

**PROVERBS 31:10-31: A CONTEXTUAL READING**

by

**ILZE JANSEN**

**Submitted in fulfilment in accordance with the  
requirements for the degree of**

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR**

in

**THEOLOGY (OLD TESTAMENT)**

at the

**FACULTY OF THEOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

**PROMOTOR: PROF D.J. HUMAN**

**NOVEMBER 2018**

## Declaration

I, Ilze Jansen, student number 97149269, hereby declare that this thesis, "Proverbs 31:10-31: A Contextual Reading" submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Philoshopia Doctor degree in Theology (Old Testament) at the University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this thesis are indicated and acknowledged comprehensively with a list of references.

.....

Ilze Jansen

23 November 2018

## Dedication

*I dedicate this study to my husband, Marais Jansen, daughter Ruach and son Marais, as well as the inspiring women that have made this world a better place.*

## Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation and sincere gratitude to the following people:

- Prof Dirk J. Human, my promotor, for his guidance, inspiration, and invaluable advice to make my life's dream come true.
- Ms Christine Nel, the information specialist at Merensky Library, University of Pretoria. Without her dedication and support, the completion of my research study would have been impossible.
- Ms Liandri Pretorius, my editor, for working under immense pressure to submit this thesis on time.
- Dr Tanja van Wyk, for peaking my interest in feminism and teaching me what feminism is all about.
- Dr Amanda Richter, for her support and guidance. Thank you for tirelessly encouraging me to complete this thesis.
- Ms Thanyani Mahanya, for always making time in Prof Human's busy schedule when I urgently needed to see him.
- My daughter, Ruach, and son, Marais. Thank you for praying for me and encouraging me. You make everything I do worth it.
- My husband, Marais – thank you for believing in me and my ability to complete this thesis. Thank you for your tireless support and dedication to me and my studies. You are the wind beneath my wings.
- To God, the father of my heart. Thank you for the opportunity to share Your Word in such a special way. Your grace carried me through this study; may you be glorified in everything I am and do.

## **Abstract**

### Proverbs 31:10-31: A Contextual Reading

by

Ilze Jansen

An exegetical study of Proverbs 31:10-31 was conducted and its relevance for modern women was examined. The Book of Proverbs is rich in guidelines for wise living, applicable to both men and women. Historically, Proverbs 31:10-31 was and is still used to judge women and their conduct, both personally and professionally. The placing of Proverbs within the wisdom genre as well as the possible author(s) of the Book of Proverbs gives readers a better understanding of the community, culture, and society in which it originated.

The Book of Proverbs was written for ordinary people as a guideline as to how they should conduct their lives. Proverbs invites the reader, proverb after proverb, to converse in what is wise, good, and truly meaningful in life. The purpose of this study was to render Proverbs 31:10-31 more accessible to its readers and to involve the reader in the context in which the pericope came to life. Although Proverbs belongs to a specific time and place, it does not mean that it cannot have a positive and significant impact on the lives of its readers, especially women.

The woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 does not truly exist. According to the Wisdom Literature, she is an ideal, paradigmatic figure. Women should be inspired by her favourable qualities and values, and therefore encouraged to emulate these desirable attributes. The woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 should be seen as a role model that other women can look up to.

The study focused on feminism, its development, and its role in theology. Specific mention was made of the diverse group of women who played an important role in changing the perception of South African women.

Women, especially in South Africa, represent diverse groups that include different races, ethnicities, and cultures. This should not prevent women from working together to transform the lives of all women.

Working together as a “sisterhood” can assist women in reaching shared goals, instead of working against each other or against men.

The “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a positive female role model women can look up to and strive to emulate. She is a personification of the woman wisdom theology encourages women to strive for. This woman portrays the way in which women should live, while they are pursuing a relationship with God. The woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 may be interpreted as the woman wisdom theology encourages all women to become.

*The “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a personification of wisdom and the ideal woman. She did not exist, but is an example of favourable values and qualities women can strive for. The reader’s interpretation of this woman influences the contextual reading of the pericope.*

## Language editor

A PhD thesis titled “Proverbs 31:10-31: A Contextual Reading” was edited for Ilze Jansen, a student in Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. The scope of editing included correcting grammar and improving sentence construction. In-text references and the reference list were adjusted where necessary, and formatting was adjusted according to the guidelines provided.

Name of Editor: Liandri Pretorius

Qualifications: BA Languages (Journalism)  
BA Criminology (Honours)

Signature:



Contact Number: 079 883 0122

Email address: liandrip@gmail.com

Date Issued: 2018/11/14

The editor will not be held accountable for any later additions or changes to the document that were not edited by the editor, nor if the client rejects/ignores any of the changes, suggestions or queries, which he/she is free to do. The editor can also not be held responsible for factual errors in the content of the document or whether or not the client passes or fails. It is the client's responsibility to review the edited document before submitting it for evaluation.

## List of abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	African National Congress Women's League
BCE	Before Common Era
COD	Congress of Democrats
COPE	Congress of the People
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
FCWU	Food and Canning Worker's Union
FEDSAW	Federation of South African Women
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex
LXX	Septuagint
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAIC	South African Indian Council
SVV	Staten Vertaling
TAWU	Transvaal All-Women's Union
UNISA	University of South Africa
US	United States



## Table of Contents

<b>Declaration</b>		<b>i</b>
<b>Dedication</b>		<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>		<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>		<b>iv</b>
<b>Language editor</b>		<b>vi</b>
<b>List of abbreviations</b>		<b>vii</b>
<b>Table of contents</b>		<b>viii</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Motivation for the study	5
1.3	Research problem	7
1.4	Objectives of the study	10
1.5	Research methodology	11
1.6	Hypothesis	18
1.7	Chapter division	19
1.8	Terminology and orthography	20
1.8.1	Terminologies	20
1.8.2	Orthography	24
<b>2.</b>	<b>Chapter 2: Proverbs a guide to wisdom and wise living</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1	Introduction	26
2.2	Wisdom literature	28
2.2.1	Definition of wisdom/Wisdom Literature	28
2.2.2	Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East	32
2.2.3	Character of wisdom	37
2.2.3.1	Wisdom literature as knowledge	37
2.2.3.2	Wisdom and the imagination of the wise	39
2.2.3.3	Wisdom's role in discipline	40
2.2.3.4	Wisdom as piety	41
2.2.3.5	Wisdom and order in the universe	42
2.2.3.6	Wisdom as moral instruction	43
2.2.4	The theology of Wisdom Literature	44
2.3	Background and structure of the Book of Proverbs	47
2.3.1	Definition of Proverbs	47
2.3.2	Title of the Book of Proverbs	48
2.3.3	The place of Proverbs in the canon	50
2.3.4	Proverbs as a book of wisdom	53
2.3.5	The author of Proverbs	54
2.3.6	The date, composition and editing of the Book of Proverbs	55
2.4	Possible outline and sections of Proverbs	61
2.5	Proverbs and biblical theology	64
2.6	Proverbs and Pan-Oriental Wisdom Literature	65
2.7	Meaning and relevance of Proverbs	67
2.8	Conclusion	70

<b>3.</b>	<b>Chapter 3 Noble woman: an idea, illusion, myth or reality?</b>	<b>72</b>
3.1	Introduction	72
3.2	Date and place of origin	74
3.3	Social and economic setting	76
3.4	Genre and purpose	79
3.5	Original audience	81
3.6	Women and their social status	82
3.6.1	Marriage, divorce and widows	83
3.6.2	Wife and mother	86
3.6.2.1	Motherhood	87
3.6.3	Infertility	88
3.6.4	Child bearing and the death of a child	89
3.6.5	Caring for the children and household	90
3.6.6	Female hierarchy in a household	92
3.6.7	Women's sexuality and adultery	93
3.6.8	Activities outside the household and family	94
3.6.9	Religious life	98
3.7	Text translation	99
3.7.1	Introduction	102
3.8	Text analysis	108
3.8.1	Introduction: Proverbs 31:10-12	108
3.8.2	Noble wife – a portrayal (31:13-27)	110
3.8.2.1	Her sources of income (31:13-18)	111
3.8.2.2	Janus verse (Proverbs 31:19)	116
3.8.2.3	Her production (Proverbs 31:20-27)	118
3.8.2.4	Praise for the noble woman (Proverbs 31:28-31)	122
3.9	Conclusion	126
<b>4.</b>	<b>Chapter 4 Feminism and “woman of worth”</b>	<b>129</b>
4.1	Introduction	129
4.2	Feminist theology as a liberating theology	130
4.3	Feminist theology as a new way to practice theology	132
4.4	Liberation theology as an amiable method	135
4.5	Patriarchy and feminism	138
4.5.1	Proverbs 31:10-31 and a critique on patriarchy	141
4.6	What is feminism?	144
4.6.1	First wave of feminism	146
4.6.2	Second wave of feminism	148
4.6.3	South Africa's women's rights movement	150
4.6.3.1	Women's rights in South Africa: the beginning	150
4.6.3.2	Women's rights in South Africa: the Women's Charter	153
4.6.3.3	Women's rights in South Africa: the Freedom Charter	154
4.6.3.4	Women's rights in South Africa: the anti-pass campaign	154
4.6.3.5	Women's rights in South Africa: the 1956 Women's March	156
4.6.3.6	Women's rights in South Africa: Thursday, 9 August 1956	156
4.6.4	Third wave of feminism	158
4.6.4.1	Third wave of feminism and its language	159
4.6.4.2	Womanist or African Womanist – A South African Perspective	163
4.7	Moving from feminism to feminist theology	166
4.8	Forms of feminist theology	168
4.9	Feminist biblical hermeneutics	169

