose growing by a stream of water. ¹⁴Send out fragrance like incense, and put forth blossoms like a lily. Scatter the fragrance, and sing a hymn of praise; bless YHWH for all his works. ¹⁵Proclaim the greatness of his name and give thanks to him with praise, with songs on your lips, and with the lyre; this is what you shall say in thanksgiving:

¹⁶All the works of God are very good, and whatever he commands will be done at the appointed time. ¹⁷No one can say, 'What is this?' or 'Why is that?' – for at the appointed time all such questions will be answered. At his word the waters stood in a heap, and the reservoirs of water at the word of his mouth. ¹⁸He has but to command and his will is carried out, and none can limit his saving power.

¹⁹The works of all are before him, and nothing can be hidden from his eyes.

²⁰From the beginning to the end of time he can see everything, and nothing is too marvellous for him. ²¹No one can say, 'What is this?' or 'Why is that?' – for everything has been created for its own purpose.

²²His blessing overflows like the Nile; like the Euphrates it enriches the surface of the earth. ²³But his wrath drives out the nations, as when he turned a watered land into a salt marsh. ²⁴To the faithful his ways are level, but full of pitfalls for the wicked. ²⁵From the beginning good things were created for the good, but for sinners good things and bad. ²⁶The basic necessities of human life are water and fire and iron and salt and wheat flour and milk and honey, the blood of the grape and oil and cloth. ²⁷All these are good for the godly, but for sinners they turn into evils.

Everything is good in its appointed time

²⁸There are winds designed to punish, and in their fury they can dislodge mountains; on the day of reckoning they will hurl their strength and appease the anger of their Maker. ²⁹Fire and hail, famine and pestilence, all these have been created for punishment; ³⁰the fangs of wild animals and scorpions and vipers, and the sword that punishes the ungodly with destruction. All these were created to meet a need and are kept in his storehouse for the proper time. ³¹They take delight in doing his bidding, always ready for his service on earth; and when their time comes they never disobey his command."

³²This is why from the beginning I have been convinced of all this and have thought it out and left it in writing: ³³All the works of God are good, and he will supply every need in its time. ³⁴No one can say, "This is not as good as that," for everything proves good in its appointed time. ³⁵So now sing praise with all your heart and voice, and bless the name of the Holy One.

Ben Sira now describes the instruments God uses to punish the evil. On the 'anger' of God (verse 28) see 1:11-21, page 19-23, and 5:6, page 50.

Verses 32-35 serve as an epilogue to Ben Sira's hymn of praise.

We have practically the whole of the Hebrew text for chapter 40. Ben Sira has assured his students that all God's work are good (see 39:16, 33), and he has marvelled at God's providence (39:16-35). However, perplexity, fear and anxiety are part of the human condition. Everyone suffers them whatever their situation. The first part of verse 3 refers to the civil ruler; the first half of verse 4 to the high priest. These suffer the same anxieties as the poorest of the poor.

In verses 8-10 Ben Sira turns from emotional and psychological fears to afflictions that come from outside, and that God uses as instruments of punishment for the wicked. It is the wicked who are to blame for them, though the innocent suffer as well.

¹God has allotted great anxiety, and a heavy yoke is laid on the children of Adam, from the day they come forth from their mother's womb until the day they return to the mother of all the living. ²Perplexities and fear of heart are theirs, and anxious thought of the day of their death. ³From the one who sits on a splendid throne to the one who grovels in dust and ashes, ⁴from the one who wears purple and a crown to the one who is clothed in the coarsest of garments, ⁵there is anger and envy and trouble and unrest, and fear of death, and fury and strife. And when he rests upon his bed, his cares disturb his sleep at night. ⁶He gets little or no rest; he struggles in his sleep as he did by day. He is troubled by the visions of his mind like one who is fleeing from pursuit. ⁷At the moment of his greatest anxiety he wakes up, astonished that his fears were groundless. ⁸To all creatures, human and animal, but to sinners seven times more, ⁹come death and bloodshed and strife and sword, calamities and famine and ruin and plague. ¹⁰All these were created for the wicked, and on their account destruction hastens.

