



# Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship

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## Abstract

The Wisdom of Ben Sira is the biblical book that says the most about friendship. This study elucidates Ben Sira's teaching on friendship within his religious and cultural context. Chapter 1 surveys previous research on the topic; friendship in the ancient world; Ben Sira's historical setting; authorship and social setting; the sage's theology and social ethics; literary aspects; textual questions; and the methodology followed in the study. Chapters 2-6 consider the seven major pericopes on friendship: Sirach 6:5-17; 9:10-16; 13:15-23; 19:13-17; 22:19-26; 27:16-21; 37:1-6. In each case, the discussion consists of delimitation of the pericope; text, text-critical notes, and translation; poetic analysis; context; and verse-by-verse exegesis. Where no Hebrew text is extant, a reconstructed text is given, based on the Greek and Syriac versions. Chapter 7 summarizes the findings, while an appendix surveys the incidental references to friendship in Ben Sira's book. The sage's teaching focuses on four main areas: the goodness of friendship; caution in friendship; faithfulness toward friends; and the fear of God as the context for true friendship. Also apparent is Ben Sira's indebtedness to earlier writings, principally Israel's Scriptures, but also the Greek poetry of Theognis and the prototype of a demotic Egyptian wisdom text, Papyrus Insinger

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