4.10	Feminist theology and the voices of African women	173
4.11	The history of feminist theology in South Africa	173
4.12	The history of black feminist theologians in South Africa	176
4.13	African women and their relationship with Christianity	177
4.14	The framework of African women's theology	178
4.15	Oeuvre of female African theologians	179
4.16	Proverbs 31:10-31 a feminist reading	181
4.16.1	Introduction	181
4.16.2	Proverbs 31:10-31A feminist perspective	182
4.16.3	Proverbs 31:10-31 – an outline	183
4.16.3.1	Proverbs 31:10-12	183
4.16.3.2	Proverbs 31:13-19	185
4.16.3.3	Proverbs 31:20-27	187
4.16.3.4	Proverbs 31:28-31	190
4.16.3.5	Proverbs 31:10-31: key issues in a feminist reading	195
4.17	Public and private sphere: a false division	197
4.18	Conclusion	202
<b>5.</b>	<b>Chapter 5 Synthesis</b>	<b>204</b>
5.1	Introduction	204
5.2	Actuality	205
5.3	Problem statement	207
5.4	Objectives of the study	211
5.5	Research methodology	212
5.6	Chapter division	216
5.7	Hypothesis	218
5.8	Limitations of the study	219
5.9	Recommendations for further study	220
	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>221</b>

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

*The fact that I am a woman does not make me a different kind of Christian.*

*But the fact that I am a Christian makes me a different kind of woman.*

*- Elisabeth Elliot <sup>1</sup> -*

Through the years, inspiring women such as Mother Teresa<sup>2</sup> and Corrie Ten Boom<sup>3</sup> showed through their lives and work how being a Christian makes you a different kind of woman.

Mother Teresa (1910-1997) was a nun who received the “call within a call” that gave rise to the Missionaries of Charity family of Sisters, Brothers, Fathers, and Co-Workers. Her aim and mission was “to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus on the cross for love and souls” by “labouring at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor.” Mother Teresa travelled tirelessly to countries such as South Africa, Albania, Cuba, and Iraq to bring services to poor and disaster-stricken countries (Mother Teresa of Calcutta n.d.).

---

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Elliot (21 December 1926-15 June 2015) was a Christian author and speaker. Her first husband, Jim Elliot, was killed in 1956 while attempting to make missionary contact with the Auca of eastern Ecuador. She later spent two years as a missionary to the tribe members who killed her husband. She stayed in Quichua until 1963 when she returned to the United States of America with her daughter Valerie (About Elisabeth n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Mother Teresa (27 August 1910-5 September 1997), known in the Roman Catholic Church as Saint Teresa of Calcutta, was an Albanian-Indian Catholic nun and missionary. She was born in Skopje, then part of Kosovo Vilayet of the Ottoman Empire. In 1928, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu joined the sisters of Our Lady of Lareto, a Catholic order that humbly ministered to lepers, the homeless and the poorest of the poor in the slums of Calcutta, India (Mother Teresa of Calcutta n.d.).

<sup>3</sup> Cornelia Arnolda Johanna “Corrie” Ten Boom (15 April 1892-15 April 1983) was a Dutch watchmaker and Christian who, along with her father and other family members, helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II by hiding them in her closet. She was imprisoned for her actions (Corrie Ten Boom 2014).

Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983) and her family protected hundreds of Jews during World War II from arrest by Nazi authorities. Ms Ten Boom and her family were imprisoned by the Nazi's but she survived and started a worldwide ministry. She also started a rehabilitation centre for concentration camp survivors (Corrie ten Boom 2014).

Both these women portrayed the character of the women of Proverbs 31:10-31 as they exuded strength and dignity, they were wise and hardworking and they cared for the poor and the needy.

Many Christian women, across the ages, struggled with their identity and role as women of God. To complicate matters further, the Church and society played a significant role in imposing certain cultural and context-related views on these women. In lieu of the above, Proverbs 31:10-31 is sometimes cited on occasions celebrating womanhood, such as Women's Day or Mother's Day, praising women as virtuous and capable, whose value surpass that of precious stones (NLT).

International Women's Day is celebrated each year on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. Through the years, a significant shift took place in both women's and society's thoughts about women's emancipation and equality. Today we see more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights and an increased critical mass of women's visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life. One could come to the conclusion that women have gained true equality in society. It is, however, an unfortunate fact that women are still not paid equally compared to their male counterparts. Women are also disproportionately represented in equal numbers in business and politics. Globally, the education of women, their access to healthcare and violence against them is worse than that of men. Substantial improvements have, however, been made. During the past few years, International Women's Day changed from being a reminder of the negatives to a celebration of the positives (International Women's Day n.d.).

South African women are celebrated on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August each year due to the bravery of 20 000 women who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956 to protest against legislation aimed at tightening the government's control over the movement of black women in urban areas (Mother's Day n.d.).

These women showed courage, bravery and wisdom, just as the women of wisdom in Proverbs 31:10-31, by rebelling against oppression and fighting for their rights as women in a male-dominated society.

Mother's Day<sup>4</sup> is also a special day on which women, especially mothers, are celebrated. Mothers in this case does not only refer to women with children but women who play a motherly role in society. Mother's Day goes back to the era of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Greeks used the celebrations to honour Rhea, the wife of Cronus. She is also seen as the mother of many of the deities in Greek mythology (Hard 2004:69). The Ancient Romans celebrated a spring festival called 'Hilaria' dedicated to Cybele, who was a mother goddess (Mother's Day n.d.). South Africans also celebrate Mother's Day annually in May. It is a day on which we celebrate the mothers of our society and the unmissable role they play in each of our lives, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, such as being single working mothers.

Even though special days like Women's Day and Mother's Day have been instituted, society is still in a transition process to acknowledge and honour women in all spheres of society. For the Christian community, Proverbs 31:10-31 would like to encourage society to support and make room for women so that they might have the opportunity to flourish<sup>5</sup> (Claassens 2015:45).

---

<sup>4</sup> In the US, Mother's Day was suggested by Julia Ward Howe and founded by Anna Jarvis. Howe was an activist, writer and poet. Jarvis was known as the Mother of Mothers; an apt title for a woman who worked hard to bestow honour on all mothers. Americans now celebrate Mother's Day in May (Mother's Day n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> Claassens (2016:5-6) states that the concept of human flourishing is important in order to critically evaluate the quality of women's lives in different communities around the world. Women all over the world struggle to survive. Statistics compiled by the United Nations (discussion on "Women and Poverty" during the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held September 1995 in Beijing, China (The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women 1995) on the feminisation of poverty, indicates that women are faced with barriers in terms of basic healthcare, nutrition and education. It is not only women from poor communities that are struggling to survive. Working women also struggle to balance the demands of a career and family. One can also add to this the all-too-real threat and in many cases, the reality of emotional, physical and psychological violence that aids as a unifying factor for rich or poor, white and black women in their homes and at work. As a society we have failed to create conditions for women to live lives that are truly worth living. Claassens (2016:6) makes use of Martha Nussbaum's (1999:40) insight into human flourishing in order to indicate that we should not be content with "mere bare humanness". "We want to specify a life in which fully human functioning, or a kind of basic human flourishing will be available. For we do not want politics to take mere survival as its goal; we want to describe a life in which the dignity of the human being is not violated by hunger or fear or the absence of opportunity." (Nussbaum 1999:40). Claassens (2016:6) utilises Nussbaum's understanding of the concept of human flourishing as a hermeneutical framework to interpret the depiction of the 'noble woman' in Proverbs 31:10-31.

A woman who is struggling to survive, exploited and abused – who does not have access to the necessary resources – will not be able to grow and develop into the woman she would want to be or who she was created to be. Women should also be afforded the opportunity to have meaningful relationships and to grow intellectually and emotionally. They should also be allowed to play and relax, however, women still are not always afforded the aforementioned opportunities (Claassens 2015:45).

Every year, South Africa participates in the 16 Days of Activism against Abuse<sup>6</sup>. The year 2015 marked South Africa's 16<sup>th</sup> year of participation. The 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children is a global initiative that runs from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) through to International Human Rights Day on 10 December. Although the campaign only runs for 16 days, the objectives are reinforced by a year-long programme and a national plan to combat abuse. South Africa still faces high levels of abuse against women despite its world-renowned Constitution and legislative overhaul to safeguard the rights of women. The government, business-, civil society-, and faith-based organisations and the media are all participating in the campaign to increase awareness of the negative impact of violence and abuse on women and children (What is 16 Days of Activism? 2017).

Proverbs 31:10-31 does not only want to encourage women to be a woman in her own right and to make sensible decisions, but also to give other women room, opportunity and support to do the same. If women today look at other women through the eyes of Proverbs 31:10-31, one might look at one's domestic worker differently or have more sympathy for a difficult co-worker (Claassens 2015:45).

---

<sup>6</sup> Violence in society is often a symptom of deep-rooted social problems. We need to stand together in stopping violence, especially violence against women and children. The purpose of the international campaign of 16 Days of Activism is to create an increased awareness of the negative impact of abuse and violence on women, children and the social fabric of society. The rights of women and children are fundamental human rights protected by South Africa's Constitution. Gender-based violence and child abuse in all its different forms devalues human dignity and the self-worth of the victim (What is 16 Days of Activism? 2017).

