

This Courageous Woman: A Socio-rhetorical Womanist
Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31

By

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any university or tertiary institution.

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Abstract

The title of Proverbs 31:10-31, namely, אִשְׁת־חַיִל 'a woman of courage', cultivated my interest in this text and hence this thesis. Through the use of a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach under the banner, Socio-rhetorical Womanist reading, I endeavour to show that the picture here portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31 is a complex one. Previously scholars have tackled the poem from different perspectives and contexts. However they have understated or misread the rather richly nuanced portrayal that is here depicted in the portrait of the woman. The over simplified reading of the text has resulted in such translations of אִשְׁת־חַיִל as 'a good wife, an excellent wife, a virtuous wife or even a woman of substance or valour but, not as 'a woman of courage' which I maintain is a more fitting translation of the Hebrew phrase אִשְׁת־חַיִל. By exploring the different textures of inner, inter, socio-cultural and ideological textures of Proverbs 31:10-31 as permitted by the socio-rhetorical approach, the thesis shows that the woman here described is more than a wife and mother, roles which are stereotypically used for the subordination of women. With the influence of my interpersonal and ideological womanist reading, our subject is shown to be a woman of courage, who displays autonomy, physical prowess, is a trader and business guru who acquires land. She is also a wise and thoughtful woman. The woman is on the same footing as men of courage described throughout the Hebrew bible. The poem is read as a polemic to the patriarchal status quo with its tendency to subordinate, suppress and oppress women on the basis of their gender. It ends on a strong note, demanding that the woman be duly recognized for her deeds of courage particularly at the public level of the 'gates'. Consequently this thesis contends that the poem constitutes a paradigm shift in relation to gender based inequality, challenging men to reconsider their stance and empowering women to take their place as equal partners.

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Abbreviations

ANE	Ancient Near East
HB	Hebrew Bible
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>BCTA</i>	<i>Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Africa</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>Black Theology</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Conservative Judaism</i>
<i>CTS</i>	<i>Chafer Theological Seminary Journal</i>
<i>ER</i>	<i>The Ecumenical Review</i>
<i>FT</i>	<i>Feminist Theology</i>
<i>Hist</i>	<i>Historicism</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JFSR</i>	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
<i>JITC</i>	<i>Journal of the International Theological Centre</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>The Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NEB	New English Bible

<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon.
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>RV</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
REV	Revised English Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>TB</i>	<i>The Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WCC	World Council of Churches
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>