The fruits of evil and good

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

¹²All bribery and injustice will be blotted out, but good faith will last forever.

¹³The wealth of the unjust will dry up like a river, and crash like a loud clap of thunder in a storm. ¹⁴As a generous person has cause to rejoice, so lawbreakers will utterly fail. ¹⁵The children of the ungodly put out few branches; they are unhealthy roots on sheer rock. ¹⁶The reeds by water or on a river bank are withered before all other plants;

¹⁷but kindness is like a garden of blessings, and righteousness endures forever.

The opening statement in verse 40 is taken from Genesis 3:19. Man's breath returns to God; his body returns to the dust from which it was formed.

Bribery and injustice will not benefit the sinner. Verse 12 is absent from the recovered Hebrew text. The Septuagint πίστις can be translated 'good faith', 'fidelity', or 'loyalty'.

Verse 15 reminds us of Jesus' parable about the seed which fell on rocky ground (see Matthew 13:5).

By way of contrast with the punishment that falls upon those who break God's law, the fruit of those who welcome God's 'kindness' (חֲסֵד) and 'righteousness' (צְדָקָה) 'endures forever' (verse 17

In verses 18-27 Ben Sira speaks of the special joys that come to those who are kind and righteous (see verse 17).

The 'treasure' in verse 18 is clarified in verse 19 as being "wisdom".

From the second part of verse 19 to verse 25, Ben Sira lists seven special joys. A special joy is a wife who is 'devoted' (verse 19), and 'sensible' (verse 23). Friends, too, feature in the list (verse 20).

Having opened with wisdom, he concludes the list with God's greatest gift, and the one that brings most joy: 'fear of God/YHWH' (verses 26-27; see 1:11-21, pages 19-23).

The topic of verses 28-30 is begging. A wise person can be poor, but must not lose all self-respect by begging.

For those who have no shame, begging can become an obsession, a fire that takes over and cannot be extinguished.

¹⁸Wealth and wages make life sweet, but better than either is finding a treasure. ¹⁹Children and the building of a city establish one's name, but better than either is the one who finds wisdom.

Cattle and orchards make one prosperous; but a devoted wife is accounted better than either. ²⁰Wine and strong drink gladden the heart, but the love of friends is better than either. ²¹The flute and the harp make sweet melody, but a pleasant voice is better than either. ²²The eye desires grace and beauty, but the produce of the field more than either. ²³A friend or companion is always welcome, but a sensible wife is better than either. ²⁴Kindred and helpers are for a time of trouble, but almsgiving rescues better than either. ²⁵Gold and silver make one stand firm, but sound judgment is esteemed more than either.

²⁶Riches and strength build up confidence, but the fear of God is better than either. There is no want in the fear of YHWH, and with it there is no need to seek for other help. ²⁷The fear of God is a paradise of blessing, and covers a person better than any glory.

²⁸My son, do not lead the life of a beggar; it is better to die than to beg. ²⁹When one looks to the table of another, one's way of life cannot be considered a life. One loses self-respect with another person's food. One who is intelligent and well instructed guards against that. ³⁰In the mouth of the shameless begging is sweet, but it kindles a fire inside him.

Death

¹O 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! ²O 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. ³Do not fear death's decree for you; remember those who went before you and those who will come after. ⁴This 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.

⁵The children of sinners are abominable children, and they frequent the haunts of the ungodly. ⁶The inheritance of the children of sinners will perish, and on their offspring will be a perpetual disgrace. ⁷Children will blame an ungodly father, for they suffer disgrace because of him. ⁸Woe to you, the ungodly, who have forsaken the law of the Most High! ⁹If you have children, calamity will be theirs; you will beget them only for groaning. When you stumble, there is lasting joy; and when you die, a curse is your lot. ¹⁰Whatever comes from earth returns to earth; so the ungodly go from curse to destruction.

¹¹The human body is a fleeting thing, but a virtuous name will never be blotted out. ¹²Have regard for your name, since it will outlive you longer than a thousand precious treasures. ¹³The days of a good life are numbered, but a good name lasts forever.

