Finding “The Proverbs 31 Woman”

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The Ladies’ Ministry at my church kicked off its first meeting with icebreakers and a potluck picnic. As ladies of all ages settled in a circle on the grass, the leader produced a boxful of multicolored pastel cupcakes, one for each of us. Each woman introduced herself and read the words iced on the top of her cupcake. Each was a character trait of “the Proverbs 31 woman,” such as generous, wise, or hardworking. The leader then shared how Prov 31:10–31 had challenged her to be a better wife, mother, and businesswoman. She encouraged each of us to try to put into practice the trait on her cupcake.

Countless bridal showers, conferences, books, and blogs for women have taken a similar approach to Prov 31:10–31. The woman described in this passage is held up as a role model for all women—and women only—to emulate. Some women embrace it and promote it. Others feel anxiety at the impossible task. However they react, many Christian women know Prov 31 offhand because of how often it is quoted to them. Men, however, are often unfamiliar with the reference. Although the characteristics of the woman in Prov 31:10–31 are admirable, we risk muffling God’s word when we assume that any part of the Bible applies exclusively to women, men, or any other group. The whole Bible is God’s word to God’s whole people.

Because this woman is viewed as a standard, interpretations of this passage are often cited in debates about women and their appropriate roles. These discussions disproportionately focus on mapping the specific details of the woman’s work onto today, with implications for what women should be doing. Some say this woman trades and invests, so women should join the workforce. Others argue that all her work happens out of her home in order to highlight the woman’s concern for her family, implying women should be homemakers. Both arguments read a contemporary debate about women’s roles into this passage. Unfortunately, this passage has also been used as a standard by which women measure their marriageability, believing they must be a “Proverbs 31 woman” to be a good wife, or to get married at all.

Applied in these ways, God’s word is trivialized into a tool for enforcing behavioral standards on women. Women do not need a spiritual guilt trip on top of all the neighbors, family, advertisers, and authors telling them how to get married, raise their families, and make ends meet. Christians do not need another reason to judge each other and divide. We need to celebrate each other. We need grace.

Upon careful study, this passage offers life and hope to society for his glorious plan. The message of Prov 31:10–31 neither trivializes women’s work nor shames women trying to “have it all.” It is much more. It invites us all—men and women—to seek wisdom, celebrate each other, and rejoice in God’s grace.

Proverbs’ Parting Mnemonic: “Son, it’s worth seeking wisdom and a wise wife.”

To understand Prov 31:10–31, the first place to look is the passage’s immediate context in the book of Proverbs. This poetic text occupies a crucial place in OT Wisdom literature as the closing words of the quintessential Wisdom book. This poem recaps the several themes of Proverbs with a memorable character description. When paired with Proverbs’ introductory instructions to sons, this passage describes persuasive rewards to clinch the author’s case for why young men should pursue wisdom, including in a wife. The passage is not primarily for women to live up to, but a literary ideal to shape the choices and values of young men, and by extension all people.

Young men are ostensibly the immediate ancient audience of the book of Proverbs. As when approaching any book of the Bible, the message can be applied to all God’s people throughout history, but awareness of the initial audience provides a foundation for interpretation. Proverbs is bookended by advice to sons. After a brief introduction stating the usefulness of studying wisdom (1:1–7), Proverbs launches into teaching wisdom by means of a father’s instruction to his sons. Though mothers are sometimes mentioned in a parallel line (e.g., 1:8, 6:20), the consistent placement of fathers before mothers, in addition to texts which lack mention of mothers (e.g., 4:1–3, 13:1, 29:3), serve to focus the book on fathers’ instruction to sons. The last chapter of the book presents King Lemuel, the reader’s role model since he is a son who paid attention to his mother’s wise advice (31:1). He proceeds to share his mother’s advice, which ends with a poem describing the valiant wife that a young man should seek.

