3

Sirach 9:10–16

1. Introduction

The third major unit of the Wisdom of Ben Sira, namely, 6:18–14:19, offers the longest treatment of friendship in the book, since both 9:10–16 and 13:15–23 (as well as 7:12, 18; 12:8–9; 14:13) deal with the theme. This chapter will consider 9:10–16. The pericope speaks positively of the old friend (9:10), one who is wise and just (9:14–16), while warning against friendship with the wicked and the proud (9:11–13). In 9:10–16 the primary text is H^A, supplemented in its few lacunae by G and S.¹

2. Delimitation

This section will first examine the indicators that 9:1–16 is a pericope separate from 8:1–19 and 9:17–10:18, and then will delimit 9:10–16 as the second half of 9:1–16, distinct from 9:1–9.

a. Delimitation of 9:1–16 from 8:1–19

Sirach 8:1–19, a poem on prudence in social relationships,² is a series of prohibitions; every bicolon contains either "do not" or an explanatory "because". The pericope does not mention women, who form the whole subject of 9:1–9.

b. Delimitation of 9:1–16 from 9:17–10:18

The content of 9:17–10:18, which Prato considers to be a tract on government, distinguishes it as a separate pericope from 9:1–16. The first

¹ For the text of 9:10–16 H^A, see Adler, "Some Missing Chapters of Ben Sira," 469. On Sir 9:1–18, see Botha, "Through the Figure of a Woman," with discussion of delimitation on p. 23.

² Skehan and Di Lella, Wisdom of Ben Sira, 209. Note that the final bicolon (8:19) contains end-rhyme, which emphasizes the conclusion of 8:1–19.
subsection on rulers (9:17–10:5) is marked off as a distinct unit by a double inclusio: יִד ("hands," 9:17a) matches יָד ("hand," 10:4a, 5a), and יָנוּ ("man") occurs in both 9:18a and 10:4b.³

c. Delimitation of 9:1–16 As a Pericope

As regards the subject matter, 9:1–16 is a pericope concerning two kinds of relationships: with women (vv. 1–9) and with male friends (vv. 10–16). Although 9:1–16 has some verbal links with the preceding and following pericopes, its sharp focus on women (vv. 1–9) and on desirable and undesirable male friends (vv. 10–16) marks it as a discrete pericope.

Stylistic features also indicate that 9:1–16 is a separate pericope. If the text of HA is accepted, the passage is a nonalphabetic acrostic of twenty-two bicola, although the pericope has twenty-one bicola in G (and twenty-three in S). The passage displays rhyme in its opening bicola (vv. 1–3) and its last bicolon (v. 16).

d. Delimitation of 9:10–16 within 9:1–16

Sirach 9:10–16 forms the second half of a unit dealing with relationships. Whereas in the first half (9:1–9) concerning relationships with women, the noun יָנוּ (“woman”) occurs five times (HA, vv. 1a, 2a, 3a, 8a, 8c),⁴ it never appears in 9:10–16. Similarly, whereas 9:10–16 thrice employs תּו ("man, person"),⁵ twice in the singular (vv. 11a, 13a) and once in the plural (v. 16a), the term never appears in 9:1–9. Moreover, while 9:10–16 twice employs דָּרָה ("friend," vv. 10a, 10c), the root בָּה (occurs only once (v. 8d) in 9:1–9.⁶ The same sequence of women (9:1–9) followed by friends (9:10–16) also occurs in 36:26–37:6, where 36:26–31 discusses women and 37:1–6 deals with friends.

Stylistic features also indicate that 9:1–16 is a pericope in two parts. Both units begin with prohibitions; לָא ("do not," vv. 1a, 2a, 3a) opens the first three bicola of 9:1–9 (according to HA), while three of the first four bicola of 9:10–16 also begin with נָה (HA, vv. 10a, 11a, 12a). Furthermore, just as 9:1–9 opens with rhyme in the first three bicola (HA, vv. 1ab, 2ab, 3ab), so 9:10–16 begins with rhyme between the first two bicola (vv. 10b, 10d). Likewise, just as 9:1–9 includes a rhymed wordplay within the last bicolon (תּו, “you will incline,” v. 9c; יָנוּ, “you


⁴ As well as these five instances, G uses גָּעוּ ("woman") also in 9:9a.

⁵ G once utilizes אֲנִחַיו ("human being, man," 9:13a) and once אֲנִי ("man," 9:16a [plural]).

⁶ On the textual question in 9:8d HA, see table 2 in the appendix.
will decline,” v. 9d), so 9:10–16 closes with rhyme (vv. 16a, 16b) in the final bicolon.  

Moreover, each half of the pericope ends with a concluding theme typical of Ben Sira. The last word of 9:1–9 is הָאָדָם הַקְּדֵשׁ (“the pit/grave,” v. 9d), just as other pericopes close with mention of “worms” (7:17b, concluding 7:1–17), “the end” (7:36a, concluding 7:18–36), “death” (11:28a, concluding 11:7–28; 28:6b, concluding 27:22–28:7), and “Sheol” (41:4d, concluding 41:1–4). In like manner, 9:10–16 finishes with the mention of the “fear of God” (9:16b), a theme that often concludes Ben Sira’s pericopes elsewhere (1:30e; 6:16b; 23:27c; 25:10–11; 38:34c S; 40:26–27; 50:29).  

3. Text of 9:10–16

I

אלה התפש והὶים.

יִנְנָה תַּנְשָׁה חֲרִים.

II

אלה התפש וה.singletonList

אבלلاح יתע מה垛מה.

III

אלא תפשיה פהרי פגודה.

садק יהיה ואסוף נפשיה.

IV

כָּפָ֣ךְוּ תַּנְכָּה רֵאָ֣שׁ

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8 This word also concludes 3:25–4:10 in H^4^ (4:10d), but the reading of G seems preferable there.
9 Cf. Haspecker, *Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach*, 136 n. 30. For further discussion, see my exegesis of 9:16b below.
10 The versions of Ben Sira often confuse the “fear” (רָאָיָה) and the “law” (תַּנְכָּה) of God, given their interconnection for the sage; compare 6:37 G with H^4^ and S; also 9:15 G with S^W^. 
4. Text-Critical Notes

The text follows H^a throughout, except where noted below. Although generally reliable, H^a has suffered damage in the case of a few letters in verses 10–13, but the restoration from G and S is probable.

10a–a. The phrase "will not equal him" represents G^BC^V oûk ἐστὶν ἐφίσος αὑτῷ ("is not equal to him") and the reading of S ("does not equal him"). Although the final Hebrew letter is uncertain, the damaged phrase in H^a seems to read יִרְאֵהוּ לֹא לְשַׁמְשֵׁהוּ ("will not resemble you") or יאֵהוּ לֹא לְשַׁמְשֵׁהוּ ("has not known you"). Peters suggests the possible reading יִרְאֵהוּ לֹא ("will not resemble him"). However, besides the evidence of G and S, poetic considerations also favor יאֵהוּ לֹא, which rhymes with יֹדֵע (v. 10d) and exhibits assonance with יִדְע, which (v. 10a).

10b. In the word יֹדֵע the י has to be supplied in a MS lacuna, while the ע is an example of plene spelling sometimes found in H^a (compare the unusual plene verbs in 7:17a and 10:6a). G adds the explanatory phrase μετ’ εὐφροσύνης ("with joy"), absent in H^a and S.

11c–c. Whereas H^a (followed by S) has יְרֵע ("a wicked person"), G reads δοξα αὐτῷ ("the glory of a sinner").

12d. Where H^a has a lacuna, I supply the verb יֵעֵק ("envy") from S. G has εὐδοκίας ("be pleased"), possibly from יִרְא ("delight"). However, the verb יֵעֵק provides a wordplay with the final verb in verse 12b, יִרְא, and similar anaphoric repetitions of an opening phrase occur elsewhere in the book (e.g. 4:29–31; 5:3–4; 16:8–9).

12e–e. The form יִדְע is best vocalized יֵדְע ("arrogant"). Psalm 124:5 uses the word symbolically (spelled plene); here Ben Sira employs it as a noun, "an arrogant person" (cf. Der. Er. Rab. 2). Where H^a (followed by

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12 Peters, Der jüngst wiederaufgefunden hebräische Text, 12.

13 Also in connection with wine, G^c uses the word ἐφίσος in Sir 31:27a: ἐφίσον ζωῆς οἶνος αὐθήρωσες ("for human beings wine is something equal to life"). See briefly C. Wagner, Die Septuaginta-Hapaxlegomena im Buch Jesus Sirach (BZAW 282; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 216.


15 Comparison with G suggests that the adjectival noun יִדְע ("arrogant person") also be read in Sir 12:14 (G: ᾱμαρτωλῶ); 13:24 (G: ἀσεβοῦς); 35:23 (G: υἱῷστῶν).
S) has בָּהֵר אוֹר מֶלְאֵךְ ("a prosperous arrogant person"), G<sup>BA</sup> reads ἐν εὐδοκίᾳ ἁσβων ("in the pleasure of impious persons," = בָּרֵךְ [וֹדֵה]).

12<sup>f</sup>. For ἡ ("time," H<sup>8</sup>), G (<σως>) and S presuppose ἡ ("even till"); but ἡ πρὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ("at the time of death") in verse 12b provides a better parallel to ἡμέρα ("his day") in verse 11b.

13<sup>g–h</sup>. Damage to H<sup>A</sup> has obscured some letters in the phrase ἐξιλθήσεται ("empowered to kill"), but the above restoration on the basis of G and S is highly probable.