Almost all the Hebrew of chapter 41 has been recovered. The focus of verses 1-4 is death.

Death comes to all and is part of 'the will of the Most High'. Nothing is gained by fearing it.

In verses 5-10 Ben Sira speaks of the fate of sinners and their offspring..

The 'ungodly' are defined as those 'who have forsaken the law of the Most High (תִּזְוֶה עֲלֵיוֹן)'. Ben Sira may have in mind especially those Jews who have abandoned their faith in favour of sharing in the advantages of Greek culture (compare 1Maccabees 3:5-8).

In verses 11-13 he contrasts the fate of the apostates with the life of the virtuous.

Verses 19 and 22 are missing from the Septuagint, and the verses of this passage are jumbled in the Hebrew text that has been recovered.

After a general statement about shame (verse 16) in 41:17 – 42:1 Ben Sira gives examples of when we should feel ashamed. In the following passage (42:1-8) he will go on to give examples of when shame is an inappropriate response.

‘Sexual immorality’ (verse 17) translates the Hebrew *zʿnût* (זָנָה); see Hosea 4:11; 6:10; Jeremiah 3:2,9; 13:27; Ezekiel 23:27; 43:9).

‘Agreement’ (verse 19) translates the Hebrew *bʿrît* (בְּרִית), often translated ‘commitment’, or ‘covenant’. The other examples are self-explanatory.

¹⁴My children, be true to your training and be at peace; hidden wisdom and unseen treasure – of what value is either? ¹⁵Better are those who hide their folly than those who hide their wisdom.

¹⁶Therefore show respect for my words; for it is not good to feel shame in every circumstance, nor is every kind of feelings of shame to be approved.

¹⁷Be ashamed of sexual immorality, before your father or mother; and of a lie, before a prince or a ruler; ¹⁸of a crime, before a judge or magistrate; and of a breach of the law, before the congregation and the people; of unjust dealing, before your partner or your friend; ¹⁹and of theft, in the place where you live.

Be ashamed of breaking an oath or agreement, and of leaning on your elbow at meals; of surliness in receiving or giving, ²⁰and of silence, before those who greet you; of looking at a prostitute, ²¹and of rejecting the appeal of a relative; of taking away someone’s portion or gift, and of gazing at another man’s wife; ²²of meddling with his servant-girl – and do not approach her bed; of abusive words, before friends – and do not be insulting after making a gift.

^{42:1}Be ashamed of repeating what you hear, and of betraying secrets. Then you will show proper shame, and will find favour with everyone.

When shame is inappropriate

¹Of the following things do not be ashamed, lest you sin to save face:

²Do not be ashamed of the law of the Most High and his statutes,

and of rendering judgment to acquit the ungodly;

³of keeping accounts with a partner or with travelling companions, and of dividing an inheritance or property; ⁴of accuracy with scales and balances, and of tested measures and weights; ⁵of acquiring little or much by bargaining with merchants,

and of frequent disciplining of children, and of beating the back of a disloyal slave.

⁶Where there is an untrustworthy wife, a seal is a good thing; and where there are many hands, lock things up.

⁷When you make a deposit, be sure it is counted and weighed, and when you give or receive, put it all in writing.

⁸Do not be ashamed to correct the stupid or foolish or the aged who are guilty of sexual immorality. Then you will show your sound training, and will be approved by all.

The Hebrew for chapter 42 has been recovered. Ben Sira lists here matters about which we should not be ashamed.

The first is ‘the law of the Most High’, an expression already found in 41:8. ‘Statutes’ translates the Hebrew *hoq*. The etymology suggests the idea of something engraved, and therefore permanent.

Even a person who is ungodly should be judged according to the law, and acquitted if appropriate.

Verses 3-5 need no explanation.

One should not be ashamed to discipline children and slaves (see 30:1-13).

It is right to seal documents if you can’t be sure your wife will not read and use them. Likewise it is appropriate to lock things away when there are a lot of people around who might be tempted to steal.

The meaning of verses 7-8 is apparent.

In verses 9-10 Ben Sira describes the concerns a father has over his daughters.