The similarities between the father’s advice in the introductory chapters and the wise sayings of King Lemuel’s mother reveal that Prov 31 is not an afterthought but a carefully crafted conclusion to the book. Both parents advise their sons to value hard work, marital faithfulness, and the fear of the Lord rather than pursuing the deadly allures of fast money, power, and pleasure. They each use descriptions of women to make their point. The father warns the young men to avoid men with violent get-rich-quick schemes (1:10–19) and adulterous women (2:16–19, 5, 6:20–35, 7). Hard work and marital faithfulness are the path to life. He contrasts wisdom (chs. 2–4) and folly (chs. 5–7), depicted as women calling out in the streets offering the path of life or death (ch. 8). “Woman Wisdom” and “Woman Folly” from Prov 1–9 are again contrasted within Prov 31. King Lemuel’s mother warns her son, “do not hand over your strength to women” (31:3). Instead, she urges him to pursue the woman of strength, who builds up her husband and their household.
The ideal wife whom King Lemuel’s mother describes looks strikingly similar to the father’s personification of wisdom:

The Woman of Substance knows her profit is good (31:18); Woman Wisdom’s merchant profit is more than that of silver (31:14). Both women are difficult to find / attain (31:10, 128, 8:17). Each has a house (31:15, 21, 27, 9:1) and a staff of young women (31:15, 9:3). They provide food for their companions (31:14, 9:5) and offer a life of security (31:11, 1:33). Both women are known at the city gates: wisdom by her presence (1:21; 8:3) and the Woman of Substance for her profits and work (31:31) and by her husband (31:23). They stretch out their hands to the needy (31:20; 1:24). Their fruit is profit (31:16, 31; 8:19).

The Woman of Substance does no evil (31:12); Woman Wisdom hates evil (8:13). They laugh (31:25, 1:26, 8:30). The children of the Woman of Substance call her happy (31:28). Those who hold fast to Woman Wisdom are made happy (3:11).9

Indeed, the wife in Prov 31 is a memorable summary of the various virtues of wisdom that the book has extolled. This poem highlights the value of wisdom in terms of the economic reward of hard work, right speech, caring for the poor, marital fidelity, financial foresight, and prudence.

Proverbs 31:10–31 summarizes the characteristics of wisdom in a unique, beautiful, and memorable form. For the majority of the book, these virtues are presented in an overwhelming number of couplets. However, this poem presents them in an alphabetic acrostic (cf. Ps 111, 112, 119; Lam 1–4). Each verse begins with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, serving as a memory aid for the student of wisdom. Alphabetic acrostics symbolize completeness and perfection (suitable for the perfect wife, for wisdom, and for the conclusion of a book), and they require artistic labor, which emphasizes that the subject is worth the effort to express eloquently.10 The poem also personifies these concepts, making them easier to remember and showing by example what it looks like to practically apply wisdom.

The book solidifies the connection between the Prov 31 wife and wisdom not only because the Prov 31 wife embodies wisdom and is described the same way, but also by employing the same rationale for pursuing wisdom and the Prov 31 wife. The father urges young men to seek wisdom, making a compelling case by appealing to their desires for wealth, honor, and a long life:

Blessed is the human being who finds wisdom,
the human being who obtains understanding,
for the profit she gives is better than the profit of silver
and her revenue than gold.
She is more precious than corals;
all desirable things cannot compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand, wealth and honor. (3:13–16)11

King Lemuel’s mother also convinces her son to marry wisely by appealing to his desire for honor, prosperity, and peace:

A valiant wife who can find?
Her price is far beyond corals.
The heart of her husband trusts in her;
he does not lack “spoil.”
She does him good and not evil
all the days of her life. . . .
Her husband is respected at the city gate,
when he sits with the elders of the land. (31:10–12, 23)12

In the father’s speech, he reinforces to his son that he must pursue wisdom and be faithful to her, using metaphorical language that could easily apply to pursuing and being faithful to a wife:

Do not leave her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
The beginning of wisdom is [this], get wisdom!
In exchange for all your acquisitions, get insight.
Cherish her, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.
She will bestow a garland to grace your head;
a splendid crown she will give you. (4:6–9)

Throughout Proverbs, the value of pursuing both wisdom and the valiant wife is described in economic terms, utilizing the imagery of a crown to signify honor and corals (more commonly translated “rubies” or “jewels”) to signify wealth. Woman wisdom says:

Choose my instruction instead of silver,
my knowledge rather than choice gold,
because wisdom is better than corals,
and all the things one desires do not compare with her. (8:10–11)13

Solomon’s advice in the central portion of the book includes:

A noble and virtuous wife is the crown of her husband, but like rottenness in his bones is a shameful wife. (12:4)

Then the description of the valiant wife begins with:

A valiant wife who can find?
Her price is far beyond corals. (31:10)

The interchangeable imagery and the similar rationale for pursuit regarding wisdom and the Prov 31 wife suggest she is an embodiment of wisdom.

