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Wisdom for Women

31: 10-31

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.



The book of **Proverbs** ends with this poem about **wives of noble character**. A careful reading shows that **her** value is derived from **her** character of godly **wisdom**, which is beneficial to **her** family and to **her** community as a whole. This poem reminds us of the role that **women** play in **Proverbs** and is written from the perspective of **her** husband. That this poem concludes **the book** and helps to explain why, in the Hebrew canon, **Proverbs** is followed by **Ruth** (who **herself** is called **a noble woman** in **Ruth 3:11**). **She** is **a woman** who is defined not just by **her** actions but also by **her** attitudes. **She** is confident in the present and in the future because **her** confidence rests in **her wisdom**. **She** knows how to stay out of trouble through preparations such as making warm clothes in anticipation of winter.

Her industry frees **her husband** up for tasks important to **his** life. While **she** is taking care of the home front, **he is at the gate**, the place where town leaders gather to decide on the important matters affecting the whole community. This is an acrostic poem, the verses of which begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

According to tradition, **Proverbs 31:10-31** were originally created by **Abraham** in memory of his wife Sarah. Later usages of this passage in Jewish mysticism allude to **Shabbat** as a queen (a concept designed to bring reverence to the Sabbath), who is welcomed into the home. In contemporary Judaism, these verses are read at the **Shabbat table** every Friday evening, usually by man in honor of his wife. These praises praise the virtuous woman, indeed all women who shine the light of **ADONAI** through their actions.⁵⁷¹

Alef: Who can find a wife of noble character? She is worth far more than precious jewels (31:10 Hebrew). The climax of the book of **Proverbs** is a poem of the ideal **woman**. The word **noble** (Hebrew: *chayil*) has military overtones, but is not restricted to military use. The basic meaning of the term is *strength* and *power*. But in **her** strength, **she** is not competing with **her husband**. **She** is not going through an identity crisis over sexual politics. **She** is beyond that. **She** is giving herself away to **her** family and her community with wholehearted selflessness. **She** has high standards and sticks to them. The question: **who can find?** Underscores the rarity, and therefore the preciousness, of such **a woman**. The second colon emphasizes this by asserting that **her worth** exceeds that of **precious jewels**.⁵⁷²

Bet: Her husband trusts his heart to her, and he will have no lack of gain (31:11 Hebrew). Her husband does not maintain a jealous guard over his wife, or keep his valuables locked up so she cannot access them, as was a common ancient practice in a house of distrust. **The wise woman** is faithful to **her** marriage vows, demonstrates impeccable loyalty to **her husband**, and is prudent with the family finances. As a result, **her husband** has complete **trust** in **her**.⁵⁷³ The word translated **gain** means *loot*, *plunder*, or *spoils of war*. Why this wording? Because life is a struggle. This **woman** is not living in a perfect environment where life is a breeze. **She** is living in the real world, and **she** is up to the challenge. No wonder **her** husband trusts **her**. **He** feels honored to be **her husband**. This **woman** that **God** gave him is **his** greatest earthly treasure. In fact, there is only one **Person** this **husband** trusts more than **his wife**, and that is **ADONAI Himself**. **She** has won a

deep place in **his heart** and **he** cherishes **her**.⁵⁷⁴

Gimel: She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life (31:12 NLT). This poem continues to describe the benefits that **the woman of noble character** brings to **her husband**. In this case, the statement is general. As long as **she lives**, **she** will bring **him good** and **not evil** things. **Good** things and **evil** things can encompass a wide variety of moral and material blessings, some of which will be explained in the verses to come.

Dalet: She finds wool and flax and works with willing hands (31:13 BSB). The woman is not stuck at home, but goes out into the public square, the market, in order to obtain the materials that she needs. We presume that she needs the wool and flax in order to make the clothes described in the following verses. The second colon informs us that she not only does the labor, but she also does it joyfully.

He: She is like a merchant's ship, bringing her food from afar (31:14 NLT). **A merchant ship** buys and sells. It sets out from one port to deliver goods needed there and then picks up and delivers other goods needed at the home port. **The woman of noble character** works with **her** hands to produce products **she** can sell in the public market, and then buys food and brings it back to sustain **her household**.⁵⁷⁵

Vav: She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household and plans the day's work for her servant girls (31:15 NLT). To accomplish all that **she** does, this **woman** doesn't get much sleep. **She gets up early**, and we will discover that **she** goes to bed late in **verse 18**. **She** is selfless in serving **her household**, starting **her** day early on behalf of others, and is generous with those who help **her** – even **her servant girls**. Notice there is no hint of a grudging attitude in **her** selfless service toward others in **her household**.

Zayin: She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard (31:16 Hebrew). **Women** in the ancient world were typically not involved in business transactions, yet this **wise woman** transcends cultural expectations in service to **her** family. The Hebrew word **consider** implies careful thought and advance planning. **She** is not shopping for shopping's sake; rather, **she** has **her** eyes set on the future. **She's** not an impulse shopper, but **she** gives thorough consideration to **her** finances and searches out the most profitable purchases for **her** family's long-term benefit.

