

A Woman of Note in Proverbs

New Biblical understandings enhance the place of women ...

Maybe we don't get the deeper meaning if we read only one version of the Bible. Not only are these stories translated from original texts, but each person involved with that translation, no matter how scholarly, brings their own interpretation to what they are working on.

Take the final chapter of the Book of Proverbs – which has traditionally been referred to as a poem about “The Capable Wife”. The title, itself, biases our thinking. She is seen primarily in the role of serving her husband. It concludes “Many women are good wives, but you are the best of them all.”

A more contemporary Biblical Scholar, Ellen Davis, in her book “*Scripture, Culture and Agriculture*”, sees more when she interprets this passage which she calls “A Valorous Woman”.

The woman, who happens to also have a husband, is hard-working, God-fearing, and successful in the way she runs the family farm. “It is likely that many or most of the men had to spend months away from the farm” working on imperial projects and even rebuilding Jerusalem. In the face of these demands, the women were called to keep the family farm and economy going.

The poem, Davis concludes, “Honours the industry and accomplishments of this ordinary citizen.” The woman is scrupulous in her care of the land. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and follows the rituals of her faith. This is indeed “an ideal for a whole people living on the edge of subsistence.”

What more can be said? Davis sees “the mother of the family as teacher, sharing fully with her husband in the work of maintaining both the household and the covenantal identity of its members.”

This interpretation of the passage reflects the true culture of Israel at the time as it was shared with the people. Even until today, many farm women we know live this reality daily.

NOTE: *Ellen Davis, using contemporary writers such as Wendell Berry and Aldo Leopold as primary sources alongside Old Testament sources, is affirming for many modern day students in the rural-culture movement.*

(written by Joyce Sasse, 2010)