However, the Prov 31 wife is not solely a metaphor for wisdom. The Prov 31 wife and Woman Wisdom have several key differences: one woman is a mother and a wife, extremely busy providing financially for her family. The other is a single woman, a composite preacher (1:20–23), prophet (1:24–33), and teacher (8:4–11) actively seeking followers.14 It is possible that the Prov 31 woman is a continuation of the earlier personification, now “settled down with her own.”15 Yet since the noble wife “speaks” with wisdom, she cannot be solely interpreted as a metaphor.16

Interpreting Prov 31 as literal practical marriage advice makes sense within Proverbs.17 The introductory phrase “a valiant wife” is also found in Prov 12:4 referring to a literal wife. Proverbs is full of practical warnings about adultery and wise marriage choices right from the beginning, so it seems likely that the poem could
have been practical marriage advice for young men as well as a vivid description of wisdom. The repeated economic rationale for the value of wisdom has a practical logic behind it: a young man in the ancient Near East was often required to pay a bridewealth to his bride's family. The young man and his family would want to know that it would be worth the cost of acquiring such a rare wife. Like in some honor-shame cultures in developing economies today, it would be important to know if she would be a financial asset and bring him honor.

Using poetic double entendre, the author seems to leave it deliberately ambiguous whether the final poem is describing wisdom or the ideal wife. The two are not mutually exclusive—indeed, it is wise to pursue a wise wife. In fact, marrying this kind of woman would be a strong indicator of a young man's wisdom. The application for the immediate audience is clear: a young man will be rewarded for valuing and seeking wisdom, which involves fearing the Lord, working hard, and devoting his life to a woman who does the same.

The book of Proverbs thus concludes with the message with which it began: seek wisdom and you will be rewarded. It ends with a vivid memory aid for the student of wisdom: an alphabetic acrostic describing the female embodiment of wisdom that the man should literally and metaphorically pursue and embrace. More broadly applied, the Prov 31 woman encourages both women and men to value, seek, and praise wisdom throughout life.

**A Hymn for the Home Front Hero: The Valiant Warrior Wife**

The Prov 31 wife reinforces the overall message of wisdom in a memorable way to the primarily young male audience. But its imagery also conveys a surprising corrective to other depictions of women. By careful word choice, the poem portrays this wife as a valiant warrior working to provide for her household. Most poetry about women at the time (and today as well) erotically extolled a woman's body parts, but in this heroic poem the community praises the wise wife as the military hero of the home front. Rather than shaming women, this poem offers an example of how to celebrate women for all the seemingly mundane domestic chores they do.

The first clue to the poem's genre is how the subject of the poem is described: as an *'esht chayil*. This phrase forms an *inclusio* around the poem (vv. 10, 29). The word *'eshet* means "woman of" or "wife of." The phrase *'eshet chayil* refers to a widow in Ruth 3:11 and a married woman in Prov 12:4. Given the context of marital advice to a son, "wife of" seems appropriate. The word *chayil* can refer to strength, and a synonym for strength (ֹֹצ) occurs twice in the poem (vv. 17, 25). *Chayil* is the sense of *chayil* in Ps 18:32, 39: "It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. . . . You armed me with strength for battle; you humbled my adversaries before me" (NIV). It is used in relation to soldiers, officers, and brave warriors such as Gideon, David, Jephthah the "mighty warrior," "valiant fighters," or "the chief." It refers to wealth, property, and profits from trade in statements such as, "By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth" (Ezek 28:5 NIV) and, "he will not enjoy the profit from his trading" (Job 20:18 NIV). *Chayil* can indicate substance, power, or wealth. The phrase "valiant wife" captures a comparable range of meaning in today's English.