13<sup>h</sup>. For the noun τραχύς ("net"; cf. plural noun in S) in H<sup>A</sup>, G reads ἐπάλξεως πόλεως ("the battlements of a city"). Thus, the original reading may be τσְדִיקֵי פֶתַר (or perhaps מִשְׁרְשְׁרָה), meaning either "nets" (S; cf. H<sup>8</sup>) or "fortifications" (G);<sup>17</sup> the word provides assonance with ἡμέρα (v. 13e), and also occurs in 9:3b ("nets," "snares"). Probably a scribe substituted τραχύς by analogy with Job 18:8.<sup>18</sup>

15<sup>i–j</sup>. Where H<sup>A</sup> has יתנין ("among them," or with initial י vowel "their discernments";<sup>19</sup> in either case the plural suffix is difficult), G has ἐν νόμῳ ψιθυροῦ ("in the law of the Most High"), equivalent to הבשָׂהְתֶּךָ נָחַל (cf. L: in praeceptis Altissimi); the Hebrew phrase occurs in 41:4 H<sup>M</sup>; 41:8 H<sup>M</sup>; 42:2 H<sup>BM</sup>; 49:4 H<sup>B</sup>. However, S<sup>W</sup> reads "in the fear of the Lord" (equivalent to בְּচִרְצֵיהֶם, וַחֲשֵׁית הָרִים.)<sup>20</sup>

5. Translation

I

10 Do not abandon an old friend, for a new one will not equal him.

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<sup>16</sup> For the lack of an initial preposition such as ב ("at"), compare the phrase לַעֲנָה ("[at] the time of his resting," Sir 40:5 and 46:19); see also Ps 69:14: לַעֲנָה ("[at] a time of favor").

<sup>17</sup> For a similar ambiguity underlying Sir 26:22, see Skehan, "Tower of Death or Deadly Snare?" 127.

<sup>18</sup> For a similar scribal alteration, see how H<sup>8</sup> alters the second word of Sir 43:8a H<sup>M</sup> on the basis of Num 28:14.

<sup>19</sup> Botha ("Through the Figure of a Woman," 23) translates "their understanding" (presumably an intensive plural, as in Isa 27:11). For the emendation according to G, see Smend, Sirach, erklärt, 88.

<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere S shows a tendency to avoid mentioning "the law of the Most High" (e.g., 19:17b; 41:8b); cf. Winter, "The Origins of Ben Sira in Syriac," 498. Note that S<sup>i</sup> reads "in the ways of the Lord" in 9:15b.
A new friend is new wine,
and when it has grown old, afterward you may drink it.

II

11 Do not envy a wicked person,
for you cannot know when his day will be.
12 Do not envy a prosperous arrogant person;
remember that at the time of death he will not be held guiltless.

III

13 Keep far from anyone empowered to kill,
and you will not be terrified of the terrors of death.
But if you have approached, commit no offense,
else he may take away your life-breath.
Know that you will be stepping among traps,
and upon nets you will be walking about.

IV

14 In accordance with your ability, respond to your companion,
and confide in wise persons.
15 Let your planning be with someone discerning,
and let all your confidence be in the law of the Most High.
16 Let righteous persons be your meal-partners,
and let your glory be in the fear of God.

6. Poetic Analysis

The poem consists of four stanzas (2 + 2 + 3 + 3 bicola).²¹ The first stanza (9:10) compares old and new friends, using the adjectives בֵּית ("new," 3x) and יָדוֹ ("old," 1x), as well as the verb יָדוֹ ("grow old," 1x). The second stanza (9:11–12) warns the student not to be envious of the wicked, who are doomed to death; both bicola begin with the prohibition אֵינוּ דִּיקָה לָא ("do not envy"). The third stanza (9:13), urging extreme care in dealing with the ruling power, is bound together by the assonance between הָאָשֶׁרֶת ("the terrors of death," v. 13b) and הָאִשֶּׁר ("traps," v. 13e). Finally, the fourth stanza (9:14–16) returns to an appreciation of wise friends and is

²¹ Cf. Botha, “Through the Figure of a Woman,” 22–23.
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held together by the related terms נביאים ("wise persons," v. 14b), נביאים ("someone discerning," v. 15a), and נביאים ("righteous persons," v. 16a).

The two middle stanzas are linked by the explicit mention of death (דובא, 9:12b, 13b). Its antithesis, life, is implied in the first stanza by the mention of "wine" (cf. Sir 31:27). In the fourth stanza life is also suggested by the reference to its characteristic virtues of "righteousness" (9:16a; cf. Deut 16:20; Ps 119:144) and "the fear of God" (9:16b; cf. Deut 4:10; 6:24; 31:13). Indeed, this antithesis between life and death gives the pericope an a:b::b:a chiastic pattern.

Stanza 1: The Life-Giving Value of an Old Friend
Stanza 2: Avoiding Company Leading to Death
Stanza 3: Avoiding Company with One Empowered to Kill
Stanza 4: The Life-Giving Value of Wise Friends

The poem also exhibits inclusiones of meaning and sound. A word-pair (found in Prov 4:17 and 9:5, for instance) frames the whole pericope, which begins with יין ("wine," 9:10c) and ends with לחם (lit., "your bread," 9:16a). The whole passage is also bracketed by a rhyming inclusio, since one rhyme occurs between verses 10b and 10d, and another between verses 16a and 16b. In addition, below I will note a phonetic inclusio for each stanza.

a. Stanza 1. The Life-Giving Value of an Old Friend (9:10)

The first stanza exhibits a pattern of repetition, chiasm, and antithesis. The couplet repeats חבר ("friend," 2x), חדשים ("new," 3x), and the root יש ("old," v. 10a; "grow old," v. 10d). Indeed, repetition of "new" and "old" forms an a:b::b:a chiastic pattern: יש : יהיש (2x) :: יהיש : יש ("old : new :: new [2x] : and when it has grown old"). In this way, Ben Sira utilizes the antithesis between old and new to generate a chiastic structure for the couplet. Moreover, there is an explicit contrast between יש ויהיש ("an old friend," v. 10a) and יהיש ויהיש ("a new friend," v. 10c).

Sound patterns also contribute to the poetic effect of the stanza. If ייש ("will equal him") is the correct retroversion for the verb in verse

22 The middle stanzas also have an inclusio: לין אלי ("you cannot know," 9:11b) in the first bicolon of the second stanza matches לין ("know," 9:13e) in the last bicolon of the third stanza.

23 Another device serves to bracket the poem: its first word begins with א (9:10a), while its last word begins with ת (9:16b). The same device occurs in Ps 1, as well as Sir 5:1–6:4 H and 7:18–36 H.

24 Skehan and Di Lella, Wisdom of Ben Sira, 69.
10b (cf. G), it offers a striking rhyme with נַחֲנַת ("you may drink it") in verse 10d.²⁵ Ben Sira also creates a phonetic inclusio for the stanza, since assonance exists between נַחֲנַת (v. 10a) and נַחֲנַת (v. 10d). Indeed, the letter š occurs twice in each of the four cola. There is further alliteration with initial y (once in each colon). Finally, there is a clever wordplay between יִשְׁרָאֵל ("old") and יִשְׁרָאֵל ("will equal him").

b. Stanza 2. Avoiding Company Leading to Death (9:11–12)

The second stanza makes use of repetition, synonymy, and alliteration. Both bicola have the words: אל לא בר לא ("do not envy ... for/that ... not").²⁶ In addition, the term יֵרֵד ("arrogant person," v. 12a) serves as a synonym for יָרֹד ("wicked person," v. 11a), while the phrase מִזְמַע ("the time of death," v. 12b) parallels מִזְמַע ("his day," v. 11b). Sirach 9:12 exhibits an a:b::b:a' chiasm in its pattern of alliteration: l-q-n : z-m :: z-m : l-n-q²⁷ (אל תַּחֲנֹת). In addition, the series אל לא ... בר לא ("do not ... for/that ... not," 9:11–12) repeats the pattern of verse 10ab. Finally, as in stanza 1, a phonetic inclusio unites stanza 2, which begins with אל תַּחֲנֹת ("do not envy," v. 11a) and ends with תַּחֲנֹת ("he will not be held guiltless," v. 12b).

c. Stanza 3. Avoiding Company with One Empowered to Kill (9:13)

The third stanza employs antithesis and assonance. Antitheses exist between קִבּוּל ("keep far," v. 13a) and קִבּוּל ("you have approached," v. 13c), as well as between בַּל ("death," v. 13b) and בַּל ("your life-breath," v. 13d). The second bicolon exhibits alliteration of q, t, s, and m, with מִזְמַע ... מִזְמַע (v. 13c) followed by מִזְמַע ... מִזְמַע (v. 13d). Like the other stanzas, the third stanza contains a phonetic inclusio, with מַעַר (v. 13b) matching דֹּרֶשׁ (v. 13e). Assonance is also apparent in the phrase מַעַר (v. 13b), as well as between מַעַר (v. 13e) and מַעַר (v. 13f).

Moreover, the third stanza plays on the syntactic pattern of the previous two. Whereas the first two stanzas contain the sequence אל לא ... אל ("do not ... for/that ... not"), Ben Sira distributes this sequence throughout

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²⁵ Ben Sira often begins a pericope with rhyming bicola; see, for instance, 6:18b, 19b, 19d; 9:1b, 2b, 3b; 51:1b, 2a, 2c. Cf. my discussion of rhyme under “Ben Sira’s Poetry” in ch. 1 above.
²⁶ Here we assume the reconstruction (cf. S) of יֵרֵד in the lacuna of H (9:12a); see textual note 12d above. For stylistic reasons G tends to avoid repeating the same verb in consecutive bicola and prefers synonyms instead; e.g., יָרֹד (4:29a, 30a) corresponds to יִוֹב יִוֹוָע in 4:29a but to יִוֹֹז in 4:30a.
²⁷ Note the reversal of q and n in the final verb.
the third stanza: אֵל (v. 13b), שָׁמָיִם (v. 13c), and יִרְאָה (v. 13e). In addition, the sage has linked the second and third stanzas by the common use of איש (“person, anyone,” vv. 11a, 13a), מות (”death,” vv. 12b, 13a), and the root יד (“know,” vv. 11b, 13e).