## 1.2 Motivation for the study

In recent years, the importance of Proverbs 31:10-31 has increasingly been a subject of interest within Old Testament studies, due to the changing position of women in modern society. These studies have helped to show that the pericope of Proverbs 31:10-31 should not be viewed in isolation. Instead, it should be viewed within the greater context of the book of Proverbs and the relationship between Proverbs and the Wisdom Literature of Ancient Israel and the Wisdom Literature of the Ancient Near East.

Various ideas on the role of women in society are based on biblical texts. Yet, in some cases, the texts are unknowingly cited incorrectly. Some of these texts represent outdated conclusions or unfair judgements as reflected by biblical language (Fischer 1978:27). The poetic depiction of the 'virtuous and capable wife' (NLT) at the end of Proverbs represents one of the most striking documentations of women dating back to the Ancient Hebrew times (Lang 2004:188).

Furthermore, wisdom is often portrayed as a woman in the Old Testament, where wisdom is not seen as abstract, but concrete. It is described as an outstanding woman who knows exactly what is expected of her, especially when it comes to her household (Venter 1999:732). Proverbs 31:13, 15 and 17 describes a woman that enjoys her work. In other words, she enjoys doing her assignments at home. She does not have to feel ashamed or inferior. To be a wife to one's husband is a God-given vocation. It is also a God-given vocation to be a good mother to one's children. In other words, it is a God-given calling to care for your family and home, and to enjoy it. A part of a woman's calling is to provide for her family's spiritual, emotional and material needs (Joubert & Smith 2010:17).

Women today are inundated with responsibilities trusted upon them by society. Women must feed their family, work to pay the bills and stay true to the demands placed on them at work, at home and in relationships. Women, especially God-fearing women that depend on God's help in their daily activities, may become tired of the depiction of the perfect woman in Proverbs 31:10-31.



Women sometimes find themselves in conversations where some women are praised as depicting the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31. If these women then compare themselves to the qualities of the woman depicted in Proverbs 31, they might feel like they cannot obtain such high standards (Joubert & Smith 2010:17).

Proverbs 31:10-31 is sometimes interpreted as an indication that women are not allowed to work and be successful in their careers. It does, however, not say that a woman is not allowed to work. This section rather emphasises the important role of a woman within her family, as her family should be her priority and calling (Joubert & Smith 2010:17). Although we know very little about the circumstances in which these texts originated, these texts do, however, indicate that the biblical authors did not primarily force rules onto women (Fisher 1978:27). These texts rather attempt to communicate the glory of the image of God, as seen in women, since the Bible contains huge amounts of imagery and symbols that depict womanhood and femininity in a positive light. These symbols and imagery contain the dynamics of the world of women in the Bible and has great potential for modern women to grow as women of God (Fisher 1978:27).

Society can no longer ignore a new generation of women that has come to the fore. These women now demand, much more vigorously than previous generations, that to be a Christian and to be socially accepted no longer needs to be mutually exclusive. The Gospel of Christ contains enough proof for women to be sure of their dignity. Women now also have the right to participate in all the spheres of the Church and community. These rights are definitely not inferior to those of men, but equal (Bowden 2001:94).

A generation of Christian women created a novel understanding of their newly found self-worth, namely 'feminist theology'. This concept means that women no longer only use theological traditions developed by men without questioning such traditions (Bowden 2001:94). Women's belief no longer reflects the inherited experiences of men but is a discovery of the reality of their own experiences so that they can become the subject of their own theology. The Church and theology have missed ample opportunities, and modern tendencies were strongly supported by authority figures of the Church.

This resulted in the minority of women being reached by the reinterpretation of the role of women in the Church and community. Women, however, provided much more support to the Church as an institution than men did (Bowden 2001:95).

Bowden (2001:95) continues by highlighting a few possible problem areas which require attention. Firstly, the equal status of women is an urgent necessity for the current era, instead of the privileges that discriminate in favour of men. Secondly, the different religions, such as the prophetic religion, can contribute to the changing worldwide awareness in the post-modern paradigm of the basis of women's participation in religion. Thirdly, the religious can contribute to the implementation of political and social human rights as well as the dimensions of a partnership between men and women (Bowden 2001:95).

### **1.3 Research problem**

The Proverbs 31:10-31 pericope concludes that the Book of Proverbs describes and praises a woman of noble character (NIV). Interpreters, however, have different opinions as to how the pericope should be understood. It poses a three-part question: 1) does this description refer to a woman and mother that truly existed; 2) or does Proverbs 31:10-31 refer to qualities that every woman should strive for; 3) or is the 'noble woman' a personification of wisdom<sup>7</sup> or is she wisdom in its totality (Hawkins 1996:12).

Hawkins (1996:21) is of the opinion that this pericope in Proverbs sketches the ideal woman as well as the honour bestowed on her due to her unique qualities. Despite these unique qualities, modern women might view Proverbs 31:10-31 as a harsh measure of their own shortcomings. This may be the reason a number of women tend to shy away when Proverbs 31:10-31 is mentioned or discussed. It is therefore prudent to place this pericope in perspective. In Section 1.2 (Motivation for the study) it became evident that further examination of Proverbs 31:10-31 in its original context is crucial to gain an understanding of its application today.

---

<sup>7</sup> Personification is a representation of a thing or abstraction as a person or human form. Personification describes a divinity or imaginary being representing a thing or abstraction (Merriam Webster Dictionary 2002).

Female figures, whether symbolic or real, play a more prominent role in Proverbs than in any other book in the Old Testament. Specific attention needs to be given to the subject of women in Proverbs more so than the mere personification of wisdom as a woman in Proverbs 1 to 9. The portrayal of this ideal woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 has, however, over the years shown to be limiting in its scope. Therefore, a growing interest in this subject has been established in the years preceding Whybray's research (1995:143).

This interest has mainly been inspired by the feminist movement. It forms part of studies about women in the Old Testament in general, more specifically, women in the Wisdom Literature (Whybray 1995:143). Consequently, issues might arise within the text. Some of these might be to attempt to establish the thoughts of the sages in Israel (as individuals or as groups) concerning women. Moreover, what kind of conclusions can be reached by gaining insight into the thoughts of the sages? And how can this information be applied to modern women? How can the Proverb's 31:10-31 women and modern women be understood within the context of Wisdom Literature?

Farmer (1991:11) states that the canon of Scripture has convinced her that the Word of God was intended for both men and women. The God that communicates through these texts created both men and women. They were created to live and work in the image of God in this world. Both men and women must thus work in partnership to carry out God's purpose on Earth. If this assumption by Farmer (1991) is correct, the question is then how it can become part of the dynamic and challenging world of modern women struggling with a variety of pressures on a daily basis.

Farmer (1991:11) notes that an intensive reading of the biblical texts shows that the communities in which these biblical witnesses lived, did not always share an understanding of God's intentions. Not everyone who carried over the traditions of religion, have understood God's plea for humanity towards both women and men. Farmer (1991:11) insists that these texts be read in context as they are part of a whole body of Scripture. It is this leap of faith that makes it possible for the reader to become part of the audience that hears the text, as if it is specifically intended for the audience, irrespective of their gender (Farmer 1991:11).

Firstly, if we were to read the text in context as proposed by Farmer (1991), would we be able to apply the text within the context of modern women? Secondly, is the necessary documentation readily available to the reader of a text such as Proverbs 31:10-31 in order to obtain a better understanding? Thirdly, the vast majority of readers of the Bible have to solely rely on what is written in the Bible. These readers do not have access to commentaries and academic writings that can provide them with a better understanding and insight into texts such as Proverbs 31:10-31.

Fischer (2005:149) adds to this view by stating that the Church of today would benefit from a collaboration with biblical authors. This collaboration would envisage not viewing current issues from a male-centred perspective, especially since the text in itself is not doing it. Fischer (2005:149) further states that biblical authors show us that a fear of the feministic challenges, which can falsify the Hebrew Scriptures, is unfounded. The Hebrew Scriptures need to be actualised and the questions of our time must be addressed if they want to bring a new message to persons of all ages.

The question regarding women is also a social question, as women in more patriarchal communities do not have equal rights to form their own culture. They are also not allowed to share in the resources. This is one of the most important problems of our time. If these challenges are not viewed as serious, whilst yesterday's answers are given for today's questions, these problems will never be addressed sufficiently (Fischer 2005:149).

The Hebrew Scriptures are not unnecessarily burdened by these gender equality issues. These questions are also not new or uncommon to them. These scriptures are interpreted more honestly as it takes into consideration that God acts with and in women, as well as with and in men. The narratives prove that women are better able to interpret and actualise the Holy Writings and to bring the Holy Plan to fulfilment. Thus, those who are serious about their search of YHWH looks to Abraham and Sarah and not only to the fathers as women have also been wrestling with God to find salvation for their people for generations (Fischer 2005:149).

The research problem will be addressed by looking at the use and meaning of 'noble'/'capable women' and 'wisdom', and its social use and context within the Ancient Hebrew and Israelite times as well as the current context. In doing this, one can begin to understand the use, meaning and development of the above-mentioned concepts within the more patriarchal approach of the Ancient Hebrew context against a more modern feminist approach.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To determine if the attributes of the woman as portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31 apply to modern women.**

Can modern women identify with the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31? The image of the ideal woman as portrayed by Proverbs is not the image of only one woman but a compiled image of the ideal woman. The reader, especially female readers, must not pursue this woman in fine detail, but rather as an inspiration for every woman to completely develop her individual and God-given potential. Every woman must thus develop in her own right and live according to God's will. No woman can be exactly as she is, but can learn from her diligence, integrity and ingenuity (Burden 1993:937-938).