He urges his students, when they have a family of their own, to ‘keep strict watch over a daughter’(verse 11).

Verses 12-14 betray the mentality of the time. Girls were to be kept away from conversations with married women lest they learn too much and pick up a woman’s wickedness.

The first part of verse 14 is an outlandish example of the pro-male mentality of the time, though it is slightly softened by the final part of the verse. However, there is some uncertainty about the translation of the final phrase. The NRSV translation is very different. It reads: ‘it is woman who brings shame and disgrace!’

⁹A daughter is a treasure that keeps her father watchful, and worry over her robs him of sleep; when she is young, for fear she may not marry, or if married, for fear she may be childless; ¹⁰while a virgin, for fear she may be seduced and become pregnant in her father’s house; or having a husband, for fear she may be unfaithful, or may be unable to have children.

¹¹My son, keep strict watch over your daughter, or she may make you a laughingstock to your enemies, a byword in the city and the assembly of the people, and put you to shame in public gatherings.

See that there is no lattice in her room, no spot that overlooks the approaches to the house. ¹²Do not let her parade her beauty before any man,

or spend her time among married women; ¹³for just as moths come from garments, so from a woman comes woman’s wickedness.

¹⁴Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman’s goodness, but better a religious daughter than a shameless son.

¹⁵I will now call to mind God's works, and will declare what I have seen. By the word of YHWH his works are made; and all who do his will are acceptable to him.

¹⁶As the sun looks down on everything with its light, so the glory of YHWH fills all that he has made.

¹⁷Even God's holy ones fail in recounting all his marvellous works, though YHWH has established things so that the universe may stand firm in his glory.

¹⁸He searches out the abyss and the human heart; he understands their innermost secrets. For the Most High knows all that may be known; he sees from of old the things that are to come. ¹⁹He discloses what has been and what is to be, and he reveals the deepest secrets. ²⁰No thought escapes him, and nothing is hidden from him. ²¹He has set in order the splendours of his wisdom; he is from all eternity one and the same. Nothing can be added or taken away, and he needs no one to be his counsellor.

²²How beautiful are all his works, delightful to gaze upon and a joy to behold!²³All these things live and remain forever; each creature is preserved to meet a particular need.

²⁴All things come in pairs, one opposite the other, and he has made nothing in vain. ²⁵Each supplements the virtues of the other. Who could ever tire of seeing his glory?

Ben Sira concludes this section of his work with a hymn of praise of the Creator (42:15 – 43:33). The universe came into being in response to God's word (see Genesis 1). This is a lesson human beings should learn. Their lives, too, should be in response to God's word (revealed in the Torah).

Gerard Manley Hopkins expresses the truth of verse 16 in his poem *God's Grandeur*. Indeed 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God.'

If the angelic hosts cannot adequately recount the splendours of God's creation, Ben Sira knows that he will necessarily fall short in the praise he offers.

In verses 18-21 the readers are reminded that everything is known to God, who has complete control over the mysterious forces of chaos ('the abyss', see Genesis 1:2), and who penetrates to the depths of the human heart. Everything is ordered by divine providence.

All that God has created has its own beauty, and everything has its place in the divine harmony (verses 22-25).

In verses 1-12, Ben Sira delights in the beauty of the heavens, which reflect the glory of God. He speaks first of the sun, as does the Psalmist:

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.

– Psalm 19:1-6

The moon (verses 6-8) is not only beautiful. It is central to the life of Israel as the ‘sacred seasons and pilgrimage festivals’ are determined by it.

Verses 9-10 speak of the starry hosts. We need to remember that they were thought of as living creatures, formed from the purest of the elements (fire) and set in the heavens to keep watch over the earth and its inhabitants. They made up God’s heavenly host.

Finally, in verses 11-12, he speaks of the rainbow. God ‘stretched it out’ as a sign of the covenant he made after the great Flood (see Genesis 9:12-17).

¹The beauty of the celestial heights and the clear vault of the sky, heaven itself manifests its glory.