The fourth stanza uses alliteration and assonance. Verse 14a has ק four times (כסף יבשע י捭 이런), while verse 14b employs מ three times (ברושים יבשע י捭 이런). In verse 15 Ben Sira continues the assonance between יבשות (”someone discerning”) and יבשות (“your planning”) as far asulist (“the Most High”) at the conclusion of the verse. All of the last four cola contain -ק a once, always at the end of the colon except in verse 15b. Indeed, the final stanza has a phonetic inclusio formed by the suffixed and plural endings: the threefold series יבשות/רשבים/ןכימים (v. 14) matches the subsequent threefold sequence לֶחֶם/אלוהים/השנים (v. 16). Furthermore, the stanza ends with rhyme between מ’ (“your meal,” v. 16a) and מ’ (“your glory,” v. 16b).

Stanza 4 also utilizes synonyms. The adjectives יבשע (”wise”; plural in 9:14b) and יבשות (“discerning,” v. 15a) occur together in the MT. Likewise, the MT often connects the concepts of “righteousness” (יבשות, v. 16a) and “the fear of God” (אלוהים, v. 16b). Moreover, the noun יבשות (“your companion,” v. 14a) and the phrase מ’ יבשות (“your meal-partners,” v. 16a) are also virtually synonyms. Finally, the use of the noun מ’ (“your confidence,” v. 15b) and the cognate verb יבשות (“confide,” v. 14a) contributes to the unity of the stanza.

7. Context


Harvey sees the third part of Ben Sira’s book (6:18–14:19) as concerned with “Applying Wisdom Socially.” He explains:

28 Sirach 9:15 has an a:b::b:a chiastic rhyme: יבשות יבשות :: קדושה : לעליון.
29 Skehan and Di Lella, Wisdom of Ben Sira, 220.
30 E.g., Gen 41:33, 39; Deut 4:6; 1 Kgs 3:12. According to Prov 4:4–5, the way to gain life is by acquiring קדושה (“wisdom”) and יבשות (“discernment”).
31 For instance, Deut 6:24–25 equates “to fear [לארשי] Yahweh our God” with “righteousness” (ברשות); cf. also Pss 15:2, 4; 112:1–3; 119:74–75; Prov 8:13, 18.
32 Harvey, “Toward a Degree of Order,” 55, whence comes the following quotation.
The wisdom poem of 6:18–37 exhorts the student to submit to wisdom’s discipline because of the many benefits she bestows. The teaching of the body of the section applies that discipline to social and relational issues raised when the wise person associates with others.

More specifically, Roth suggests that the key word of this section is נ骢 (“pride” or “arrogance”: 7:17; 10:6–8; 13:20), a sin that spoils all relationships.

In keeping with the emphasis on social relations in 6:18–14:19, several of its pericopes discuss friendship. According to the outline given by Skehan and Di Lella, this section comprises eleven pericopes.34

- 6:18–37: Encouragement to Strive for Wisdom
- 7:1–17: Conduct toward God and Neighbor
- 7:18–36: Maxims for Family Life, Religion, and Charity
- 8:1–19: Prudence in Dealing with Others
- 9:1–16: Advice concerning Women and the Choice of Friends
- 9:17–10:18: About Rulers and the Sin of Pride
- 10:19–11:6: True Glory
- 11:7–28: Providence and Trust in God
- 11:29–12:18: Care in Choosing Friends
- 13:1–14:2: The Rich and the Poor
- 14:3–19: The Use of Wealth

Within this section of eleven pericopes, there are at least three nonalphabetic acrostics: 6:18–37, the opening wisdom poem (twenty-two

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33 Roth, “On the Gnomic-Discursive Wisdom,” 74. Although the terms נ骢 (“pride”) and קנ (“proud”) do not occur in 9:10–16, a synonym of the latter term, ככ (“arrogant”), appears in 9:12.


35 Although Skehan and Di Lella (Wisdom of Ben Sira, xiv) regard the pericope on “The Rich and the Poor” as comprising 13:1–14:2, it is better to limit the unit to 13:1–23, since 13:24–14:19 is a twenty-three-line nonalphabetic acrostic (ibid., 258–59). For lists of inclusiones and nonalphabetic acrostics, see pp. 73–74.
bicola); 12:1–18 (also twenty-two bicola); and 13:24–14:19, the section’s closing poem (twenty-three bicola). According to H^a 9:1–16 is also a twenty-two-line poem, although the text of G has only twenty-one bicola. Two other pericopes in 6:18–14:19 are marked off by *inclusiones*: 10:19–11:6 with the adjectives נַפְא ("honored": 10:19ab; 11:6b) and נַפְא ("dishonored": 10:19cd; 11:6c); and 13:1–23 by the root נַפְא ("touch, reach": 13:1a, 23b).

b. Links between 9:10–16 and the Wisdom Poem in 6:18–37

Ben Sira’s advice to associate with wise and understanding persons who fear God (9:14–16) echoes his earlier exhortation to search for wisdom (6:18–37). The table below illustrates some connections between the two pericopes.

| 9:13c H^a: נַפְא תַּכְרֶה A | 6:19a H^c: נַפְא אָחָלָה | "if you have approached" "approach her"
| 9:14b G: μετά σοφῶν | 6:34b G: τίς σοφός | "with wise persons" "who is wise?"
| 9:15a H^a: נַפְא | 6:35b H^c: בְיִשָׂ | "someone discerning" "discernment"
| 9:15b G: νόμῳ υψίστου | 6:37a G: τοῖς προστάγμασιν κυρίων | "the law of the Most High" "the commands of the Lord" 36
| 9:16b H^a: נַפְא נַפְא | 6:31b H^a: נַפְא | "your glory" "glory"

These connections imply that for Ben Sira, one’s choice of friends should contribute to one’s quest for wisdom.

c. Links between 9:10–16 and 8:1–19

Sirach 8:1–19, urging prudence in various social relationships, also exhibits several links with 9:10–16. In both 8:18 and 9:11 Ben Sira emphasizes the limits of human knowledge, while the injunction to זָכַר ("remember") the fact of death occurs in both 8:7b and 9:12b. The advice of 8:8a, אָלָה אֵלֶּה שֶׁאֵלָה שֶׁאֵלָה ("Do not abandon the conversation of wise persons"), is, moreover, distributed in 9:10–16 between the opening bicolon of stanza 1, אָלָה אֵלֶּה גְדוֹל בָּךְ יִשְׁתַּי ("Do not abandon an old friend," 9:10a), and the opening bicolon of stanza 4, אָלָה אֵלֶּה שֶׁאֵלָה ("Confide in wise persons," 9:14b).

36 However, Sir 6:37a H^a reads נַפְא נַפְא ("the fear of the Most High"), which parallels נַפְא נַפְא ("the fear of God") in 9:16b H^a.
d. Links between 9:10–16 and 9:1–9

In addition, there are connections in H₄ between 9:10–16 and 9:1–9,⁷ as the following table illustrates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9:11a: אָל אָל</th>
<th>9:1a: אָל אָל</th>
<th>“Do not envy”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:13c: יָרַע יָרַע</td>
<td>9:3a: אָל אָל</td>
<td>“Do not be jealous”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“if you have approached”</td>
<td>“Do not approach”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:13f: נָעַר נָעַר</td>
<td>9:3b: מַעֲרַתָה</td>
<td>“upon nets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“confide”</td>
<td>“into her nets”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:14b: הַסְּטִיתִי</td>
<td>9:3c: אֲלָל</td>
<td>“do not confide”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This series of similarities (in the same order) may indicate that 9:1–9 and 9:10–16 form two parallel panels of a diptych, although the textual confusion in 9:1–9 makes it difficult to gain precision in the matter.⁴⁰

Several motifs in 9:8–9 foreshadow themes in 9:10–16. The mention of “strong drink, beer” (所所)⁴¹ in 9:9b anticipates the imagery of “wine” (ןַי) in 9:10c. Likewise, the root בָּחַה (“love”) in 9:8d H₄ anticipates the occurrence of בָּחוי (“friend”) in 9:10a, 10c. Finally, the reference to הר (“the pit/grave”) in 9:9d foreshadows the allusion to הר (“death”) in 9:12b, 13b. Such shared ideas knit 9:1–16 together as a pericope.

e. Links between 9:10–16 and 9:17–10:18

Just as 9:10–16 contrasts the “arrogant person” (חָדָא, 9:12a) with “someone discerning” (בָּנָב, 9:15a), so too 9:17–10:18 contrasts the “arrogance” (חרז, 10:13a, 18a) of the proud with the well-ordered modesty of

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³⁸ G presupposes הָרַע הָרַע (“do not encounter”).

³⁹ H₄ reads הָרַע הָרַע (“upon a net”).

⁴⁰ Botha (“Through the Figure of a Woman,” 30–31) summarizes the links between 9:1–9 and 9:10–16: “Both sets [of directives] dwell on relations which can be described as intimate (the wife; the close friend). Both sets warn against being jealous. Both sets warn against people with questionable morality (prostitutes; evil and arrogant men). Both sets compare certain relationships with stepping between snares (a prostitute; a man with authority to kill)…. Both sets contain instructions on whom one should dine with (never with a married woman; always with just and God-fearing men”).