- 2) To look at the difference between the experiential world of the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 and the experiential world of modern women with specific reference to feminism.**

Women in society, today, face numerous challenges. Their world is dominated by patriarchal systems. They have to survive in a world that is often hostile towards their ideas for change in an already challenged society. Feminism, through the years have highlighted these challenges modern women face in their experiential world.

These challenges brought on by a still very patriarchal oriented society places a strain on women in society today. The study will look at the difference between the experiential worlds of the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 and women today.

**3) How does the role of the modern woman differ from the role of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31?**

According to Budlender and Lund (2011:925), the result of the disruption of family life is that women need to fulfil the role of both breadwinner and carer in a context of high unemployment rates and limited economic opportunities.

**4) To differentiate between the life challenges of the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 and modern women.**

According to Chitando (2004:151), the Hebrew Scriptures of Christianity was used selectively in order to justify the marginalisation of women in Africa.

**5) More specifically, in the South African context, how the text is interpreted if it is read from the experienced world of a Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman's perspective.**

Masenya (1997:55) re-reads Proverbs 31:10-31 from the perspective of the Bosadi. This is a feministic liberal perspective that is linked to an "African-ness" of a Northern Sotho South African woman.

## **1.5 Research methodology**

The Book of Proverbs belongs to the Wisdom Literature of Ancient Israel (in ancient Hebrew times). In order to determine the place of Proverbs 31:10-31 within the Wisdom Literature, a historical background of Proverbs and Proverbs 31 will be provided. Specific reference will be made to the personification of the woman as Wisdom as well as Wisdom as a woman of substance.

The “woman of Wisdom’s” presence still causes historical and theological controversy (Yoder 2001:2). The relationship between Proverbs and the Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East, specifically in Egypt and Mesopotamia, as well as the date and origin of the book will be discussed.

The formal analysis of the text will include observing the literary form as well as a structural analysis which consists of divisions and sub-divisions. The place of Proverbs 31:10-31 within the context of the Book of Proverbs will be determined as well as how these verses are still applicable to modern women, since the context of the reader forms the way in which the Bible is read. For example, a Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman’s context within the context of South Africa will be characterised by a variety of oppressing forces such as post-apartheid racism, sexism, and classism as well as oppressing elements of the African culture (Masenya 1996:55).

Wisdom literature consists of distinguishable literary characteristics. These literary characteristics will be identified and discussed. The literary forms include proverbs, poetic forms, questions, riddles, dialogues and didactic narratives. These literary forms will be taken into consideration during the analysis of Proverbs 31:10-31 (Perdue 2000:5).

For the purpose of this study, a variety of literature will be studied. A literature review is a critical summary and assessment of current material that consist of knowledge and an understanding of information within a given field of study (Jupp 2006:162). The primary purpose of the literature review is to determine in which academic areas the previous studies were done as well as the relevant research that will be conducted on the current research topic. The purpose of the literature study is thus to lay a foundation for the current study (Oliver 2004:107).

The literature study focuses on and gives a clear indication of the research question. It provides the researcher with a better understanding of the subject matter and identifies previous theoretical approaches that were followed and applied. The literature study helps the researcher to conceptualise the research question and to identify the shortcomings of the research subject. The literature study can also improve the methodology of the research.

By reading previous studies, the researcher can be guided towards the most effective research methods. The literature study broadens the researcher's knowledge of the chosen study theme to be undertaken (Jupp 2006:162-163).

Subsequently, the literature used for this study includes biblical scholars such as Crenshaw (1981), Wolters (2001), and Yoder (2001). These scholars studied the background, origin and meaning of the Old Testament Wisdom as well as Wisdom as a woman of substance. This study will include scholarly comments on Proverbs, specifically Proverbs 31:10-31 from Toy (1970), Van Leeuwen (1997), and Murphy (1998).

This study entails an exegetical study of Proverbs 31:10-31. Exegesis is a thorough, analytical study of a piece in the Bible in order to come to a useful interpretation of the scripture. Exegesis is a theological assignment. Basic rules and standards must be followed, although the results may differ as the parts of biblical texts also differ. In order to conduct an Old Testament exegesis correctly, the researcher needs to get involved in the function and meaning of words (linguistics), the analysis of literature and conversations (filology), theology, history, the transfer of biblical texts (textual criticism), style, grammar, and vocabulary (Stuart 1980:15).

Exegesis is a careful, historical, literary and theological analysis of a text. It is also called a 'scholarly reading' in which the text is read in such a way that a sense of the text is gained by a complete, systematic recording of the phenomena of a text, grappling with the reasons that speak for or against a specific understanding of the text. Exegesis is also a 'close' reading of the text which means a deliberate word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase consideration of all the parts of a text in order to understand it as a whole (Gorman 2001:8-9).

Exegesis is an investigation of a text as it investigates the many dimensions and/or textures of a specific text. It is a process during which questions are asked of a text; questions that are often provoked by the text itself.



Engaging in exegesis means asking historical, literary, religious and/or theological questions about the dimensions of the text. In exegesis, the exegete must not be afraid to ask difficult questions. Lastly, exegesis also means not fearing the discovery of something new. In exegesis, the exegete sometimes has to ask questions that may not be immediately resolved (Gorman 2001:9-10).

Exegesis is a conversation with readers, living and dead, highly educated and uneducated, and absent or present. The conversation is about a text's content, sacred words and the claims they make. Exegesis as conversation means listening to others even if one does not agree with what is said about the text. The exegetical process should be carried out in the presence of other people through reading and discussing the text. These conversations are usually creative, careful and critical (Gorman 2001:10).

One approach followed by exegesis is the synchronic ("same time") approach. This approach only looks at the final form of the text as it is in the Bible we have today. This approach is not interested in the "long view" or "prehistory" of the text. The synchronic approach makes use of methods designed to analyse itself as well as the text in relation to the world in which it first existed as a text (Gorman 2001:12). Gorman (2001:13) identifies the methods used in the synchronic approach as: literary-, narrative-, rhetorical- and social-scientific criticism, as well as lexical-, grammatical-, syntactical- and discourse analysis.

Exegesis also follows the diachronic (meaning "across time") approach or historical-critical methods. This approach focuses on the origin and development of a text by employing methods designed to uncover these aspects of the text (Gorman 2001:15). Gorman (2001:15) identifies the following methods used in the diachronic approach: textual-, form-, tradition-, source- and redaction criticism, as well as historical linguistics.

It is clear that neither of the two exegetical approaches should be given preference to text analysis. Both approaches display a complimentary character as they combine different methodological facets.

The exegete should thus allow for both the synchronic and diachronic aspects of text analysis to be visible from the text. Furthermore, the historical and literary aspects should support one another in order to identify the different dimensions of the text (Human 1999:358).

Groenewald (2005:552) is of the opinion that the exegete should combine synchronic and diachronic textual reading. The question is no longer whether to either use a synchronic or diachronic reading of the text. A synchronic reading of the text can no longer regard the historical refinement of the text as a redundant effort, so too the historical critical method cannot exclude the synchronic approach from the exegetical process. "This new theoretical understanding therefore necessitates a diachronically reflected synchronic reading of the text. In this regard, Barr (1995:1-14) states as follows: '... the diachronic consideration explains the synchronic ... fact'; that is to say; they are thus inextricably intertwined and linked to one another" (Groenewald 2005:553). We can thus deduce that a synchronic analysis without a diachronic input only touches on the textual surface (Groenewald 2005:553).

Human (1999:362-364) indicates the following aspects as valuable to a literary historical reading of Old Testament texts:

- *Text boundary*: To gain meaningful research results the exegete must work with boundaries within the text units that reflect a specific cohesion in form and content. Through formal and content criteria, a distinctive and independent text unit can be identified for all biblical texts. In this study, Proverbs 31:10-31 was studied as a distinctive and independent text.
- *Form analysis*: The purpose of form analysis is to identify the structure and development of each text to determine the meaning of the text. Its purpose is also to indicate important concepts and to identify its literary function. By taking the morphology, syntactic, stylistic and semantic criteria into consideration, the text can be divided into smaller units. Intratextual and extratextual relations lead to cohesion and indicate a structure. The interplay between sounds, words, sentences and structure aids the deployment of semantic categories in the text.

- *Tradition criticism:* Under this exegetical facet, stereotypical Old Testament traditional material can be identified and the literary function thereof within the structure of the given text, as in Proverbs 31:10-31, can be determined. The identification of stereotypical traditions and motives (images, themes and features) reflects the diachronic approach to the text. The challenge posed to the exegete is then to determine the content and function of these motives that already have a diachronically stereotypical semantic content.
- *Various other aspects:* Various aspects that add to a literary historical reading of the text are relevant here. These literary aspects include determining the genre of the text, determining the broader context of the text within the given biblical text or canon as well as the rhetorical function of certain literary indicators within the text that help to read the texts responsibly within a literary context. The historical aspects investigate the oral transmission of texts, and the redactional additions and changes show how the text was re-used and re-interpreted in different contexts. The text's original function within the cult of the ancient literary works also contributes to the understanding of the text within its earlier existence.