The valiant wife's exploits are detailed using masculine and military language. She laughs in victory (v. 25), "girds her loins with strength" (v. 17), and obtains "plunder" (v. 11) and "prey" (v. 15). Other phrases normally used in a military context include "you ascend above" which normally refers to going out to battle (v. 29), "she stretches out her hand" which is always aggressive elsewhere (v. 19), and "extol" which occurs in heroic poems, referring to singing of someone's victory (v. 31).

Therefore, this poem is best classified as one of Israel's heroic poems, "characterized by recounting the hero's mighty deeds, usually his military exploits." Similar poems include the Song of Deborah (Judg 5), the women's songs for Saul and David (2 Sam 18, 21), and David's elegy for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1). Deborah's song notwithstanding, this is an atypical genre for a poem praising a woman. Poems praising women in ancient Near Eastern literature would normally focus on their physical beauty and erotic appeal, but in this poem the fear of the Lord explicitly eclipses attractiveness (Prov 31:30). As if to highlight the contrast, the poem describes the woman's body parts not as passive objects to delight the male gaze, but strong and active in bringing about her conquest and earning her praise. The words "hand," "palm," and "arm" are repeated to highlight the woman's work and strength: spinning wool (v. 13), earning money (v. 16), having strong arms to work (v. 17), and creating clothing (v. 19). In a chiasm, a literary device featuring inverted parallelism, "hand" and "palm" also describe her generosity to the poor (vv. 19–20), and such language is used again in the context of the praise that the works of her hands bring her (v. 31).

A heroic poem urges people to praise the subject, honoring the hero as a champion of the community and its values. Despite including the incentives of status and honor for this woman's husband, this poem ends with an admonishment to praise this wise woman. The examples of her industriousness, hitherto seen as a work ethic that benefits a household, are now causes to praise her. Having received honor from his wife throughout the poem, in v. 28 the husband and his children give her honor:

> Her sons arise and pronounce her blessed; her husband [rises] and praises her:
> 
> "Many women do valiantly, but you surpass all of them." (31:28–29)

The very first proverb in the book states that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7 NIV), and the book ends urging its readers to praise a woman for her practical application of wisdom and the fear of the Lord. The entire coda centers around the root "extol" (v. 31), which is the only imperative in the poem.

Charm is deceitful and beauty is fleeting;
as for a woman who fears the LORD, she should be praised.

Extol her for the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates. (31:30–31)
The form of the poem also highlights the worthiness of its subject by its carefully crafted and even beautiful alphabetic acrostic structure. The reader ought to leave with an awed appreciation for the value of wisdom and such a woman.

By choosing a woman to exemplify the hardworking, generous, and Godfearing exploits of embodied wisdom, Proverbs has presented an unusually glorious portrayal of a woman for any culture. She is not a passive homebody, but a warrior fighting to benefit her family and community. The performance of her chores is depicted as exhibiting mastery of her tools and is elevated to the national significance of victories in battle. The proper response is to value and praise her for all that she does. Instead of evaluating women against “the Proverbs 31 woman,” this poem would better be applied by celebrating the value of even the most ordinary actions done to love others and glorify God.

**“Nobody” Ruth, the Real Nation Builder**

Perhaps a wife who personifies wisdom seems like a lofty literary ideal. Maybe her praise as a community hero seems exaggerated for literary effect. Or perhaps the glorification of the Prov 31 wife seems to exclude women who are unmarried, barren, or too poor to have real estate and servants. How inclusive is the Bible’s vision of female wisdom?

The Bible tells of a real historical *’eshet chayil*. The phrase *’eshet chayil* occurs only once in the biblical canon outside Proverbs—in the book of Ruth. In the Jewish canon, Ruth comes directly after Proverbs, as though to give a historical example of this poetic ideal, despite the fact that Ruth is a poor, single, widowed Moabite. This “nobody” fully embodies the Godfearing wisdom of Prov 31. As a result, by God’s grace she becomes one of Israel’s national heroines.

The first bold act of this foreign widow is to swear an oath of loyalty to Naomi, the people of Israel, and the Lord (1:16–17). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of her wisdom. Ruth then works hard to glean grain for her mother-in-law, risking sexual harassment and returning home with a shocking amount of plunder to feed her family. She enacts the values described in Prov 31: loyalty, fidelity, resourcefulness, service to one’s family and to the needy.