⁴¹ Cf. G; H₄ mistakenly has חוּר (“drunkard”).
“the government of a discerning person” (טומצע תמחל, 10:1b). Moreover, in both pericopes Ben Sira warns against pride in view of the certain fact of death. Just as 9:11–12 declares that the arrogant cannot escape “death” (תמו, 9:12b), so 10:9–11 notes that “at the death of a human being [המשפט Weaver he will inherit worms” (10:11a), even if he has been a king (10:10b).

8. Exegesis

a. Stanza 1: The Life-Giving Value of an Old Friend (9:10)

The first stanza is a rhymed couplet that urges the student not to abandon an old friend. A comparable sentiment occurs in Prov 27:10a: דוד תומצע נלע תומצע ("Do not abandon your companion or your father’s companion"). Within the biblical tradition the classic illustration of enduring loyalty in friendship is the story of David’s friendship with Jonathan, which was sealed by a covenant (1 Sam 18:1–3). After Jonathan’s death in battle (1 Sam 31:2), David showed covenant loyalty to his friend’s crippled son Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:1–13), acting “for the sake of Jonathan” (2 Sam 9:1).

Theognis also offers advice similar to Sir 9:10a: “Never be thou persuaded by the words of men of the baser sort to leave the friend thou hast and seek another” (Theognis 1151–1152 = 1238A–B).42 Similarly, Sophocles knows the value of an old friend, for his tragic hero Philoctetes describes Nestor as “my good old friend” (παλαιος καγαθος φιλος τεµως, Phil. 421). Likewise, Aristotle asserts that one should honor an old friend even after a rupture in the friendship.43

Sirach 9:10 shows the sage’s esteem for an “old friend,”44 which accords with the general “conservatism” of his outlook.45 Di Lella has

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43 See _Eth. nic_. 9.3.5 §1165b: “Are we then to behave toward a former friend in exactly the same way as if he had never been our friend at all? ... Some attention should be paid, for the sake of old times, to those who were our friends in the past” (Rackham, trans., _Nicomachean Ethics_, 531–33).

44 As distinct from an “aged friend” (= רן קדוש), the term דוד תומצע נלע תומצע denotes principally a “long-standing friend,” one whose friendship has matured like old wine. However, Ben Sira would also tend to favor an older person (cf. 8:9; 25:4–6); indeed, perhaps he was already advanced in years when he composed the pericope.

45 For example, he urges: “Endure in your covenant and be engaged in it, and in your work grow old” (11:20 G; H^A has lacunae). Sirach 11:20b H^A may be
contrasted Ben Sira’s “conservative” theology with the more “progressive” theology of the Wisdom of Solomon, in relation to Hellenism, anthropology, and retribution.46 With reference to Sir 2:10, Di Lella remarks that “as a genuine conservative in the best sense of the word, Sirach urges his readers to look to the past for answers to the present crisis.”47 Hence it is not surprising to find the sage asserting the value of an old friendship.

Ben Sira plays on the contrast between יָדוֹת (“old,” 9:10a) and יִדְעָה (“new,” 9:10bc), using an antithesis that also occurs in the MT (Lev 26:10; Cant 7:14). Luke 5:38–39 draws an explicit contrast between new and old wine: “New wine [οἶνον νέον] is to be put into new skins. And no one drinking the old [παλαιῶν οἶνον] desires the new [νέον], for he says, ‘The old [ὃ παλαιῶς] is pleasant.’”48 However, whereas Sir 9:10 refers approvingly to the pleasantness of vintage wine49 (symbolizing an old friendship), Luke 5:39 uses the same imagery to point out the comfortable inertia that can prevent acceptance of anything new.

Greco-Roman literature often praises old wine. For example, from the fifth century B.C.E. one of Pindar’s Olympian Odes (9.48–49) contrasts the delight of old wine with the beauty of new songs: “While thou praisest the wine that is old [παλαιῶν οἶνον], thou shalt also praise the flowers of songs that are new [νεωτέρων].”50

About a century and a quarter after Ben Sira compared an old friend to old wine, Cicero made a similar comparison (Amic. 19 §§67–68):

Are new friends who are worthy of friendship, at any time to be preferred to old friends? ... The doubt is unworthy of a human being, for

completed to read יָדוֹת הָבֵמוֹת הַמִּשְׁתַּרְתִּים (“and in your work grow old”), using the same root (דָוֹת) as in 9:10.

47 Ibid., 141. Di Lella also observes (142) that “in the section entitled ‘Praise of the Fathers’ (44:1–50:24), Sirach pulls out all the stops to celebrate the glories of Israel’s past.”
50 J. E. Sandys, trans., The Odes of Pindar (2d ed.; LCL; New York: Putnam, 1930), 101. The Latin dramatist Plautus (a contemporary of Ben Sira) also writes appreciatively of old wine (Cas. Prologue 5–6).
there should be no surfeit of friendships as there is of other things; and
as in the case of wines that improve with age, the oldest friendships
ought to be the most delightful.  

A comparison of aged persons to old wine occurs in m. Abot 4:20:

R. José b. Judah of Kefar ha-Babli said: He that learns from the young, to
what is he like? To one that eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from his
winepress. And he that learns from the aged, to what is he like? To one
that eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.

R. José b. Judah expects that the aged will be able to teach mature wis-
dom, which is as pleasant as old wine, just as Ben Sira believes that an old
friend’s company is as agreeable as old wine.

Proverbs 9 employs the poetic imagery of wisdom’s banquet, where
wine is served. Proverbs 9:5 presents wisdom’s invitation to the simple:

Proverbs 9:5 presents wisdom’s invitation to the simple:

This imagery may underlie Sir 9:10–16, which
also mentions the “wise” and the “righteous” (cf. Prov 9:9). Not only does
Sir 9:10 speak of an old friend as “old wine,” but verse 14 also advises,
“Confide in wise persons”

In the world of both Israelite and Greco-Roman literature, wine was
an integral part of festal meals. The Hebrew Bible mentions wine in con-
nection with various celebrations of friends, such as parties (Isa 5:12; cf.


52 Viviano, Study “As Worship”, 101. A contrasting saying (ibid.) concludes m. Abot 4:20: “Rabbi [= R. Judah the Patriarch] said: Look not on the jar but on what is in it; there may be a new jar that is full of old wine and an old one in which is not even new wine.” The aphorism of R. Judah the Patriarch may be an allusion to Elihu’s speech in Job 32. In Job 32:9b Elihu declares, “[It is not] the old who understand judgment,” while in 32:19 he says, “Behold, my belly is like wine which has no vent; like wineskins it will burst open.” The utterances of Elihu and R. Judah the Patriarch in favor of youth contrast with the statements of Ben Sira and R. José b. Judah on behalf of maturity.

53 Sirach 9:10 begins with the phrase לא תבטש תמימים (“Do not abandon”), which occurs in Prov 1:8 and 6:20 in a sapiential context: “Do not abandon your mother’s instruction.” Ben Sira uses the phrase in an explicitly sapiential statement in 8:8a ח: “Do not abandon the conversation of wise persons.”

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Wis 2:7) and royal banquets (Esth 5:6; 7:2, 7, 8; Neh 2:1). In Greek culture the drinking of wine was the centerpiece of a symposium (Plato, Leg. 665b–666c). Since in the Hellenistic world friends from the wealthy classes (such as Ben Sira’s students) would gather to drink wine at symposia, the sage’s comparison of an “old friend” with “old wine” was appropriate.

Sirach 9:10 indicates the sage’s positive appreciation of wine, which we see most clearly in 31:27cd H^B: “What is life for one lacking wine, which from the beginning was formed for joy?” Similarly, 32:5 G states: “A seal of carnelian on an adornment of gold is a band of musicians at a symposium of wine.” In 40:20a H^B the sage also praises wine for its cheering effects: “Wine and beer make the heart rejoice.”

Being also aware of the negative results of drinking alcohol (19:2; 31:25), Ben Sira understands the ambiguity of wine, which brings delight when consumed moderately but pain when imbibed excessively (31:28–29). Hence he sums up his view of wine in 31:27ab H^B: “Wine is life for whom? For a human being, if he drinks it in its measure.” Just as an appropriate measure of wine is life-giving, so too mature and God-fearing friends safeguard one’s life (Sir 6:16a) and enhance it (9:10).

b. Stanza 2: Avoiding Company Leading to Death (9:11–12)

Having spoken positively of an old friend in the first stanza, Ben Sira now speaks negatively of the wicked and the arrogant, who constitute unsuitable friends. The reason for the sage’s warning is that God may at any time bring death upon such persons, and hence joining them in friendship may be harmful. The whole sentiment seems to allude to Prov 24:19–20:


55 H^B has two versions of this verse. The actual phrase “banquet of wine” (מתנה גורים) occurs in H^B here (bis) as well as in 31:31; 32:6; 49:1.

56 For “beer” G reads שֶׁר (”song”).

Do not be vexed at the evildoers; 
do not envy the wicked; 
for there will be no future for the evil person; 
the lamp of wicked persons will be extinguished.

Sirach 9:11 also echoes Prov 24:1:

Do not envy persons of evil, 
and do not desire to be with them.