In this way, the synchronic and diachronic approaches complement each other when reading Old Testament texts. For the exegete and the Bible reader, this results in an integrated vision of the text. The exegete can then also test his/her preconceived ideas of the text. The literary historical approach complements both synchronic and diachronic analyses of any Old Testament text (Human 1999:364).

According to Human (1999:364), the literary historical approach to exegesis has the following advantages:

- The literary dimensions of a text can be identified when determining the meaning of a text. The purpose of this study is to identify the meaning of Proverbs 31:10-31 for modern women.

- The historical dimensions in and behind the text is cleared in order to understand the text. This study aims to identify the historical meanings in and behind Proverbs 31:10-31 in order to gain a better understanding of the use of the text for modern women.
- The pre-suppositions and the contextual premises of the exegete as part of the historical understanding of the exegetical process must be acknowledged. Proverbs 31:01-31 has been inundated with the premises of biblical interpreters and laymen. This study aims to clarify these premises and introduce, if possible, a new understanding of the meaning and use of Proverbs 31:10-31, especially in the lives of modern women.
- Exegesis strives for the literary historical approach to be the overarching approach for a superordinate and holistic interpretation of biblical texts.

Old Testament exegesis is a process in which the historical and scientific meaning of the text can be determined. The task of exegesis is to determine the meaning and intentions of the declarations in the text. This is done within the historical sphere of the origin of the text, as well as the different phases of the text development in the Old Testament. This is done so that the text can manifest, today, in its historical characterisation (Steck 1995:3).

Exegesis reflects the text as a living entity that exists in relation to life. The fundamental attitude of scientific exegesis is thus attention, the willingness to learn, the ability to experience, and the recognition of the limitations in relation to the text as something different or foreign. The understanding of the text differs from the modern Bible reader's personal understanding of the text. The individuality and depth of the Bible reader's understanding of the text is essentially determined by current experiences (Steck 1995:3-4).

The type of literature usually determines which aspects require more attention. The context, hermeneutics, philosophical "standpoint" as well as the exegete's ability to read the Old Testament texts determines the exegete's reading process.

The fewer windows the exegete opens into the text, the less the perspective will be that he/she gains of the text (Human 1999:362).

Scientific historical exegesis does not devalue a direct understanding of the Old Testament, but enriches the text through the manifestation of the original meaning of the text: (1) through the arbitrary subjective exploitation of the text; (2) through the indication of the central theme of the text; (3) the exposure of the text's specific impulse as required by modern times. Scientific historical exegesis thus acts as a judge of the original meaning of the text. It provides a fundamental contribution for the declaration and enhancement of the applied understanding of the text (Steck 1995:3-4).

Scientific historical exegesis is also critical exegesis as it includes a critical recognition of preconceived ideas. As soon as the preconceived ideas are identified, they should be controlled by reviewing the original meaning of the text. At the same time, the critique is directed at the text. This statement does not imply an arrogant critique on the text, but an attitude of methodological doubt. This leads to a distinguishable historical formulation of judgement towards different perceptions, approaches and conclusions about the character of the text. It questions the text's claims to truth within its historical context (Steck 1995:5).

## **1.6 Hypothesis**

*The “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a personification of wisdom and the ideal woman. She did not exist, but is an example of favourable values and qualities women can strive for. The reader's interpretation of this woman influences the contextual reading of the pericope.*

The concept of “noble woman” alongside the notion of the “woman of wisdom” needs to be contextualised within the Ancient Near East, and more specifically the Ancient Hebrew context in an attempt to try and understand the use, meaning, and development of the language and symbolism in Proverbs 31:10-31.

The focus of this study is to ascertain if the “noble woman” in Proverbs 31:10-31 is as follows:

- 1) If she is a woman/women and mother who really existed;
- 2) If the pericope refers to desirable qualities women should strive for;
- 3) Whether the concept “noble woman” becomes a personification of wisdom or if she is wisdom in its totality.
- 4) The role of the audience and their acceptance of who this woman is will influence the contextual reading of the pericope.

## **1.7 Chapter division**

The chapters in this thesis are organised as follow:

**Chapter 1** introduces the research subject of Proverbs 31:10-31 as well as the motivation for the study. Subsequently, the research problem is addressed as well as the objectives of the study, the research methodology and the hypothesis. Attention will be given to the specific chapter division that will be utilised in the study as well as an explanation of the terminology relevant to the study.

**Chapter 2** focuses on Wisdom Literature, specifically Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East. The background, structure and author of the Book of Proverbs will be reviewed. Furthermore, the date, composition and editing of the Book of Proverbs will be examined. Possible outlines and sections of Proverbs will be argued as well as Proverbs and its role in biblical theology. Proverbs in relation to pan-oriental Wisdom Literature will be discussed. The message and relevance of Proverbs will finally be addressed before concluding the chapter.

**Chapter 3** discusses the position of the woman in Proverbs, specifically Proverbs 31:10-31 by means of a literature study on the subject. The date and origin of Proverbs 31:10-31 will be discussed before examining the social and economic setting of the pericope. The genre, purpose and audience of Proverbs 31:10-31 will be reviewed. Women's challenges and social status in the Old Testament will be discussed. An exegesis of Proverbs 31:10-31 will be done using the New International Version (NIV) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

**Chapter 4** examines feminism, patriarchy and feminist theology as well as the move from feminism to feminist theology. Feminist theology in Africa, more specifically South Africa, will be discussed with a focus on African women and Christianity. This will be done with reference to Masenya's (1996) feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 by linking it to both the public and private spheres.

**Chapter 5** reflects a synthesis of the insights gained from the above-mentioned chapters. It will focus on the actuality of Proverbs 31:10-31 for modern women, addressing the previously identified problem statement relating to the use of the concepts of the 'noble woman' and 'woman of wisdom' in Proverbs 31:10-31. The chapter will review the initial objectives of the study, the research methods as well as the hypothesis. Lastly, the limitations of this study will be discussed and recommendations for further studies will be proposed.

## **1.8 Terminology and orthography**

### **1.8.1 Terminologies**

The following key terms are used:

**Acrostic poem:** This term is commonly applied to a composition in a verse in which the initial letter of successive stanzas or lines is chosen intentionally to outline a specific message.

Acrostic is both a creative technique of biblical Hebrew poetry and the broad label for a limited number of carefully crafted canonical poems that, in a variety of ways, effectively employ this technique. The acrostic technique provides a precise design for the poet, facilitating a recital of verse capable of captivating the audience and enabling the listener to follow the movement of the poem from beginning to end (Longman & Enns 2008:1).

**Ancient Near East:** In this study, the Ancient Near East is used as a general term that “embraces both an enormous geographical territory and a long chronological span. Many different peoples lived in this area of more than three million square miles that included a variety of ecological environments – alluvial plains of river valleys, coastal regions, high mountain steppes, deserts and oases. A combination of different ethnic groups and living conditions produced the complex and rich cultures that we, today, call the Ancient Near East (Benzel et al. 2010:9).

**Black theology:** Black theology is a theology of liberation; a theology of “blackness”. It confirms black humanity that liberates black people from white racism, therefore providing real freedom for both black and white people. It verifies the humanity of white people because it opposes the white oppression. Black theology is a theology that ascends from the need to express the religious importance of the black presence in a hostile white-dominated world. Black theology entails black people contemplating the black experience under the Holy Spirit’s guidance in an attempt to redefine the significance of the Christian Gospel in their lives (Antonio 2007:81).

**Diachronic approach (historical-critical method):** The diachronic approach focuses on the origin, development and history of a text with the aim of identifying texts that are as close to the original as possible (Gorman 2001:15, 199).

**Exegesis:** A careful historical, literary and theological analysis of a text is called exegesis (Gorman 2001:8). It is also called a ‘scholarly reading’ which entails reading it in a way that “ascertains the sense of the text through the most complete, systematic recording possible of the phenomena of the text, grappling with the reasons for or against a specific understanding of it” (Gorman 2001:8).



Exegesis can be described as a 'close reading', a term derived from the study of literature. A 'close' reading is a deliberate, word-for-word and phrase-by-phrase reading of all the parts of a text in order to understand it as a whole (Gorman 2001:8-9). Exegesis is "to lead out" in order to better interpret and understand a text. Biblical exegesis is the study of words, syntax, grammar and theology to uncover the meaning of a text or biblical passage (De Moss & Miller 2002:83).

**Feminist theology:** This strand of theology "emerged from the notion that Christian theology and the institutional embodiment of Christianity not only excluded women's voices and experiences, but also developed practices that are sexist, patriarchal and androcentric" (Pederson 2003:327). The historical roots of contemporary feminist theology is found with those who question the authors of sacred texts. It also challenges theologians who defined what it meant to be a human being from the perspective of a male, patriarchal experience. The male experience was, for centuries, the standard by which the contribution and worth of a woman was judged. Since the 1960s, however, contemporary feminist theologians began to challenge and protest against the fundamental practices and doctrines of institutional Christianity (Pederson 2003:327).

**Feminist/womanist:** "Feminist" is a term commonly used to describe those who seek to eliminate the subordination and marginalisation of women. Women have throughout the centuries resisted their subordinate position and exploitation. The roots of feminism as an intellectual and social movement are found in the European Enlightenment. Although diverse articulations of feminism exist, there is consensus among feminists in general that gender roles are socially constructed rather than innate as well as their critique of masculine supremacy. Feminism's "root experience" is women's realisation that cultural "common sense", dominant perspectives, scientific theories and historical knowledge are androcentric, i.e. male-biased and therefore not objective but ideological. This breakthrough experience does not only cause anger and disillusionment, but also a sense of power and possibility (Freedman 1992: 783). Alice Walker's term "womanist" (i.e. feminist of colour) was introduced by African-American feminists in religious studies.