She gains the title “valiant woman” by daring to live after God’s heart, to embrace the spirit of God’s law. Naomi, concerned about Ruth’s future as a foreign widow, instructs Ruth to go down to the threshing floor and present herself for marriage to Boaz. However, Ruth considers her mother-in-law’s family first, suggesting that Boaz marry her as a way of redeeming the land of Naomi’s family and hopefully providing an heir to carry on Naomi’s family’s name. She demonstrates an understanding of the Mosaic law: first, a kinsman’s obligation to redeem the land of his deceased relative, and second, the custom of levirate marriage in which a man marries his brother’s widow to provide sons for a deceased childless brother. Regardless of whether these two laws were usually linked, Ruth’s request goes beyond the requirements of the law. Boaz, not being a brother to Naomi, much less to Ruth, is not obligated to perform levirate marriage. But Ruth suggests that she and Boaz take up these roles, understanding that the spirit of the law is to provide for widows, the poor, and foreigners. Her wisdom is based on a fear of the Lord and a knowledge of his commands. Boaz, equally a man of *’eshet chayil* (Ruth 2:1), accepts the challenge: “And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character [*’eshet chayil]*” (Ruth 3:11 NIV).

The last mention of *’eshet chayil* in Ruth highlights the eternal reward that Ruth and Boaz gain for fearing God. Interestingly, it takes place with Boaz becoming Ruth’s husband at the gate, precisely where Prov 31:23 locates the husband:

Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing [*’achar*] in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” (Ruth 4:11–12 NIV)

The blessings are more than fulfilled. Out of the valiant actions of Ruth and Boaz, a grandchild is born and the estate is saved, restoring Naomi’s dashed fortunes. Genealogies in Ruth and Matthew highlight the impact of this couple’s community leadership across generations, broadening to leadership of the entire kingdom of Israel (in David) and the kingdom “on earth as it is in heaven” (in Jesus)!

Clearly, Prov 31 does not elevate the deeds of the *’eshet chayil* to national significance for mere rhetorical effect. The valiant woman has a crucial role in advancing God’s purpose. Her influence spreads far beyond the home into her community, her nation, and the world. The fact that God chose an outsider from the bottom of society to be the real *’eshet chayil* in the divine plan is remarkable. Taken in the context of Ruth, Prov 31 speaks to us not of unattainable standards but of God’s glorious grace in using us, no matter who we are.

**Application**

The description of the Prov 31 wife is not intended as specific, detailed instructions for how to get married or become the perfect wife and mother. Women today do not need to fret about the modern equivalent of spinning flax or to wonder how to provide portions for their female servants if they lack domestic help. Despite claims to the contrary, this passage is not a recipe with steps to becoming an ideal woman. If it were to be a list at all, it would be a shopping list describing what a *man* should look for in a wife. Since the poem is a summary and an embodied example of wise character traits from throughout the book of Proverbs, women and men can look to the rest of the book for clarification on what those virtues are. Since the acrostic is a poetic tribute, how we live out the virtues of wisdom does not need to match this wealthy woman from ancient Israel. In the context of the whole book of Proverbs, this poem’s message is that everyone, both men and women, should seek to embody and to value the virtues of wisdom.
Knowing how this poem's depiction of women critiques objectifying portrayals of women informs how we apply it today. Many societies still praise women primarily for their physical appearance and sex appeal, By ending with a heroic poem that honors this Godfearing woman's work, Proverbs challenges us rather to value women for their character and all they contribute to their families and communities. Like Ruth, Godfearing women who embrace and live out the Lorn's commands can change their nations and the course of history. Proverbs 1 urges us to celebrate the wives and mothers in our lives, and to see even domestic chores as victories. Kings and philosophers may write about wisdom, but wisdom can just as easily be found at home and in the community, and it is certainly no less praiseworthy in a wife. Furthermore, Ruth reminds us that anyone, regardless of social status, sex, or ethnicity, can embody the wisdom of the Prov 31 wife.

