

Preface

Hear me and grasp my intelligence,
and upon my words set your heart.
I will pour out my spirit by weight,
and in humility I will declare my knowledge.
(Sir 16:24–25 H^A)

And I was like a canal from a river,
and as a waterway coming out into paradise.
I said: I will water my garden,
and I will drench my flower bed.
And, behold, the canal became for me a river,
and my river became a sea.
Still I will make discipline to shine like the dawn,
and I will shine forth these things far off.
Still will I pour forth teaching as prophecy,
and I will leave her behind for generations for ever.
See that not for myself alone have I toiled,
but for all those who seek her out.
(Sir 24:30–34 G)

With these and similar words throughout his book, the master teacher reveals that he is not only the source of education but also its goal. He pours out teaching and shines forth instruction, yet he also has been filled up and illuminated by Wisdom. He therefore can beckon his audience to have the same experience by sitting at his feet as attentive disciples.¹ The etiological and teleological dimensions of the teacher's role connect him to a tradition of wisdom as well as to God, as is suggested by the reference to prophecy in Sir 24:33. He is a source of knowledge about God but also someone who has received this knowledge. His audience therefore has reason to sit at his feet with the hope of being filled with wisdom like their master. In a sense then, the pedagogical goal of the teacher is to multiply himself. In this way, he is honored, gains the immortality of a great name, and confirms the wider community in the tradition by the continuance of his work through his disciples. Here may be appropriated to his pedagogical situation his own teaching about a father leaving behind a son: *He leaves behind him one like himself (30:4b).*

¹ The self-reference in Sir 6:32–37 is thinly veiled.

Ben Sira's pedagogical project is not complicated, and it is shared by any teacher of any era who cares that his students adopt his point of view in order that they may better themselves and benefit society at large. Therefore, one can say that pedagogical goals are often cultural ones.

The purpose of this study is to present Ben Sira's teachings about himself as sage and to examine the implications of his articulation of this role in familial language for the lives of his students. After considering various methodological points in the introduction, chapter 1 first examines the vertical dimension between the sage and his disciples. Then the similar vertical relation between personified Wisdom and the students is described, showing the necessity of exploring the connection between the sage and Wisdom. Chapter 2 takes up this exploration, focusing on Sir 23–26 and other passages that teach on the goods of human marriages and family. The main contribution of this study is in chapter 2, where it is argued that the pedagogical situation presented in Sirach is conveyed in family language in order to create the ideal family in the relationships between the sage, Wisdom, and the students. This ideal family is intended to be the model for domestic family units. Not only is the sage the exemplar for students but his relationships with Wisdom and his students is the exemplar for students' families. Chapter 3 explores other Jewish instructions and other texts from the Second Temple period in order to contextualize Ben Sira's appropriation of family language in the larger historical and literary setting.