Womanism indicates that feminism is more than a political movement and theoretical perspective of only white women (Freedman 1992:784).

**Liberation theology:** Liberation theology is a new way of practicing theology but not a new theology as such. Liberation theology's focus is on worship, service to humanity and theological reflection. Commitment to, and solidarity with, the poor and vulnerable of society is essential in order to stimulate the intellectual activity which permits liberation theology to begin. Liberation theology is an exercise, a discipline, and a way which has to be lived by instead of a gained body of knowledge (Rowland 2007:3).

**Literary criticism:** It is the quest to understand the text as literature by applying either traditional or recent models of literary criticism. The meaning of the text is dependent on their immediate and larger context. Literary criticism analyses various literary aspects of the text as literature (Gorman 2001: 12, 196). According to De Moss and Miller (2002:137), a literary criticism is a study of a book's authorship, date, genre, structure, themes and sources.

**Synchronic approach:** This approach sees the text as a finished product and therefore analyses the text in its final form (Gorman 2001:12, 196).

**Wisdom (in the Old Testament):** "Wisdom" is the term used to indicate the books in the Bible that deal particularly with (biblical) wisdom. It can also refer to an ancient world associated with "teachers" or sages. "Wisdom" also suggests a particular understanding of reality which presents some contrasts with other books in the Bible (Freedman 1992:920). This term can also refer to a philosophic outlook in which people inquired about the most cautious ways to live in the world. Reality and the unpredictability of life stimulated a deep-rooted felt need to order life so that people could live within human society with a minimised threat to order. People's thoughts about wisdom recognised that life is fragile and therefore one should exercise good judgement and make cautious decisions (Beavis & Gilmour 2012:601).

**Wisdom Literature:** Wisdom Literature is a type of literature that was common in the ancient Middle East. It is characterised by philosophical reflection, proverbs and analyses of life's experiences, human nature and religious devotion (De Moss & Miller 2002:260).

**#MeToo:** The “me too” movement was founded in 2006 to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly young women of colour from low-income communities, find pathways to healing. Their vision from the beginning was to address the dearth in resources for survivors of sexual violence and to build a community of advocates, driven by survivors, who will be at the forefront of creating solutions to interrupt sexual violence in their communities. Their goal is also to reframe and expand the global conversation around sexual violence to speak to the needs of a broader spectrum of survivors. This spectrum includes the youth, queer, transgender, and disabled people, black women and girls, and all communities of colour. The movement envisages that all perpetrators be held accountable and strategies be implemented to sustain long-term, systemic change (MeToo n.d.).

### 1.8.2 Orthography

The adjusted Harvard method of reference will be used.

Hebrew Bible and Old Testament are used interchangeably to refer to the first part (Old Testament) of the Christian Bible.

The following translations of the Bible are used for the discussion and analysis of Proverbs 31:10-31:

- *Holy Bible*, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984. U.S.A: Colorado Springs.  
(Referred to in-text as NIV.)

- *Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version, copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971. Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America.  
(Referred in-text as RSV.)
- *Die Bybel* © 1983-Nuwe Vertaling. Die Bybelgenootskap van Suid-Afrika.
- This study identifies the woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31 as a “noble wife”. In Chapter 4 Masenya identifies this woman as the “woman of worth”. Masenya’s view of the woman of the pericope as the “woman of worth” was not changed in order to articulate Masenya’s understanding and interpretation of the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31.

## Chapter 2

### Proverbs, a guide to wisdom and wise living

*If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. (James 1:5, NLT)*

*Coral and jasper are worthless in trying to get it. The price of wisdom is far above rubies. (Job 28:18, NLT)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

Human beings need wisdom in order to achieve happiness. A healthy and progressive society hands down its wisdom to the next generation. The Old Testament Book of Proverbs is a literary anthology of the traditional wisdom of Israel gathered from diverse spheres of life. The purpose of Proverbs is to help people become wise and godly. Its writers were, however, aware of the hermeneutical circle of reading and living in which a person needs godly wisdom in order to gain wisdom. The entry of the book into this circle of life and learning is generational. In the traditional oral cultures, life experiences and ancestral wisdom was passed on to children by fathers, mothers and teachers. Proverbs is therefore a literary collection of such diverse wisdom. It invites its readers to follow a path of wisdom and “the fear of the Lord” (Van Leeuwen 1997:19).

Murphy (1998:15) opines that Proverbs is a compendium of ethics of the morality of Israel. This view of Proverbs is supported by words stating that wisdom will prosper, while folly will self-destruct. This resulted in the book becoming very popular in Western culture for both its picturesque language and timely truths. The true subtlety of the book is, however, seldom recognised in popular use (Murphy 1998:15).

Proverbs undergirds a moral code but the book's real intent is to train a person in character formation, to convey what life really is about and how to wisely undertake life's challenges. Proverbs seeks out comparisons or analogies between the human situation and everything else such as animals and the rest of creation. The book does not command but seeks to persuade the reader to adopt a specific way of life (Murphy 1998:15).

Proverbs is essentially about wisdom. On the one hand, wisdom is a skill of living with a form of practical knowledge. Wise people say and do the right things at the appropriate times. Wise people live their lives in a way that maximises blessings for themselves and others in a world that was created by God. At a deeper level, wisdom is, however, more profound than the ability to navigate life well. Wisdom for Israel begins with a proper, respectful attitude towards God that is characterised by "fear". This type of fear does not make one run away and it is more than respect. It is a type of awe that a person should feel when he/she is in the presence of God, the creator of the universe. Proverbs therefore intends to guide the reader towards wisdom and wise living (KJV).

Proverbs is concerned with wisdom as a fundamental option in life and not only wise actions. Its focus on wisdom is so intense that it personalises and reifies it. Proverbs gives Wisdom a voice in order for her to invite people to become her disciples and companions. She encourages her hearers to seek her over everything else. Wisdom is with God and therefore God's blessings come to those who follow her. This quest for wisdom is presented as a drama that is overflowing with conflict (Clifford 1999:320).

Proverbs recognises another voice that resembles the voice of Wisdom and makes use of the same relationship language. That voice belongs to a group of men or another woman. This voice promises fellowship and life. The promises in the end prove to be empty and even dangerous to a point of being fatal. Those who seek wisdom must discern who is speaking in order to be able to choose and reject unfavourable voices. Acquiring wisdom is both a human achievement as well as a divine gift.

Wisdom is a free gift but this gift can only become accessible through discipline. This discipline is a willingness to learn from others and the capacity to bear contradiction and pain if it is required to gain wisdom. Wisdom is gained by opening oneself up to receiving it as a gift. The quest for wisdom is a universal quest and thus not limited to Jews and Christians. Proverbs enables its readers to engage in a common quest with women and men of all faiths and from every land (Clifford 1999:32-33).

## **2.2 Wisdom Literature**

### **2.2.1 Definition of wisdom/Wisdom Literature**

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2002) defines wisdom as “accumulated philosophic and/or scientific learning. Wisdom is an ability to discern inner qualities and relationships.” Hanks (1990:999) defines wisdom as the ability to use one’s experience and knowledge to make sensible decisions or judgements. Wisdom can also be defined as accumulated knowledge or learning (Hanks 1990:999). Wisdom’s goal is development of character and to give meaning to life’s inconsistencies (Crenshaw 2010:4).

Biblical studies designate this accumulated knowledge as Wisdom Literature in the books of Proverbs, Job, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes), Song of Songs, wisdom Psalms, other poets of law, prophets with wisdom characteristics and in the deuterocanonical and apocryphal books such as Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon (Clifford 1997:1). Proverbs forms part of the three wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible, namely Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (Martin 1995:16).

The root for “wisdom” in its various forms appears 318 times in the Hebrew Bible. “Wisdom” appears 183 in the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (Kampen 2011:5). Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, along with Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon (it occurs in the two apocryphal book forms of Sophos/Sophia over 100 times) are known to represent Israel’s “Wisdom Literature” (Freedman 1992:111).

Johannes Meinhold published the first study entirely dedicated to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament in 1908 (Waltke 2005:51; and Waltke & Yu 2007:897). Biblical Wisdom Literature's precise nature and setting is widely debated. However, Wisdom Literature's nature and setting is often said to be humanistic, international, non-historical and eudemonistic<sup>8</sup> (Waltke & Yu 2007:897).

This is also true for other proposed distinctive marks such as the search for order and its distinctive "sapiential" tone (Waltke & Yu 2007: 897). "Sapiential is an adjective from the Latin word '*sapere*' that means 'to be wise' " (Waltke & Yu 2007: 897). Waltke (2007:897) is of the opinion that biblical Wisdom Literature differs from other genres due to its unique style, vocabulary, inspirations and subjects.