Likewise, Prov 3:31a (also alluded to in Sir 10:23b H8) warns readers: "Do not envy a person of lawlessness" (אלא תקפנה בראות ה WV); this is the first of several points of contact between Sir 9:10–16 and Prov 3:21–35. Similarly, just as Ben Sira urges his students not to envy the wicked (Sir 9:11a), so 4QInstruction suggests keeping a distance from evil and hostile persons: "Do not count a man of iniquity as a helper. And moreover let there be no enemy [among thy acquaintances]" (4Q417 2 i 7).58

Next, Ben Sira explains the motivation for the admonition of 9:11a: אלא תְּחַנְּנָה בְּראֹות ה ("you cannot know when his day will be," v. 11b). The term “his day” (יום) denotes “the day of his death,” as it also does in 1 Sam 26:10: “His day will come and he will die” (וימר יבואו למו).59 Moreover, Ps 37, which begins with the counsel "Do not envy those who do wrong,” cf. Sir 9:11a), says of the “wicked person” (רashi; cf. Sir 9:11a):

The Lord will laugh at him, 
for he sees that his day will come (Ps 37:13).

58 J. Strugnell et al., Sapiential Texts, Part 2: Qumran Cave 4.24 (DJD 34; Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 176; cf. Harrington, Wisdom Texts from Qumran, 49. The exact reading of this text is uncertain.

59 Likewise, speaking of the “wicked” (רashi, Job 18:5; cf. Hebrew, Sir 9:11a), Job 18:20a says: “Westerners are appalled at his day” (יומם), that is, the day of his death.
According to Ben Sira, a terrible death may serve as punishment for an evildoer (11:25–28). God knows the day when he will judge the wicked by causing their death, even if human beings are ignorant of when that day will be (9:11).

Human ignorance about the future is a common theme in the wisdom literature of Israel and Egypt. Thus, Prov 27:1 advises, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you cannot know what the day will bring forth” (כָּל לֹא תֹּאמֵךְ מֵאֵשׁ יָמָּן). Similarly, Qoh 11:2 counsels giving a portion to seven or eight different persons: “For you cannot know what evil there will be on the earth” (כָּל לֹא תֹּאמֵךְ חֲשָׁתִי עֲלֵי האָמָר). In addition, Qoh 11:5 affirms: “You cannot know the activity of God” (כָּל לֹא תֹּאמֵךְ אֲדֹנָי הָאָדָם).

Such human ignorance is also a theme in ancient Egyptian sapiential texts; for example, Amenemope 19.13 declares: “Man ignores how tomorrow will be,” while Amenemope 22.5 asserts: “Indeed you do not know the plans of god.” Closer to Sir 9:11 is the Instruction of Any 5.2: “You do not know your death.” Similarly, P. Insinger 4.8 offers the counsel: “Do not be greedy for wealth in a lifetime which you cannot know,” while P. Insinger 17.6 notes: “Death and the life of tomorrow, we do not know their [nature].” A Greek parallel occurs in Theognis 159–160: “No man living knoweth what a night and a day have to accomplish for us.”

Elsewhere in his book (e.g., 3:21–22; 11:4; 43:32), Ben Sira points out the limits of human knowledge. Sirach 8:18 HA advises: “Before a stranger do not do anything secret, for you cannot know what its end will bring forth” (כָּל לֹא תֹּאמֵךְ מֵאֵשׁ סְפָּא). In addition, Sir 11:18–19 warns against becoming like a selfish miser, who “cannot know what will be his portion [כָּל לֹא תֹּאמֵךְ אֲהִי חֲשָׁתִי], and he will leave it to another and die” (11:19cd HA). Sirach 9:11 implies that since the rich miser cannot be sure of enjoying his possessions, there is no need to envy the wicked, whose appointed day has been decreed by God.

Sirach 9:12 emphatically reiterates the advice of verse 11, introducing the term מַלָּתָן (“death,” v. 12b). The first colon presents one way to avoid death: מְלָתָן הָאָדָם אֲרָמָי מַלָּתָן (“Do not envy a prosperous arrogant person”). In the Deuteronomic law code the root דָּרֶשׁ (“be arrogant”) refers to a presumptuous sin deserving death; Deut 17:12 speaks of the מָדָרֶשׁ (“arrogance”) of someone who rejects the decision of the priest or judge,

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60 AEL 2:157, 159. The following quotations of Egyptian texts come from 2:138 (Instruction of Any) and 3:188, 198 (P. Insinger), while the Theognis quotation is from Edmonds, trans., *Elegy and Iambus*, 1:247.

61 I complete the lacuna of H8 in light of Qoh 11:2.
while Deut 18:20 uses the cognate verb רָאָה ("act arrogantly," "be presumptuous") to denote the action of a false prophet. However, whereas in Deuteronomy the root רָאָה tends to denote a specific arrogant action, in Ben Sira the presumptuousness that deserves death seems to refer more to a general attitude.

The root רָאָה ("be arrogant") belongs largely to Israel’s sapiential writings. Proverbs 11:2 contrasts arrogance (יהוּדְו; cf. Prov 13:10), just as Sir 9:10–16 contrasts the arrogant person (יהוּדְו, v. 12a) with wise persons (יהוּדְו; v. 14b). Similarly, Sir 32:18d Hتباعז asserts: “An arrogant person יָדָשְׁת ו and a scoffer will not accept the commandment,” while 15:7b Hא declares of wisdom: “Arrogant persons יָדָשְׁת and wise persons יָדָשְׁת will not behold her.” In sapiential texts the noun יָדָש ("arrogant person") occurs in parallel with יִרְאָה ("scoffer": Prov 21:24; Sir 32:18) and יָטָל ("evil person": Sir 12:4).

Where Sir 9:11–12 warns against associating with those whose power derives from arrogance, 12:8–18 spells out the harmful effects of such associations. Thus, 12:14a warns that no one pities “one who associates with an arrogant person,” and hence the sage cautions his students not to envy a “prosperous arrogant person” (יהוּדְו מָלָל; 9:12a). Since such a person is dangerous for “all who approach” (יהוּדְו, 12:13b), in 9:13c Ben Sira advises how to behave “if you have approached” (יהוּדְו בְּבֵר) someone powerful.

In two particular passages Ben Sira speaks strongly against the arrogance of proud sinners. Sirach 10:12–18 addresses the topic of pride and concludes: “Arrogance יָדָשְׁת is not fitting for a human being, nor fierceness of anger for one born of woman” (10:18 Hא). Sirach 16:1–4 insists that one God-fearing child is of greater value than a thousand sinners and maintains: “Better is … dying childless … than a posterity of arrogance” (יהוּדְו יָדָשְׁת; 16:3d Hא). For Ben Sira, any worldly advantages of the “arrogant person” are completely offset by the certainty that God will punish him, whether in the course of his life or at the actual moment of his death.

Sirach 9:12a warns against envying an arrogant person who is “prosperous” (or “successful,” מָלָל). Ben Sira here echoes Ps 37:7bc:

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62 Just as Sir 9:11–12 uses the terms יִרְאָה ("wicked") and יָדָש ("arrogant") almost as synonyms in successive bicola, so Ps 154:15 (11QPs 18.15) employs רָאָה ("the wicked") and יָדָש ("the arrogant") as a parallel word-pair.

63 Read יָדָש (cf. G), where Hא has יָדָש (lit., “one who associates with a woman of arrogance”).

64 Cf. 16:3d G; the text of Hא here contains doublets and expansions.
Do not be vexed at someone who makes his way prosperous, at a person who makes scheming plans.

The certainty of death (Sir 9:12b; cf. Ps 37:20) marks the sage’s answer to the problem of the prosperity of the wicked, a perennial problem that caused Israel’s prophets and sages so much trouble. Ben Sira elaborates his answer in Sir 41:1–2, where he presents the ambiguity of death. Whereas death is bitter for “a person at peace and prosperous in everything” (41:1c HBM), it is welcome for “a person stumbling and tripping at everything” (41:2c HBM). Thus, death will be a much more serious blow for the arrogant person who prospers in his earthly life than for a devout pauper.

The phrase “the time of death” (שע דברים) corresponds to the phrase הרים תָּלֶטֶת (“the day of death”) occurring elsewhere in Ben Sira (1:13; 11:26; 18:24; 40:2). Also found in Η is the expression ביוון השם (“on the day of death,” 33:24b), which G renders ἐν θαρύῳ τελευτή (“at the time of death”).

The phrase “remember that” (אלה כה לאزواج במרות רוח) also occurs in 7:11 HA with reference to God’s judgment.

Do not despise a human being in the bitterness of his spirit; remember that there is one who exalts and humbles.

In 8:7 HA Ben Sira uses the same imperative verb “remember” (אלה) to remind his students of the certainty of death:

Do not glorify yourself above a dying person; remember, we are all being gathered in.


Thus, although the sage does not promise rewards in the afterlife for the God-fearing pauper, he does insist that death will bring low the arrogance of the prosperous who turn away from God, and hence one should not envy such persons.

