

Sirach 15:15-20ⁱⁱⁱ

If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose. Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given. For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything; his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every human action. He has not commanded anyone to be wicked, and he has not given anyone permission to sin.

ⁱⁱⁱ **About the Alternative First Reading: Sirach 15:15-20**

The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach was written about 180 BC. Sirach (50:27) seems to have been a teacher, the head of an academy in Jerusalem (51:23). In today's reading, he addresses the question of free will and the responsibility for sin.

His interest is not in how humanity as a whole came to be sinful (as in Genesis), but rather in the actions of individuals. His intent is to exonerate God from complicity in human sin, in contrast to the idea that God is the primary cause of all activity. Although innocent of human sin, God is not ignorant or indifferent to it. Rather, a clear choice is presented, and God longs to pour out blessing.