Chet: She is energetic and strong (Exodus 12:11; Second Kings 4:29 and 9:1; Dani’el 10:5), a hard worker (31:17 NLT). This **wise woman** is not soft, for the work **she** does vigorously and with zeal has made **her** strong. It is a simple maxim that we accomplish more when we work with effort. In this way **the woman of noble character** is contrasted with the lazy person.

Tet: She knows when to buy or sell, and she stays busy until late at night (31:18 CEV). The **wise woman** takes pride in all the labors of **her** hands and strives toward excellence in all **she** does. There is no sense here that she considers any labor menial or that **she** expects the praises of others for all **her** hard work. **She** regards excellence for her family as enough of a reward in itself. We were told earlier that **she** works hard and does not sleep much, getting up **before dawn** (verse 15), and here we see the flip side of that, since the text tells us that **she** also stays up **late at night**.

Yod: Her hands are busy spinning thread, her fingers twisting fiber (31:19 NLT). On the surface of it, this verse returns us to the woman’s ability to make clothing. These were parts of the loom, used for spinning thread and making garments. **The woman of noble character**; therefore, takes responsibility for the clothing and appearance of **her** family.

Chaf: She extends her palm to the poor (11:24, 28:27, 29:7 and 14) and reaches out her hands to the needy (31:20 Hebrew). The wise woman pours herself out in service to her family, but she also finds the time to reach out to the poor outside of her own home. The verbs **extend and reach out** emphasize that this is a deliberate effort, not an afterthought. **She** can afford to be concerned for others because **she** has already made provision for **herself** and **her** family. The emphasis on **her household** in these verses, however, suggests that **her** family’s needs come first.⁵⁷⁶

Lamed: She has no fear of the winter, for everyone in her household has warm clothes (31:21 NLT). As we learn at the end of this poem, this **wise woman’s** only **fear** is **ADONAI** (verse 30). **The fear of ADONAI** drives out all other **fears**. Specifically, **the woman** is not afraid of the weather because **she** prepares for it. It is not unusual for it to snow in the central hill country of **Isra’el**, though not frequently. But even though not frequent, **the wise woman** is ready, having already made **warm clothes** for all the members of **her household**.

Mem: She makes her own bedspreads. She dresses in fine linen and purple

gowns (31:22 NLT). This is the first time we read **the wise woman** had done anything for **herself**. **Purple gowns** required expensive dyes and were usually worn only by royalty. **The wise woman** thus uses **her** own efforts to gather and create the very best for **her** family, clothing them like kings and queens. These materials point to significant wealth.

Nun: **Her husband is well known at the city gate, where he sits among the elders of the Land (31:23 Hebrew).** This verse describes the important status and function of **the woman's husband**. **He** is a leader in the community. That **he sits** with **the elders at the gate** indicates that **he is an elder himself**. **The gates** of **the city** were the public meeting area and served as a kind of city hall. There **the elders** would make decisions and render judgments that affected the whole **city**. The implication is that **her husband** can achieve such a significant role only with the support of **his wife**. **She** takes care of **the household** while **he** works in the community. **Her** reputation also enhances **his**.

Samech: **She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes (31:24 BSB).** With all **her** other responsibilities faithfully taken care of, **the woman of noble character** helps support the family by **making linen garments** for the purposes of trade.

Ayin: **She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future (31:25 NLT).** A number of the verses of this poem describe the woman's facility at making **clothes** for **herself, her household,** and for sale. Perhaps this is what has suggested the more figurative use here. **She** conducts and carries **herself** as though **clothed in strength and dignity**. Since **clothing** may display style and status, her demeanor displays **strength and dignity**. People who looked at **her** would recognize these qualities in **her**. The second colon might then be seen as a particular feature of **her strength and honor**. **The future** is unknown. But the one thing everyone knows about **the future** is that it will bring difficulties and obstacles. Yet in spite of that knowledge, **she is fearless** because of **her wisdom**, which implies a relationship with **ADONAI**. **The fear of ADONAI** will sustain her (**to see link click [Ai](#) - The Fear of ADONAI is the Beginning of Wisdom**).

Pe: **When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with chesed (31:26 NLT).** Like **her** divine counterpart, **Lady Wisdom, the noble woman's speech** is soaked with **wisdom** (**[Bj](#) - Lady Wisdom's Call**). **Wise speech** is a broad category, but it would include **words** that are godly, righteous,

and also a blueprint for living. **She** would impart lifesaving advice for those who would listen to **her**. The second colon also praises her speech as that which is characterized as **instruction** (from *torah*) of **chesed** (see [Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed](#)). **Her kind** words reflect the covenant between **God** and **His** people.