Whybray (1991:227) indicates the following distinctive vocabulary of Wisdom Literature, namely: wisdom, knowledge, and understanding/competence (see Proverbs 1:2-6). Waltke and Yu (2007:898) oppose Whybray's (1991:227) view that Wisdom Literature is humanistic. The sages are interested in the potentiality and limitations of human beings in their world which therefore indicates that a branding of the genre as "humanistic" is incorrect. The basis of the book's teachings is in "the fear of *I AM*" and not in humanity (Waltke & Yu 2007:898). Proverbs 3:7 warns the reader against self-righteousness. One should rather seek autonomy. Proverbs 3:5-6 calls the reader to trusting in 'I AM' and not in the self (Waltke & Yu 2007:898). The ethos of wisdom is not the result of the goodness of man or the superior functioning of human reasoning. Rather, the limitations of humanity leads to the righteous committing their ways to 'I AM' to reap success in life (Proverbs 16:1-3; Nel 1982:127).

---

<sup>8</sup> Crenshaw (1985:369), however, states that each term requires qualification. Eudemonism is a theory that posits that the highest ethical goal is happiness and personal well-being (Eudaemonism n.d.). William McKane (1970), Ernst Wurthwein (1967 & 1970) and Walter Zimmerli (1976) opine that Old Testament wisdom is utilitarian and eudemonistic instead of religious (Waltke & Yu 2007:899). Waltke (1979:302-317) argued that a distinction cannot be made between secular/profane versus religious/pious in any of the literature with its origin in the Ancient Near East. Wilson (1987:313-334) critically argued for a distinction between older, profane wisdom and younger, Yahwistic wisdom. Today this view is widely rejected. The Book of Proverbs claims that morality is based on eudemonism (a system of ethics of doing good in order to obtain certain pleasures) and the corpus of wisdom qualifies eudemonism in the same manner as the rest of the Old Testament (Lev. 26 and Deut. 27-28), namely that happiness depends on our faith in God (Waltke & Yu 2007:899).



Wisdom's international character, specifically its link to Egyptian instruction literature, was established after E. A. Wallis Budge (1923) published what is now known as *The Instruction Teaching of Amenemope* (Waltke & Yu 2007:898). The wisdom of Israel uniquely lays down the fear of 'I AM' (The personal God of Israel) as the foundation from which to acquire wisdom (Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). This concept is therefore representative of the central religious principles in the Wisdom Literature (Nel 1982:127).

Waltke and Yu (2007:898) posit that with regard to Wisdom Literature's non-historical nature, no mention is made of the promises to the patriarchs, the exodus and Moses, the covenant and Sinai, and the promise of God to David (2 Samuel 7). The prophetic narrators and the prophetic poets validate Moses' worldview as it is expressed in Deuteronomy. The sages confirmed such a worldview through their observations and convincing reflections of creation which also includes human behaviour. The sages thus approach creation with the worldview that is expressed in the historic covenant of Israel. Solomon is identified as the king of Israel in Proverbs 1:1. When he accepted the throne of Israel he copied the Law of Moses under the guidance of the Levites (Deuteronomy 17:18). His father's final words also influenced him to keep that law. The basis and emphasis of his teaching is that one enters into wisdom through the gate of the "fear of I AM." This is a stark contrast to Qoheleth and Job and his three friends who primarily spoke of "God"; the title given to God in his transcendence. Proverbs speaks of 'I AM'; the title given to Israel's immanent God who entered into a covenant with Israel (Waltke & Yu 2007:898-899).

"Woman wisdom" is a personification of the revealed wisdom as it is taught in the Book of Proverbs and not of "wisdom in creation". Other biblical books do, however, lay claim to God's revelation of His wisdom in creation and thus assumes a natural law. Nel (1982:127) argues that the epistemological foundation of the book, the fear of the "I AM", does not allow for wisdom to be interpreted as natural theology.

Kidner (1964:11) states that wisdom is different due to its tone, its speakers as well as its appeal. Blunt sayings such as “thou shalt” or “shalt not” in the law and the prophets’ use of “thus saith I Am” are substituted with the teacher’s appeal to reason. Wisdom’s tone differs from the prophetic and legal genres, although the father bluntly instructs the son to “Listen!” (Proverbs 1-8), “Do not give in!” (Proverbs 1:10) and represents his sayings as the *Torah* and “commandments”. These terms are used in the Law of Moses. Woman wisdom, with definite emotions, “raises her voice” (Proverbs 1:20). The sages are teachers and not prophets and lawgivers but they do speak with just as much authority as prophets and lawmakers. Woman wisdom does, however, speak as a prophet in Proverbs 1:20-33. Wisdom does indeed appeal to the mind but the knowledge of wisdom lies within a loving heart (Waltke 1988:1-15).

Wisdom Literature has its own unique style. The sages collected proverbs, also known as short aphorisms, to communicate inspired truth (Waltke & Yu 2007:900). The unique quality of Wisdom Literature is its undeniable manner of inspiration (Waltke and Yu 2007:900). Wisdom’s goal is therefore character formation and to make sense of the anomalies of life (Crenshaw 2010:4).

Perdue (2000:3) refers to the fact that wisdom is a feminine noun. This explains, to some extent, its presentation as a woman in Proverbs 1-9. In order to define wisdom, one should note that it refers to a body of literature found in the Hebrew canon (specifically Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes), and the Apocrypha (particularly Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon). These texts can be characterised by the presence of common literary genres, themes and language. Later Jewish texts that could be counted as part of the flourishing wisdom tradition, include Baruch 3:9-4:4; *Pirqe Aboth*; the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, as well as some of the writings found in *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Some fragments of wisdom were preserved in the texts that belong to other types of canonical literature such as the Law and the Prophets. They reflect the editorial activity and influence of the wisdom/sapiential scribes (Jeremiah 17:5-11; and the Wisdom Psalms). If one moves away from the literary definition and focus on a more conceptual definition, one can state that wisdom in ancient Israel and early Judaism includes six important elements. These elements are: knowledge, imagination, discipline, piety, order, and moral instruction (Perdue 2000:4).

## 2.2.2 Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East

The single characteristic of the Solomonic tradition that is viewed by its readers as strange is the comparison between Solomon's wisdom and that of the non-Israelite scholars. This strange feature of wisdom provides a clue to the international character of the sapiential tradition (Crenshaw 2010:50).

Mesopotamia and Egypt's wisdom traditions flourished. Their wisdom traditions consisted of professional scholars who wrote extensive literary works that demonstrate remarkable thematic and formal unity (Williams 1962:949-952). In Egypt, the literary writings included instructions and reflections on the deeper mysteries in life. In Mesopotamia, however, literary texts on wisdom preserved valiant struggles with the problem of human suffering. They also contained collections of popular proverbs (Crenshaw 2010:50).

The sapiential tradition in the Ancient Near East was sufficiently consistent to allow the possible integration of a section from an Egyptian Instruction into the Book of Proverbs and allow for modern scholars to label Mesopotamian texts as a "Sumerian Job" and a "Babylonian Ecclesiaste." There are significant differences between the cultural contexts but the sense of a sapiential tradition in the Ancient Near East has substantial merit (Crenshaw 2010:51).

The pharaonic court was the locus for the sapiential tradition in Egypt. The Mesopotamian sages went to a school that was located near a temple. The different settings had an influence on the character of the wisdom that developed from each of these groups. Egyptian wisdom focused on providing instructions for a successful life at the royal court, while Mesopotamian wisdom focused on assuring a good life by incorporating cultic practices. The majority of biblical proverbs came about in a context other than the royal court and numerous proverbs developed within a family. This principal saw the merging of law and instruction; both carried the patriarch's full authority (Crenshaw 2010:51-52).

In the premonarchic and early monarchic period of Israel's history their careful observation of the immediate world paid considerable dividends in the form of proverbs. The maxims focused on the agrarian enterprise, personal relationships (specifically sexual ones), self-control as well as the many ways in which one can enrich or impoverish one's life. It is likely that this is how most biblical proverbs began as folk sayings that were conveyed within the family. Israel's sapiential tradition seems to have started, initially, among ordinary people in small villages which then moved on to the royal court and ultimately into households where it was taught within the family (Crenshaw 2010:51-52).

Israel's constant pursuit of knowledge, meaning, divine presence, and survival forms part of a bigger pursuit in the Ancient Near East. The influence of wisdom from the Easterners and the Egyptians (Genesis 41:8; Exodus 7:11; Kings. 4:30-31; Isaiah 19:11-15) on wisdom in the Hebrew Bible is highlighted by a continued influx of literature from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Similarities and differences between the wisdom of Israel and its neighbours to the south and east are evident from the Wisdom Literature of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Features that distinguish the Egyptian and Mesopotamian Wisdom Literature from that of related Israelite texts have cautioned readers to not use the term "wisdom" in relation to extra-Israelite writings (Crenshaw 2010:251).

The biblical concept of wisdom (*hokma*) is not as applicable as the descriptive term "instruction" when applied to the Egyptian material (Brunner 1991:90). In Babylonian literature, "wisdom" is a misleading term (Lambert 1960:1). Lambert (1960:1) explains that "Generally 'wisdom' refers to skill in cult and magic lore, and the wise man is the initiate." Both Brunner (1991:90) and Lambert (1960:1) indicate an important area of shared subject matter, literary form and world view between Israelite wisdom and that of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

"Wisdom literature" is a title given to some genres from Egypt and Mesopotamia. The example of the biblical wisdom books helped to form the extra-biblical texts as constituting a special group.

Comparing the extra-biblical texts to their biblical counterparts has proven to be fruitful. The foreign examples illuminate two very important topics, namely: literary genres (a set of conventions by which the work is ruled) and the social location of the authors of the books (Clifford 1997:3).

