

Wisdom Literature Wisdom and Women

Interpreting the Text:

1. How is the depiction of the “valorous woman” in Proverbs 31 used or misused in contemporary religious settings? Based on how you’ve seen it referenced in the present day, would the author of Proverbs be pleased or displeased? How do you feel about contemporary definitions of a “Proverbs 31 Woman”?
2. Why do you think the author portrays both wisdom and folly as women? What does this tell you about how women functioned in this historical period? What is compelling or confusing about these feminine metaphors?
3. The misogyny present in the world of Proverbs is clearly demonstrated in this book of wisdom. What is our role as interpreters of this text to prevent further damage caused by this rhetoric that may be harmful?

Applying the Text:

1. Proverbs, despite using feminine imagery throughout the book, appears to have a negative view of women, especially women who don’t meet certain expectations tied to the function of a wife. How does this affect how we see Jesus interact with women in the Gospels?
2. Proverbs uses women as metaphors for both threats as well as the rewards of following instruction. This makes us keenly aware that men were writing for men. Were you to write a new book of proverbs, could you think of a different framing that would be less exclusionary? What would your metaphors for wisdom and folly be?
3. Ultimately, the virtue of hard work is the only ethic presented by the Book of Proverbs. That, combined with its “anti-feminist” bent, complicates its usage today. Given this reality, should we still be relying on Proverbs for contemporary life advice? Are their parts that still speak to our contemporary world?