Understood properly, the Prov 31 woman is an embodiment of wisdom intended for young men—and by extension all people—to emulate. It is a summary of practical advice on all matters of life, including the importance of marrying wisely. It is a beautiful, poetic tribute to wisdom, honoring the feminine by choosing a woman as the image for this metaphor, and reminding us through Ruth of God's grace in choosing to use us to advance his purposes. Finally, it urges us to celebrate the valiant exploits of everyday women in our families, communities, and nations.

Notes

1. For example, one website lists 10 virtues from Prov 31 to which women should aspire. A Virtuous Woman, http://avirtuouswoman.org/10-virtues-of-the-proverbs-31-woman.


6. Waltke cautions against overemphasizing an application to any one party: "this valiant wife has been canonized as a role model for all Israel for all time. Wise daughters aspire to be like her, wise men seek to marry her (v. 10), and all wise people aim to incarnate the wisdom she embodies, each in his own sphere of activity. One should avoid emphasizing one of these applications at the expense of another, forgetting that by nature proverbial material sets forth exemplars, asking the audience to make the appropriate application to their own spheres." Bruce K. Waltke, The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 520.

7. Waltke states that some scholars separate Prov 31:10–31 from the rest of Prov 31 "because of its distinct form and structure, its separation from vv. 1–9 in the LXX, and an endemic scholarly skepticism about the Bible's own claims to its authorship," but he makes a case for attributing 31:10–31 to King Lemuel and his mother. He argues that no other portion of Proverbs is without a superscription of attribution, differing forms can comprise unified pieces, and the LXX is a secondary source. Lexical similarities and the feminine theme carry through the whole. Waltke, The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31, 501–2.


12. Duane Garrett, Proverbs (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 248, points out the rewards of community respect and economic gain. He argues that Prov 31 is a chiasm, whose center reinforces the honor that the husband of this woman receives:

A: High value of the good wife (v. 10)
B: Husband benefited by wife (vv. 11–12)
C: Wife works hard (vv. 13–19)
D: Wife gives to poor (v. 20)
E: No fear of snow (v. 21a)
F: Children clothed in scarlet (v. 21b)
G: Coverings for bed; wife wears linen (v. 22)
H: Public respect for husband (v. 23)
I': Sells garments and sashes (v. 24)
F': Wife clothed in dignity (v. 25a)
E': No fear of future (v. 25b)
D': Woman speaks wisdom (v. 26)
C': Wife works hard (v. 27)
B': Husband and children praise wife (vv. 28–29)
A': High value of a good wife (vv. 30–31)


15. McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife, " 40.


17. The practical wisdom of Proverbs is gained by "learning and doing. . . So, too, it is only after one has apprenticed himself to Wisdom and studied her proverbs that one can finally recognize the distinctive features of Wisdom in the valuable, industrious wife, busy in her home—placed, of course, at the end of the proverbs, at the end of the book!" McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife, " 45.


21. See also Judg 5:29; 1 Sam 2:4; Eccl 10:10; Zech 4:6.


24. See also Gen 34:29; Num 31:9; Deut 3:18, 8:17; 1 Sam 14:48; 1 Kgs 10:2; 1 Chr 11:22; Job 20:38; Ps 108:13; Isa 8:4; Jer 15:13; Ezek 28:5; Zech 14:14.

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33. Murphy, Proverbs, 245.
38. This interpretation comes from James, The Gospel of Ruth, 145.
39. This interpretation comes from James, The Gospel of Ruth, 164–66.
41. For an explanation of the debate about whether the two laws are linked, see Jack Sasson, who believes the two laws were creatively linked by Ruth, and that Ruth and Boaz were not required to occupy these roles. Jack M. Sasson. Ruth: A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist-Folklorist Interpretation, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1989), 81–85, 92, 119–36.
42. This interpretation comes from James, The Gospel of Ruth, 167.
44. "This good wife is not only a very busy housewife; she is also a shrewd and enterprising business woman," but the woman's very specific upper-class status prevents her from functioning as a universal model: she "cannot be read as a kind of blueprint for the ideal Israelite housewife, either for men to measure their wives against or for their wives to try to live up to. Far less, of course, can it be read as a blueprint for the ideal housewife in our own Western society." Kenneth T. Aitken, Proverbs (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 157–58.

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