Death plays a significant role in Ben Sira’s theology.\(^{67}\) For the sage a happy death is extremely desirable, and according to 1:13 G the God-fearing person “will be blessed on the day of his death.” Conversely, the worst form of divine punishment is a painful death in disgrace; hence the sage warns against delaying to fulfill one’s vows: “Remember [the Lord’s] wrath in the days of death, and the time of [his] punishment at the turning away of [his] face” (18:24 GBA). Similarly, among the sufferings of life is the “thought of expectation” which is “the day of death” (ἡμερα τελευτής; 40:2 G). But the most forceful of Ben Sira’s death-inspired admonitions occurs in 11:25–28. In particular, 11:26–27a G warns: “In the sight of the Lord it is easy on the day of death to repay a human being according to his ways. The evil of an hour causes forgetfulness of enjoyment.”\(^{68}\) Hence, since God can punish one’s misdeeds by causing a painful and shameful death, one should take timely preventive action. Thus, Ben Sira advises keeping away from the arrogant, who will receive God’s punishment.\(^{69}\)

Death also plays an important part in both 9:10–16 and 13:24–14:19. Just as in 13:24–14:19 human mortality affects one’s outlook on wealth, so in 9:10–16 death serves as a reason for behaving cautiously toward the wicked. In 9:12 Ben Sira seeks to turn his students’ attention away from the wealth currently enjoyed by the proud: “Do not envy a prosperous arrogant person; remember that at the time of death he will not be held guiltless” (חזרה כי טוב תהיה ולה Nuevo יניקת). In 14:12b, 13a the sage urges his pupil to practice generosity and avoid avarice:

\[^{67}\] In the extant Hebrew MSS of Ben Sira רוגע (“death”) occurs twenty-two times, while in G θάνατος (“death”) is found twenty-eight times, and τελευτή (“end, death”) occurs nine times.


\[^{69}\] Possibly in Sir 9:11–12 the sage alludes to the story of Eli’s family, punished for the sins of the priest’s two wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 2:12). The punishment prophesied against them was that “on one day both of them will die” (1 Sam 2:34; cf. “his day” in Sir 9:11b). On the very day of their death together in battle (1 Sam 4:11–12), their father Eli died of shock (1 Sam 4:17–18) and “the time for her death” (הזמן את מוות; cf. הימים את, “the time of death,” Sir 9:12b) came upon Phinehas’s wife as she gave birth (1 Sam 4:20). On the pride of Hophni and Phinehas, see Josephus, Ant. 5.10.1 §339.
Remember that ... death will not linger.
Before you die, be good to a friend.

The phrase שופט לא י yargט ("will not be held guiltless") is characteristic of ancient Israel’s wisdom literature; the exact phrase occurs seven times in Proverbs. In speaking of the punishment of the proud, Sir 9:12 follows Prov 16:5: “An abomination to Yahweh is everyone whose heart is haughty; assuredly he will not be held guiltless” (שופט לא יargarט). Elsewhere Ben Sira speaks of God’s punishment of those involved in the unbridled pursuit of wealth. Echoing Prov 28:20, Sir 11:10b ḤA declares: שופט לא יargarט (“One hasty to gain increase will not be held guiltless”). Moreover, Sir 31:5 ḤB asserts (cf. 26:29 G): שופט לא יargarט (“One who pursues gold will not be held guiltless”). Ben Sira recognizes that the “prosperous arrogant person” (9:12) is often someone whose relentless pursuit of wealth has blinded him to moral values and made him liable to divine judgment (11:10; 31:5).70

By making multiple allusions to Israel’s earlier wisdom literature, Sir 9:12 reinforces the sage’s point that prosperity gained by ungodly means is bound to end in punishment, even if such punishment occurs only at the person’s death. Hence one should avoid befriending such people who are on the road to disaster.

c. Stanza 3: Avoiding Company with One Empowered to Kill (9:13)

Ben Sira begins the third stanza by urging his students to keep their distance from the authorities who hold the power of the sword. Doubtless the sage is referring to the Hellenistic rulers of Palestine, either the Ptolemies until the Battle of Panium (ca. 200 B.C.E.), or the Seleucid authorities in the years thereafter. From the Hephzibah inscription (ca. 195 B.C.E.) we know of a provincial governor (στρατηγός) named Ptolemaios son of Thraseas; having served the Ptolemies as a general, he changed his allegiance and became Seleucid governor of Syria and Phoenicia.71 Answerable to the provincial governor were the high priest (ἀρχιερεύς) and the senate (or council of elders,

70 Possibly the sage may be thinking of the Tobiads who administered the heavy tax burden imposed on Jerusalem by the Ptolemies in the latter part of the third century B.C.E. (cf. Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, 1:47–55).
Although the Hellenistic governor (στρατηγὸς) and his staff held the “power of the sword,” it is unclear whether the Jewish senate (gewatería) in Jerusalem was also “empowered to kill.” Accordingly, Ben Sira doubtless urges his students to keep away from the circle of the provincial governor. Instead of an attitude of familiarity with the authorities, in 4:7b H⁶ he urges submissiveness: Λέσχημα τίνς ἁμαρτάνει (‘To the ruler of a city bow the head’).

Ben Sira’s advice in 9:13a accords with his ethics of caution, which matches the teaching of Egyptian wisdom literature. For example, P. Insinger 3.14 warns, “Do not tie yourself to one who is [greater] than you, for then your life will be ruined,” while P. Insinger 27.8 advises, “Do not approach the strong man even when you have protection behind you.”

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72 In Ant. 12.3.3 §142 Josephus mentions “the senate, the priests, the scribes of the temple and the temple-singers” (Thackeray et al., trans., Josephus, 7:73).

73 Possibly the “power of the sword” was reserved to the Hellenistic governor and not exercised by the Jerusalem senate, but historical evidence for the period 220–180 B.C.E. is scarce. On the same topic during the Roman occupation in the first century C.E., see Brown, Death of the Messiah, 1:363–72.

74 Similar advice is given in m. ‘Abot 1:10: “Seek not acquaintance with the ruling power” (Viviano, Study As Worship, 18). On Ben Sira’s attitude to the Hellenistic authorities, see N. Calduch-Benages, “Fear for the Powerful or Respect for Authority?” in Egger-Wenzel and Krammer, eds., Der Einzelne und seine Gemeinschaft bei Ben Sira, 87–102. If Ben Sira belonged to the “scribes of the temple” (Josephus, Ant. 12.3.3 §142), as Hengel has tentatively suggested (Judaism and Hellenism, 1:133), he might be urging his students to resist economic pressure to work for the provincial governor. This interpretation appears to contradict 39:4: “In the midst of magnates he [the scribe] will serve, and before rulers he will appear; he will pass through the land of alien nations.” However, in light of 9:13a, 39:4 presumably has in view an official of the high priest and gerousia (rather than an official of the Hellenistic rulers). Thus, 2 Macc 4:11 speaks of John, father of Eupolemus, being sent to Antiochus III on behalf of the high priest (= Simeon II, ca. 198 B.C.E.), while a generation later Judas Maccabeus sent Eupolemus to Rome on a diplomatic mission (1 Macc 8:17, probably in 161 B.C.E.; cf. Josephus, Ant. 12.10.6 §415).

75 For מְלָכָה (‘still,’ H⁶), read מִלְבָּהו (“city”) with S; so Skehan and Di Lella, Wisdom of Ben Sira, 163.

76 See Sanders, “Ben Sira’s Ethics of Caution.” In 33:20–21 H⁶ the sage commends preserving control of oneself even from family members: “While you are still living and there is breath [חֲלֵב] in you, do not let anyone human have power [יָדוֹ] over you” (33:21). As in 9:13, the sage advises saving one’s life-breath by keeping power over oneself.

By his warning in 9:13a Ben Sira draws out the practical consequences of biblical sayings like Prov 20:2: “The dread of a king is like the growling of a young lion; one who makes him angry sins against his life.” Whereas Qoh 7:19 declares that wisdom is stronger than ten “rulers” (שמיאים) in a city, Sir 9:13a indicates that wisdom entails keeping far from a ruler who is “empowered to kill” (שלום לוח),

By repeating in 9:13b the word “death” (데ת, already used in v. 12b), Ben Sira emphasizes the need to keep away from someone holding the power of the sword. Here the sage develops the observation of Prov 16:14: “A king’s wrath means messengers of death, and a wise person will pacify it.”

For Ben Sira wariness toward the ruling power is an example of wise behavior that will eliminate a source of fear from one’s life. Here again (as in 9:11a) the sage is probably alluding to the wisdom poem, Prov 3:21–35. Just as Sir 9:11a echoed Prov 3:31a, so Sir 9:13b contains echoes of Prov 3:24–25.

If you lie down you will not be terrified [לא תחאם],
and you will lie down and your sleep will be pleasant;
you will not fear a sudden terror [פוחד עז],
or the devastation of the wicked when it comes.

Biblical phraseology (cf. Deut 28:67; Pss 14:5; 53:6; Job 3:25) is also apparent in the sage’s cognate accusative, פוחד עז (“be terrified of a terror”). Instead of suffering a terrible untimely death brought about by ambitious friendships, Ben Sira wishes his students to live on until their natural death, which is not to be feared.78

Both 9:13 and 13:9–10 use the antithesis between “near” (ברא) and “far” (ד สำหรับ) to warn against too close an association with those bearing political authority. Just as 9:13a advises, “Keep far [ברא] from anyone empowered to kill,” so 13:9a counsels, “When a prince is near, keep far away” (ברא מיבר הוה להחי, Hk). In 13:10 Ben Sira continues the contrast:

Do not come near, lest you be kept far away,
and do not keep far away, lest you be hated.

Similarly in 9:13, after urging the reader to “keep far” (ברא) from such a powerful person (9:13a), the sage gives advice on how to behave if one

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78 In 41:3a Hk the sage teaches: “Do not be terrified of death, the decree for you” (לא תחאם מכת הלה).
has indeed come close to someone in authority: “If you have approached [עטב], commit no offense” (9:13c).

To underscore the seriousness of his admonition to avoid committing an offense, Ben Sira warns that the ruler “may take away your life-breath.” The verb עטב (“commit an offense, become guilty”) occurs most often in a priestly or cultic context (e.g., Lev 5:19; Num 5:7), although in Prov 30:10 it appears in a wisdom setting. Whereas Gen 2:7 employs the phrase נפש נא (“breath of life”), here Ben Sira contrasts נפש (“your life-breath,” Sir 9:13d) with “death” (םא, v. 13b).

In the MT the formulation that opens Sir 9:13e, יד כוי (“know that”), often introduces serious admonitions. In Gen 20:7, for instance, King Abimelech of Gerar receives a warning to return Sarah to Abraham: “If you do not return her, know that you shall surely die” (דיע כרמיהם). Similarly, David warns Jonathan about Saul: “If he is indeed angry, know that [כוי] evil has been determined by him” (1 Sam 20:7).