Tzadi: **She is a lookout post over the affairs of her household and does not suffer from laziness (31:27 Hebrew): The woman is upright** as **she** looks out for the needs of **her household**. **She** may not be worried about **the future (verse 25)**, but that does not mean that **she** takes a “hands-off” attitude toward **it**. A person high up in the **lookout post** would need the qualities of great diligence and observation. **Ezeki’el** understood **his** role as **watchman** (see [Ezeki’el Di - The Prophet as a Watchman](#)). By now we are far from surprised about the information provided to us in the second colon. **The woman of noble character** was definitely not **lazy**.⁵⁷⁷

Right now some of us men might be feeling, “I haven’t trusted and valued and affirmed my wife as she deserves.” Let’s talk about that, because the primary message here in the book of **Proverbs** is for us husbands and husbands-to-be, which includes nearly all of us men. What does the word “husband” mean? We have a related English word “husbandry,” that is, cultivation. And when the word “husband” is used as a verb, it means to cultivate. If you are a husband, your job is to cultivate, to nurture your **wife**. Your life-time impact on your **wife** should be that **her** life opens up more and more, and **she** is enabled to become all that **God** wants **her** to be. **ADONAI** is calling you, as **her** husband, to care for **her** so that in **her** later years **she** will be thinking, “What a great life I’ve had! My husband understood me. He cared for me. He inspired me to grow **in Messiah**.” How does a husband do that? Not by criticizing his **wife** – **God** doesn’t treat us that way – by encouraging **her**.

Kof: **Her children stand and bless her; her husband praises her (31:28 NLT). Her children rise up, they stand up, and they speak respectfully to their mom. They tell her why they esteem her, why they admire her as a woman of God.** Where did **the children** learn that? From **dad . . . “he praises her” (31:28)**. The key word from **verses 28 to 31** is **praise**. It appears **three times**. A husband cultivates his **wife** by setting an example and praising **her** in their home. No putdowns. No fault-finding. No insults. Not even neutral silence. But rather bright, positive, life-giving **praise**. The picture here is of **the woman of noble character** giving **herself** to **her** family and to others, and **she** is receiving praise from **her** husband and **children** at home and from **her** community **at the gates**.

ADONAI wants us to fill our homes and congregations with this beautiful **wisdom**, where men are not passive, but overtly cultivating the excellence of their **wives**, and **women** are thriving.

Resh: What is it that the husband says? **There are many noble and capable women in the world, but you surpass them all (31:29 NLT)! How does your wife excel? Tell her. Tell her** in front of the children. Have a conversation at the dinner table tonight . . . and tomorrow night. And if you can't think of any way in which your **wife** excels and truly deserves to be praised, then that's your fault, because **God** called you to husband **her** into excellence.

Men, this is not a pep talk. This is **the Word of God**. How you see **God** will inevitably show up in how you treat your family. You can fake it at work, but can't fake it at home. How you really see **God** will show up in how you treat your **wife**. A. W. Tozer (1897-1963) wrote, "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about **God** that are unworthy of **Him**." If your concept of **God** is beneath who **He** really is, then you will have unworthy thoughts about your **wife** and unworthy words to **her**. And the problem is not **her**. The root problem is, your **Yeshua** is not the real **Yeshua**. If you cannot bring yourself to praise your **wife** and you live with **her** in silent, sullen, defeated mediocrity, there is a reason. The reason is how you see **Messiah**. It may be that you have no complaints about **Him**. **He** may seem to you a pleasant **Savior**. But if you have no passion for **Him**, it's because you don't see in **Him** a mighty passion for you, and a mighty salvation for you, and a glorious future for you. That vision of **Messiah** is unworthy of **Him**. The truth is, **the Lord Yeshua Messiah** is a glorious **Savior**. Believe it. See **Him** in **His** grace and glory towards you, rejoicing over you with all **His** mighty heart. It will change how you treat your **wife** . . . and a lot more.

Men, let's repent of our silence and the sin of withheld love. Have we robbed our families of the love they deserve? Have we truly and worthily represented **Messiah** to our families? Or have we, in effect, denied **the Word of God** in our homes? And here is a basic principle for men: If we don't get radical, nothing will ever change. **Messiah** got radical for us at the cross, and it changed everything forever. And **He** put you with your **wife** because **He** loves **her**. So get radical, start changing, begin a new tradition in your home, starting today. If you step out in new obedience, **the Lord** will help you. And your family will rejoice over you.⁵⁷⁸

Shin: The husband continues the praise of his **wife**. **Charm is deceptive and beauty meaningless, but a woman who fears ADONAI will be greatly**

praised (31:30 Hebrew). This verse puts things in perspective. People, and men in particular (let's be honest here guys), are typically attracted to superficial attributes, like beauty, figure, and charm. However, charm may hide a nasty personality, and beauty is meaningless unless it is also accompanied by godliness. **Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion (11:22 Hebrew).** The common experience shows that the futility of physical beauty in large part derives from its relative brevity. This verse does not mean that this **wise woman** is abrasive and ugly, it simply contrasts these relatively worthless traits of **charm and beauty** with what is truly important: **fear of ADONAI**. This is true of all people, male and female, but here there is a reminder that **a woman** who deserves to be called **noble** is motivated by a proper relationship with **her God**.

Tav: Giver her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates (31:31 ESV). Such **a woman** deserves reward, and the final verse of the poem calls for it. **She** should benefit from **her** hard work. **She** should also be praised both at home and in public.⁵⁷⁹