

Friend or Foe? Friendship, Reciprocity, and the Evil Inclination in Sirach 37:1–6 LXX

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My objective in this paper is to discuss the connections between the evil inclination, friendship, and reciprocity as represented in Sir 37:1–6 LXX. Additionally, I will comment on the stage of the development of the evil inclination as presented in this text.

Text of Sirach 37:1–6 (NRSV):

- ¹ Every friend says, “I too am a friend”;
but some friends are friends only in name.
- ² Is it not a sorrow like that for death itself
when a dear friend turns into an enemy?
- ³ O inclination to evil, why were you formed [or “how were you involved” (NETS)]
to cover the land with deceit?
- ⁴ Some companions rejoice in the happiness of a friend,
but in time of trouble they are against him.
- ⁵ Some companions help a friend for their stomachs’ sake,
yet in battle they will carry his shield.
- ⁶ Do not forget a friend during the battle,
and do not be unmindful of him when you distribute your spoils.

Sirach’s Friendship Dichotomy	
False Friends	True Friends
Manifest the Evil Inclination	Are motivated by empathy
Deceive others	Remain faithful through trials
	Are to be rewarded

Methodology:

- Construct Interpretive Frameworks:
 - Friendship (φίλος)
 - Reciprocity and Gift Giving (χάρις)
 - The Evil Inclination (*yetzer*)
- Examination of Sirach 37:1–6

Frameworks

- Friendship
 - Trials reveal quality of friends
 - False friends fall away
 - True friends remain faithful
 - Faithful friends are to be treasured.
- Reciprocity and Gifts
 - Reward faithful friends
 - Exercise discernment

The Evil Inclination (*yetzer*)?

- Two Options
 - Biblical Notion: Thought
 - “The Lord searches ever mind and understands every plan and thought.” (1 Chron 28:9b)
 - Qumranic first stage
 - “And you did not abandon me to the plots of my *yetzer*.” (4Q417 2.II.2)
- An Independent being in Sirach 37
 - Vocative address: “O Evil Inclination:
 - Purpose clause: “to cover the land with deceit”
 - Contrasted with wisdom (Sirach 24:3): “Covers the earth” (κατεκάλυψα γῆν)

Sirach 37:3 LXX

O evil inclination, from where did you come to cover the land with deceit?

ὦ πονηρὸν ἐνθύμημα, πόθεν ἐνεκλίσθης καλύψαι τὴν ξηρὰν ἐν δολιότητι

True Friendship:

- Empathy (Sirach 37:5)
 - Motivation
 - Shared Human identity
- γαστήρ as related to emotions
 - “My stomach (ἡ γαστήρ μου) is aflame from weeping, and there is a shadow on my eyelids” (Job 16:16 LXX)
 - I will speak again, for I am full of words; My stomach’s spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς γαστρούς) is killing me and my stomach (ἡ δὲ γαστήρ μου) is like a bound wineskin of new wine in ferment or like a burst bellows of a blacksmith (Job 32:18–19 LXX)
- Empathy as unselfish affection

Sirach 37:5 LXX

Some companions help a friend for their stomachs’ sake, yet in battle they will carry his shield.

ἑταῖρος φίλῳ συμπονεῖ χάριν γαστρούς, ἔναντι πολέμου λήμψεται ἀσπίδα.

Conclusions:

- False friends manifest the evil inclination
- True friends are motivated by empathy
- The evil inclination (Sirach 37:3) is a semi-independent entity
 - A first stage in the development of the *yetzer*