The warning of Sir 9:13ef alludes to Job 18:7–9, part of Bildad’s speech concerning God’s punishment of the wicked.79

His vigorous steps will be narrowed,
and his advice will cast him away,
for he has been dispatched into the net by his feet,
and upon netting he will be walking about.
A trap will seize his heel;
it will cause snares to prevail over him.

Sirach 9:13ef H^a has four words in common with Job 18:7–9: יס (“trap”), גש (“step”), נד (“net”), and יג (“walk about”). However, in view of G’s misunderstanding,80 I discount יג (“net”) as a scribal alteration (to harmonize with Job 18:8a). Nevertheless, the other three words in common suggest that Ben Sira here alludes to Job 18:7–9. Just as Bildad insists that the wicked person will be caught in his own traps, so Ben Sira counsels that keeping away from the powerful will enable one to avoid falling into their fatal snares.

79 We have already seen that Sir 9:11ab alludes twice to Job 18 (v. 5: “wicked”; v. 20: “his day”).

80 The word יג (taken as original here) means either “nets” (cf. H^a) or “battles” (cf. G); see textual note 13h above.
The imagery of “traps” and “nets” (9:13ef), taken from the world of hunting, occurs frequently in the MT.\(^8^1\) Indeed, just as Ps 124:5–7 combines imagery of “the arrogant waters” (ןָּוִּים הָּשִׁירִים) and the hunter’s “trap” (גָּשֶׁם), so Sir 9:12–13 speaks of the “arrogant person” (יִרְשָׁה) and the ruler’s “traps” (חַסֵּר). Moreover, Qoh 9:12 offers a parallel to Ben Sira at this point: “For a human being cannot even know his time [cf. Sir 9:11b], like the fish that are caught in an evil net [ןָּוִּים, cf. Sir 9:13f], and like birds caught in a trap [גָּשֶׁם, cf. Sir 9:13e].” Whereas Qoheleth speaks of death as the fate that comes unbidden upon human beings, Ben Sira warns against inducing death by rash association with the powerful.\(^8^2\)


After the warnings of stanzas 2 and 3, Ben Sira again dispenses positive advice, as in the first stanza. As countless teachers before and after him have urged, he advises his students to choose wise and God-fearing friends.

Since communication is such an important part of friendship, Ben Sira begins the last stanza by appealing to his hearers to give generous and wise answers to their companions. Sirach 9:14a has affinities to 5:12 HA:

"אֶּפְּרֵדְתָּ הָאָדָם שָאָר הָעַל פַתָּה"

If you have something [to say] answer your companion, and if not, [place]\(^8^3\) your hand over your mouth.

In 9:14a the sage counsels his students to respond to their companions to the best of their ability, in other words, by sharing the wisdom they have acquired.

Sirach 9:14b then recommends associating with wise people. This age-old advice appears in Israelite sapiential tradition; for instance, Prov 13:20a (Qere) asserts: "וְאִישׁ מְרַגֵּם יֵשׁ חֲכָמִים ("One who walks with wise persons will become wise").\(^8^4\) Similarly, Ben Sira often advises learning

\(^8^1\) Ben Sira too has a fondness for hunting imagery (cf. 27:19–20); compare his use of מָכָס ("snare") in 31:30; 32:2; 51:3 (all H\(^\circ\)). Note that the wordplay between מָצַח ("terror," 9:13b) and כָּשֶׂם ("trap," 9:13e) also occurs in the MT (Isa 24:17; Jer 48:43).

\(^8^2\) In 9:3b H\(^\circ\) Ben Sira uses the noun מָכָס ("net") to describe the entrapping enchantment of foreign (or “loose”) women: “Do not approach a strange woman, lest you fall into her nets.” The sage’s warning is comparable to Qoh 7:26, which speaks of a woman’s heart as “nets” (מִכְרָא אֵשׁ).\(^8^4\) Similarly, Ben Sira often advises learning

\(^8^3\) H\(^\circ\) adds the imperative verb שָׁבָה ("place") here.

from the “wise” (חכם), as in 8:8 H. Moreover, in 27:12 G the sage coun-
sells: “In the midst of the senseless keep track of time, but in the midst of
the discerning stay continually.”

Ben Sira’s advice to associate with the wise accords with the
counsel of many sages from the ancient world. For example,
Ankhsheshonq 13.6 declares, “The friend of a fool is a fool; the friend of
a wise man is a wise man,” while P. Insinger 13.19 asserts that “he who
walks with a wise man shares his praise.” In addition, since Greek cul-
ture held wisdom in high esteem (cf. Aristotle, Eth. nic. 6.7.2 §1141a;
Plato, Apol. 20d), it is not surprising that its literature encourages asso-
ciation with the wise. Thus, one of the fragments of Menander (694K)
states: “If you go in for wisdom, do not make intimates of those who
lack wisdom.”

The hitpa‘el verb הָסָדָה (“confide [in]” or “associate [with]”) occurs
thrice elsewhere in Ben Sira (8:17a H A; 9:3c HA; 42:12b HB). In 42:12b the
sage gives advice concerning a daughter, “Let her not associate among
women,” and in 9:3c he says, “Do not associate with a prostitute.” The
message of 9:14b is the converse of 8:17, which declares:

Do not confide in a simple person,
for he will not be able to conceal your confidence.

85 Sirach 6:34 GBAC also makes this appeal (using the question idiom borrowed
from Hos 14:10; Ps 107:43): “Stand in the multitude of elders. And who is wise?
Attach yourself to him.”

86 For a brief discussion, see M. Lichtheim, Late Egyptian Wisdom Literature in the
For the following two quotations, see AEL 3:169, 196. For Menander’s aphorism,
see Allinson, trans., Menander, 523.

87 No verbal form of the root רד occurs in the MT, although the pa‘el and
etpa‘al forms occur in Syriac. Commenting textually on 9:3c, Skehan and Di
Lella (Wisdom of Ben Sira, 217) assert: “There is the strongest of evidence that
הסיד as a verb stem based on the noun סיד, and meaning ‘make oneself the
familiar companion/associate of (another)’ was a real part of Ben Sira’s per-
sonal vocabulary.”

88 I read הָסָדָה (with Smend, Sirach, hebräisch und deutsch, 44;
 cf. G).

89 I read הָסָדָה (H); on 9:3, see the text-critical note in Skehan and
As in 8:17, 9:14b–15b plays on the root dws (verb in 8:17a and 9:14b; noun in 8:17b and 9:15b); while the noun dws means “confidence, secret,” the hitpa‘el verb denotes either “to confide [in]” or “to associate [with].”

Sirach 9:15a reiterates the thought of verse 14b. In the MT (e.g., Prov 1:5; 17:28; 18:15; Qoh 9:11) the adjective הָנָיָּה (“discerning”) occurs frequently as a synonym of חַכָּם (“wise”); for instance, Prov 16:21a declares: “Someone wise of heart [חַכְּמָּה] will be called discerning [הָנָיָּה].” In the Hebrew text of Ben Sira as well, the roots הָנָיָּה (“be discerning”) and חַכָּם (“be wise”) occur together. For example, 4:11 H^A opens a sapiential poem with the words: “Wisdom [חַכָּם] teaches her children, and testifies to all who discern [חַכִּימָה] her.”

Ben Sira employs the adjective הָנָיָּה (“discerning”) to describe the ideal wise and God-fearing person. Similar to 9:15 is the thought of 33:3a H^B: “A discerning person [חַכָּם] will understand the Word [= the Torah, cf. 33:3b],” since in 9:15 the “discerning” person worth befriending is one who is occupied in the “law of the Most High.”

The term חשׂבָּה (here rendered “planning”), from the root חשׂב (”think,” “reckon,” “plan”), may refer to either financial or cognitional reckoning. In Qoh 7:25, 27 the noun חשׂבָּה means “reckoning,” “account,” “sum total,” and Sir 42:3a H^M presumes a similar sense: “[Do not be ashamed] of keeping accounts [חשׂבָּה] with a partner or a traveler.” In Qoh 9:10 and Sir 27:5–6 (as in Sir 9:15b), the same word may simply mean “plan, thought.”

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90 Seemingly, the p'iel of the verb דָּוָס occurs in 7:14a H^B: (“Do not give counsel in the assembly of elders”), but the versions diverge here.

91 The noun הנָיָּה (“discernment”) does not occur in the extant MSS of Ben Sira, unless the word הנָיָּה at the end of 9:15 H^A represents הנָיָּה יִבִּנָּה (“their discernments”), which is awkward syntactically. However, the form הנָיָּה (”discernment”) occurs in parallel with חַכָּם (”wisdom”) in Sir 4:24; 14:20 (both H^A).

92 The two roots also occur together in 3:29 H^A; 6:37 H^A; 11:15 H^A (probably an expansionary gloss); 32:16cd H^BEF (probably a doublet); 42:21 H^M.

93 Sirach 7:25b H^C suggests that if you have a daughter, “bestow her upon a discerning man” (הָנָיָּה נָבָר), while 31:19a H^B, urging moderation in eating, asks: “Is not a little sufficient for a discerning human being?”

