

Sophia
Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.
July 20, 2015

Prov 31:27

(BHS)

צוֹפְיָה הַלִּיכוֹת בֵּיתָהּ
וְלֶחֶם עֲצָלוּת לֹא תֹאכֵל:

(ESV)

She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Those trained in Hebrew may recognize a few words here. Notice, for example, that the last word of line 1 is “her house.” (It is interesting that it is not her husband’s house. This is meaningful in trying to pin down her identity.) Also, look at the first word of line 2, *w^e-lehem*, “and bread.” You can form “Bethlehem” by putting “house” and “bread” together. To read line 2 like the ESV, follow this order (counting from right to left): the initial *waw* → word 3 → word 4 → word 1 (without the *waw*) → word 2. Gotta love it.

The Proverbs 31 woman is a complex figure. Christian women look to her for inspiration. But she is more than just a model for the ladies. She represents what life looks like in a practical way when a person decides to commit to a path of wisdom. Thus all her virtues are suitable for men as well. In other words, wise men consider a field and buy it; wise men work into the night, etc.

The first nine chapters of Proverbs feature a youth with two paths and two women before him: wisdom and folly. Which will he choose? By the end of the book his decision is clear. Wisdom has become his wife, and he lives out a prosperous life with her at his side.

Many of wisdom’s virtues that Proverbs 1 – 9 extol are applied to the Proverbs 31 woman. For example, both she and Lady Wisdom are more

precious than rubies (3:15, 31:10), worthy of trust (1:33, 31:11), set a good table (9:5, 31:14), are profitable (3:14, 31:18), and laugh at the future (1:26, 8:30 – 31, 31:25). One of the aspects of the complex image of the Proverbs 31 woman is that she represents none other than Lady Wisdom herself, who blesses households that are built on her counsel.

This brings us to a consideration of the first word of our verse, צופיה. Its lexical form is the common צפה, “to watch.” Nothing about that is extraordinary. However, nowhere else in the Bible does it appear in this particular form. Al Wolters’s 1985 article suggests a reason for this (email me for the bibliography). Take a close look at צופיה. The first letter is *s*. This is followed by a long *o*. Then a soft *ph*. Then a long *i*. Finally, long *a*. How is this Hebrew word pronounced? “Sophia”—the Greek word for wisdom! (For you scholars out there, this verb form demonstrates that Proverbs was being edited well into the Hellenistic era.)

So the text that reads, “She watches the ways of her house,” also reads, “Sophia (is) the ways of her house.” It is by wisdom that a man or woman manages a household well. It is by wisdom that a field is considered and bought. It is by wisdom that a vineyard is planted. And the best example of a wise life is in the choice to marry a virtuous spouse. This is the great wisdom tradition on display. To possess wisdom is to possess life. To embrace Dame Wisdom is to embrace life (3:18).

All of the great Old Testament themes and motifs are fulfilled in Christ. He has become our wisdom (1 Cor 1:30). In him we find all the treasures of

wisdom (Col 2:3). To embrace Christ in faith is to embrace life. To possess him is to possess life abundant. The wise today build their households on this solid rock, and not on sand as fools do (Matt 7:24 – 26).

The challenge of the Proverbs 31 passage is to take care that you are wisely building your house. Are you a disciple of Jesus? Remember, “disciple” is related to “discipline”—have you entered his school and put on his yoke (Matt 11:29)? Does his wisdom characterize your life?

What tends to compromise that? What could you do better? Do you need to talk to your Instructor about that? Do you need to shore up that foundation? This is a lifelong task that will continue until he returns for us, and he takes us to his Father’s mansion, and bids us eat at the banquet table prepared for us (Prov 9:5).

Amen, Come Lord Jesus!