²The sun at its rising in its full splendour, what a marvellous instrument it is, the work of the Most High! ³At noon it parches the land, and who can withstand its burning heat? ⁴Like a blazing furnace of metal, the sun’s rays set the mountains aflame. Its fiery tongue consumes the world; the eyes are burned by its fire. ⁵Great is YHWH who made it; at his orders it hurries on its course.

⁶It is the moon that marks the changing seasons, governing the times, their everlasting sign. ⁷By it we know the sacred seasons and pilgrimage festivals, a light that wanes in its course. ⁸The new moon, as its name suggests, renews itself; how marvellous it is in this change, a beacon to the hosts on high, shining in the vault of the heavens!

⁹The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven, a glittering array in the heights of God. ¹⁰On YHWH’s orders they stand in their appointed places; they never relax in their watches.

¹¹Look at the rainbow, and praise him who made it; it is exceedingly beautiful in its brightness. ¹²It encircles the sky with its glorious arc; the hands of God have stretched it out.

God's wonderful creation

¹³By his command he sends the hail and speeds on the lightnings of his judgment.

¹⁴Therefore the storehouses are opened, and the rain clouds fly out like vultures. ¹⁵In his majesty he gives the clouds their strength, and the hailstones are broken in pieces. ^{17a}The voice of his thunder rebukes the earth; ¹⁶when he appears, the mountains shake. At his will the south wind blows; ^{17b}as do the storm winds from the north and the whirlwind.

He scatters the snow like birds flying down, and its descent is like locusts alighting. ¹⁸The eye is dazzled by the beauty of its whiteness, and the mind marvels as it falls.

¹⁹He pours frost over the earth like salt, and icicles form like pointed thorns. ²⁰The cold north wind blows, and ice freezes on the water; it settles on every pool of water, and the water puts it on like a breastplate.

²¹He consumes the mountains and burns up the wilderness, and withers the tender grass like fire. ²²A mist quickly heals all things; the falling dew gives refreshment from the heat.

²³By his plan he stilled the deep and planted islands in it. ²⁴Those who sail the sea tell of its dangers, and we marvel at what we hear. ²⁵In it are strange and marvellous creatures, all kinds of living things, and huge sea-monsters. ²⁶Because of him each of his messengers succeeds, and at his bidding accomplishes his will.

He sings now of the various elements of nature that carry out God's will. In this context we might cite Psalm 29:

Ascribe to YHWH, O heavenly beings,
ascribe to YHWH glory and strength.
Ascribe to YHWH the glory of his name;
worship YHWH in holy splendour.

The voice of YHWH is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
YHWH, over mighty waters.

The voice of YHWH is powerful;
the voice of YHWH is full of majesty.

The voice of YHWH breaks the cedars;
YHWH breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

The voice of YHWH flashes forth
flames of fire. The voice of YHWH
shakes the wilderness;
YHWH shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of YHWH causes the oaks
to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and
in his temple all say, "Glory!"

YHWH sits enthroned over the flood;
YHWH sits enthroned as king forever.
May YHWH give strength to his people!
May YHWH bless his people with peace!

'The deep'(verse 23) is the mythical sea monster, Rahab. There are dangers in sea travel, but the deep, too, is under divine control.

We might let Teilhard de Chardin express the meaning of Ben Sira's conclusion in verse 27, when he states that 'God is the heart and the beyond of everything'. God transcends creation, but is found at its heart, for God's magnificent creation expresses something of the beauty of its Creator.

The conclusion (verse 33) goes to the heart of Ben Sira's work, when he speaks of fear of YHWH (the religious awe that we experience in the presence of the divine) and wisdom.

²⁷We could say more but could never say enough; let the final word be: "He is the all."

²⁸Where can we find the strength to praise him? For he is greater than all his works. ²⁹Awesome is YHWH and very great, and marvellous is his power. ³⁰Glorify YHWH and exalt him as much as you can, for he surpasses even that. When you exalt him, summon all your strength, and do not grow weary, for you cannot praise him enough.

³¹Who has seen him and can describe him? Or who can extol him as he is? ³²Many things greater than these lie hidden, for I have seen but few of his works.

³³For YHWH has made all things, and to those who fear him he has given wisdom.