94 Compare G’s reading of 33:3a: “A discerning person will believe in the law.”

95 Sir 27:5–6 H^A is difficult. I would paraphrase the couplet: “Just as the potter’s plan of the pot he makes is tested when it is fired in the kiln, so a person’s planning is tested in the heat of experience. On the basis of a tree’s cultivation there will be fruit; equally on the basis of a person’s imagination there will be planning.”
The term הדרת לילה נלווה ("confidence," "secret," "council") is important in Ben Sira’s thinking on friendship (cf. 6:6 H^a; 8:17 H^a; 37:10 H^d; 42:1 H^b). Whereas elsewhere he warns against revealing confidences (cf. 27:16–21), in Sir 9:15b he urges his students to spend their time positively, not in secret intrigues with courtiers, but in meditation on the “law of the Most High.”

The phrase הדרת לילה נלווה ("the law of the Most High," absent here in H^a but supplied from G)^7 occurs in 41:4 H^b; 41:8 H^m; 42:2 H^m; 49:4 H^b. In 42:2a H^m Ben Sira places it at the head of his list of things that are no cause for shame. By contrast, in 41:8 H^d the sage condemns the wicked who abandon it, and in 49:4 H^a he laments over Judah’s rulers who “abandoned the law of the Most High” (הדרת לילה נלווה).^99

The phrase הדרת לילה נלווה ("the law of the Most High") occurs also in 11QPsa 18.14 (= Ps 154:14); 4Q525 2 ii 4.

The theme of the Torah is significant for Ben Sira, who often connects it with wisdom and the fear of the Lord. 100 Sirach 9:14–16 makes these connections with successive mention of “wise persons” (יהודים, v. 14b), “the law of the Most High” (נום עליון עליון, v. 15b), and “the fear of God” (ה_KHRאסה, v. 16b).^101 Sirach 19:20 states the connections more directly:

96 In Ben Sira’s time the Torah may have served not only as religious legislation but also as civil law for the Jewish community centered around Jerusalem; cf. the decree of Antiochus III confirming the right of the Jews to live according to their ancestral laws (Josephus, Ant. 12.3.3 §142).

97 The phrase נום עליון עליון ("law of the Most High") is present eight times in the Greek text (9:15; 19:17; 23:23; 38:34; 41:8; 42:2; 44:20; 49:4); see further my exegesis of 19:17.

98 In 41:4b Ben Sira calls death הדרת לילה נלווה ("the law of the Most High"), which is equivalent to הדרת לילה נלווה ("the decree for all flesh," 41:4a). In 41:4a I read הדרת לילה נלווה ("decree," cf. G) for H^b’s הדרת לילה נלווה ("portion"); instead of הדרת לילה נלווה H^a has נ loi ("end," cf. S).

99 In addition, for 6:37a Smend suggests הדרת לילה נלווה ("the law of the Most High"; cf. G) where H^a reads נلومה הדרת לילה נלווה ("the fear of the Most High"); see Sirach, hebräisch und deutsch, 6. The phrase הדרת לילה נלווה ("the law of the Most High") occurs also in 11QPsa 18.14 (= Ps 154:14); 4Q525 2 ii 4.


101 A similar series, with parallels to Sir 9:14–16, occurs in Ps 154:10–14 (11QPs 18.9–14): “The man who gives glory to the Most High is accepted… Her [= wisdom’s] voice is heard in the gates of just men [ה涍ות] … ; they speak about it when they eat to bursting … ; their meditation is on the Law of the Most High [הדרת לילה נלווה]” (García Martínez, Dead Sea Scrolls Translated, 305).
Similarly, 1:26–27a G links wisdom, commandments, and the fear of the Lord: “If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord will lavish her on you; for the fear of the Lord is wisdom and instruction.” Moreover, the central sapiential poem in Ben Sira’s book equates the wisdom dwelling in Israel (24:8) with “the law that Moses commanded us” (24:23).

In Sir 9:16a the sage advises his students to share meals with righteous persons, because their conversation and example will be beneficial. This advice is the corollary of the saying of Menander (Thaïs, fragment 218) quoted in 1 Cor 15:33: “Bad company corrupts good habits.” Hence the psalmist prays to be saved from the ill effects of bad company: “Do not turn my heart to anything evil, to do wanton deeds in wickedness, with those who are doers of iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies” (Ps 141:4).

Ben Sira employs the noun ἄληθιον (“bread,” “meal”) in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. Using the term in the physical sense (Sir 31:12, 23, 24), 31:12–32:13 offers instructions on proper conduct at banquets. Understood in a metaphorical sense, “bread” represents “insight” (Sir 15:3; cf. Prov 9:5). The connection between “bread” (Sir 9:16a) and “wine” (Sir 9:10c) that frames this pericope recurs often in the MT.

Ben Sira uses the noun ἄληθιον (“righteousness”) to describe both divine and human activity; thus, in 35:22 H B he affirms of God that “as judge of righteousness [= righteous judge] he will perform judgment,” while in 49:9 H B the sage praises Job as “the one upholding all [the ways of] righteousness.” In 9:16 Ben Sira’s concern is that his...
students will take their meals with upright persons, so as to learn their righteousness.

Just as Ben Sira urges his hearers to associate and eat with righteous persons, so too ancient Egyptian and Greek writers offer similar advice. Thus, the Instruction of Any (5.7) teaches: “Befriend one who is straight and true.” Similarly, Theognis 31–34 advises: “This then I would have thee to know, nor [sic] to consort with the bad but ever to cleave unto the good, and at their tables to eat and to drink, and with them to sit” (cf. Theognis 563–566). Likewise, Xenophon (Mem. 1.2.20) asserts: “The society of honest men is a training in virtue, but the society of the bad is virtue’s undoing.”

To conclude this pericope, Ben Sira brings the whole subject of friendship into the context of the fear of God, just as he did in 6:16b (at the end of 6:5–17). According to Haspecker, fear of God is the overall theme of Ben Sira’s book. In fact, if we discount the sage’s foreword (1:1–10) and appendix (ch. 51), the whole book is united by an inclusio: ἕμεθεν φόβος κυρίου (“fear of the Lord,” 1:11a) and ὕπατον (“fear of Yahweh,” 50:29 Hº).

Ben Sira likes to conclude his pericopes by mentioning the fear of God. Indeed, this theme concludes the opening nonalphabetic acrostic on the fear of God (1:11–30; cf. v. 30e); the first friendship pericope (6:5–17); the present poem on friendship (9:10–16; cf. v. 16b); the double nonalphabetic acrostic on self-control (22:27–23:27; cf. 23:27b G); the decalogue of macarisms (25:7–11; cf. vv. 10b–11); the nonalphabetic acrostic on the trades (38:24–34; cf. v. 34c S); the decalogue of good things (40:18–27; cf. vv. 26b–27); and the postscript (50:27–29; cf. v. 29).

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107 Marchant, trans., Xenophon, 21. Note also Aristotle’s dictum (Eth. nic. 9.9.5 §1170a) that “good men find pleasure in the actions of other good men who are their friends” (Rackham, trans, Nicomachean Ethics, 561).

108 Haspecker, Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach, 87–105. The term “fear of God” occurs more than fifty-five times in Ben Sira (p. 82); see the chart comparing G, S, and H (pp. 48–50).

109 The sage probably borrows this feature from Prov 31:10–31 (the acrostic on the “capable woman”), whose penultimate bicolon (31:30b) mentions “the fear of Yahweh” (יִרְשָׁה יְהֹוָה). Note also that in P. Insinger the didactic units close with a religious refrain, as in 13.7: “The fate and the fortune that come, it is the god who determines them” (AEL 3:195); cf. Sanders, Ben Sira and Demotic Wisdom, 90.

110 Moreover, in HA “the fear of the Most High” occurs at the end of 6:18–37 (in v. 37a); but it is better to read “the law of the Most High” (cf. G).

111 Fuß comments: “Sirach likes to top what was previously said in a unit by a final religious declaration, which may point to the fear of God, the law, or prayer.
The expression of 9:16b resembles that of 10:22b. Whereas 9:16b H^A urges: "Let your glory be in the fear of God," 10:22 H^B asserts:

Immigrant, foreigner, alien and pauper, their glory is the fear of Yahweh.

Ben Sira teaches that just as those who are helpless or inglorious by human standards can find glory in fearing God, so too a person seeking friendship should glory not in the wealth or rank of his friends but in their fear of God.¹¹²

A related phrase also occurs in 25:6 G: “The crown of the aged is great experience, and their glory (καύχημα, as in 9:16b; 10:22b) is the fear of the Lord.” Just as the aged, who possess wisdom (25:5 G), can rightly glory in the fear of God, so too Ben Sira’s students will be able to glory in fearing God if they choose wise and upright friends. Similarly, the opening nonalphabetic acrostic of the book (1:11a G) asserts: φόβος κυρίου δόξα καὶ καύχημα (“The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation”). Thus, at the end of his second poem on friendship, Ben Sira has returned to the theme of fear of God with which he began his book.

9. Conclusion

After discussing the dangers of liaisons with women in 9:1–9, Ben Sira treats relations with male friends in 9:10–16. His basic advice is to find God-fearing friends and stick with them, instead of being attracted by the unscrupulous persons who wield power. In the context of its sociopolitical setting, the sage’s message has a “conservative” tone, implying that one should remain faithful to those who obey the Torah in Jerusalem, instead of advancing one’s career by forging connections with Hellenistic rulers. Ben Sira restates the traditional wisdom instruction to

(e.g., 7:36; 28:6–7; 35:10; 37:15)” (“Tradition und Komposition,” 278–79; translation mine); cf. Haspecker, Gottesfurcht bei Jesus Sirach, 136 n. 30.

shun the arrogant and the wicked (doubtless the proud rulers of 9:17–10:18). He also follows earlier sapiential tradition in his advice to associate with wise, discerning, and righteous persons. Although this pericope offers no new teaching, it spells out clearly and succinctly the way to be avoided in one’s friendships (arrogance) and the way to be taken (the fear of God).