The wisdom texts contain some of the most ancient literature. Wisdom genres such as the instruction and proverb collections are certified from the first appearance of *belles lettres* (2600 BCE for Mesopotamia and approximately two centuries later for Egypt). It continued to be in use long after the biblical period (Clifford 1997:3).

Proverbs formed part of an international intellectual context and is an example of a literary genre that flourished primarily in Egypt but also in the Semitic world, Mesopotamia and other parts of the Ancient Near East long before the existence of Israel (Crenshaw 2010:50; Whybray 1995: 14).

The Mesopotamian wisdom tradition created distinguishable traits in their Wisdom Literature. The traits of the Mesopotamian scribal tradition was its affinity to collect and preserve information in lists. These lists are called “list science” by modern scholars and generated a large quantity of lists that included almost everything that was divine or natural. Many texts were produced by the scribes that are similar to biblical wisdom which not only includes proverbs and instructions but also Wisdom Literature of an educational and speculative nature (Sparks 2009:57).

Standard Mesopotamian<sup>9</sup> wisdom includes the Sumerian proverb collection.

---

<sup>9</sup> One of the important texts in Mesopotamian wisdom is *The Instruction of Shuruppak* (Crenshaw 2010: 265; Sparks 2009:58-59). Copies of the classical Sumerian (ca. 2500 BCE), old Babylonian periods (ca. 1800 BCE) and a very fragmented Akkadian translation (ca. 1100 BCE) exist. Although the text seems to have a clear structure, the proverbs and instructions seems to be randomly arranged. This differs from the topical rationale used in the arrangement of other Sumerian proverb collections but is indicative of the sections of the biblical Proverbs. The central theme of the text was the contrast between chaotic foolishness and the order brought about by living wisely (Sparks 2009:59).

*The Instruction of Urninurta* is a Sumerian text that depicts the divine election of Urninurta (1923-1896 BCE) as the king and provides a religious discourse on retributive theology. The instruction is believed to have been divinely revealed to Urninurta, however, it is not clear if the text was written to show Urninurta's virtue or to provide wisdom to his people, or both (Sparks 2009:59).

The Sumerians started collecting proverbs in the middle of the third millennium BCE and 28 of these collections are known to modern scholars. The best collections originated from the Old Babylonian period. These texts were used 800 years after their composition to train the scribes for whom Sumerian was a foreign language. The collection included practical and scribal court wisdom. Two genres that appear most commonly in the Bible and other Near Eastern texts are the teachings (rules regarding moral conduct) and the sayings (rules to address the practical side of life; Sparks 2009:58). Scribal proverbs occasionally comment on palace life in a critical or satirical manner. Some scholars are of the opinion that the Sumerian scribal communities, including the later schools of Mesopotamia, had some form of ideological independence from the palace (Sparks 2009:58).

In the standard Egyptian<sup>10</sup> wisdom, the instruction texts use the title *sboyet* which has the dual meaning of “teaching” and “discipline”.

---

Later the Mesopotamian scribes continued to translate copy and study the Sumerian proverbs. Akkadian scribes produced several collections of instructional warnings. Among these instructional warnings were the *Counsels of Wisdom*. The text covered topics such as proper and improper speech, legal advice, choosing companions, sex and marriage, conduct in friendship, kindness to the needy and religious piety (Sparks 2009:60).

The Akkadian text *Advice to a Prince* cautioned the future king to practice justice and heed the counsel of his advisers. Although the text was most possibly written to a Babylonian king who reigned between 1000 and 700 BCE, quotes of the text written in Neo-Assyrian letters and astral prophecies suggests that it became well-liked among court scribes (Sparks 2009:60).

See Sparks (2009:61-65) and Crenshaw (2010:266-267) on Mesopotamian Speculative Wisdom and other Mesopotamian wisdom texts.

<sup>10</sup> *The Instructions of Hardjedef* is one of the earliest teachings of the Old Kingdom. Most of this instruction has perished, except for a few lines that instruct the reader to prepare a burial place and choose a wife. Later literature frequently mentions this sage and bears witness to his influential teachings (Crenshaw 201:253; Sparks 2009:66).

*The Instructions of Ptahhotep* (late third millennium BC) is the oldest complete example of Egypt's instructional genre (Sparks 2009:67). *The Instructions of Ptahhotep* is noticeably similar to the description of old age in Ecclesiastes (Crenshaw 2010:254). The language of the text reflects a possible influence from the Middle Egyptian era, which suggests that the text was composed close to the end of the Old Kingdom – a long time after Ptahhotep would have lived. The instructions might thus have been produced pseudonymously by Ptahhotep. *The Instructions of Ptahhotep* became a source of wisdom for many generations (Arnold & Beyer 2002:182; Sparks 2009:67).

*The instructions of Merikare* (mid-second millennium BC) was allegedly written by Pharaoh Khety for his son Merikare. Some researchers do, however, believe that Merikare wrote the work himself to honour his deceased father and as a statement of his own political policies. In essence, this text is a royal instruction (Arnold & Beyer 2002:184; Sparks 2009:67).

This the same as the Hebrew term *musar* (Sparks 2009:66). The purpose of the instructions was to teach the readers how to live according to *ma'at*. *Ma'at* can be translated as “justice, order and truth” (Crenshaw 2010:252).

Although the Egyptian instructions included traditional sayings they are different from the proverbial collection in that they do not offer sentence wisdom but poetic discourse. In the Hebrew proverbs, Proverbs 1-9 comprise wisdom discourse whereas Proverbs 10-22 consists of proverbial sentence wisdom (Sparks 2009:66).

The earliest Aramaic copy of *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar*<sup>11</sup> was discovered in Upper Egypt on papyrus from the fifth century BCE.

---

*The Instructions of Amenemhet* is advice given by King Amenemhet to his son around 1960 BCE. The wise teaching warns against placing trust in all people, however, the conclusion of the text is unfortunately missing (Crenshaw 2010:256; Sparks 2009:68).

The first half of *The Loyalist Instructions (Sehetepibre)* was found on a mortuary stela. Scholars have, however, come to the conclusion that it forms part of a longer wisdom arrangement. The first half of the text advocates sincere loyalty to the king. The second half contains words of wisdom for success in the royal court (Sparks 2009:69; Crenshaw 2010: 256).

*The Instructions of Any* (mid-second millennium BC) were written by a middle-class scribe for a middle-class audience. In *The Instructions of Any*, the obsession with success in the royal court is replaced by practical advice on marriage, the threat of strange women, religious piety and concern for the poor (Arnold & Beyer 2002:184; Crenshaw 2010:256-257; Sparks 2009:70).

*The instructions of Amenemope* (first millennium BC) are the best known of the New Kingdom instructions. Scholars are of the opinion, through their examination of formal and material similarities, that *The instructions of Amenemope* directly influenced the first collection in the Book of Proverbs (Chapter 1-9) and the biblical writer of Proverbs 22:17-23:14. *The instructions of Amenemope* also indicate a move in Egyptian thought. Humility, integrity and moral character were seen as rewards in and of themselves and happiness was not rooted in a wealth of power and possessions (Arnold & Beyer 2002:184; Crenshaw 2010:256-257; Sparks 2009:70-71).

See Sparks (2009:73-75) on Speculative Egyptian Wisdom.

The Ugaritic wisdom corpus was mainly written from traditions that were borrowed from Mesopotamia. This included copies of the *Dialogue of Sube'-awilum*, a fragmentary collection of admonitions, a few fragmentary collections of proverbs and a pessimistic but also fragmentary text like the *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*. Wisdom native to Ugarit primarily included school texts and astronomical, magical and professional literature. None of the Ugaritic corpus however equals biblical wisdom (Sparks 2009:76).

<sup>11</sup> Scholars are relatively certain that the same author did not write the proverbs and the story because the Aramaic dialect of the proverbs is older than that of the story. This then suggests that Ahiqar was not the author of the story but that the story was secondarily attached to the collection of proverbs. It could have been an attempt to enhance the authority of the text by associating it with a well-known sage. Scholars have argued that the proverbs originated in Mesopotamia. The religious outlook of its sayings and language is in favour of a northern Syrian context. A possible objective of the composition was to construct didactic materials for officials in the royal court. This purpose is indicated by its combination of scribal wisdom and popular folk wisdom (Sparks 2009:76).

The proverbial collection does, however, seem to be slightly older. Two general sections are included in the papyrus, namely: a story that presents Ahiqar to the reader and a collection of proverbs. *The Proverbs of Ahiqar* differs significantly from Mesopotamian wisdom (Sparks 2009:66).

In numerous respects, the features of *The Proverbs of Ahiqar* are similar to those of the Hebrew wisdom of Proverbs. Similarities between *The Proverbs of Ahiqar* and the Hebrew wisdom of Proverbs traditions include individual sayings and form-critical affinities such as instructions on discipline (Ahiqar 81-82; Proverbs 23:13-14) and numerical sayings (Ahiqar 92-93; Proverbs 6:16-19). Other similarities between Ahiqar and Proverbs are that they both address their pupil as “my son”, personify wisdom as a woman, contrast the “righteous” with the wicked and include animal proverbs. Although some of these themes and motives also appear in Mesopotamian and Egyptian wisdom, the unique combination of characteristics shared by Ahiqar and Proverbs indicate that West Semitic wisdom was a tradition in its own right. The tradition was, however, influenced by but not dependent on the Mesopotamian and Egyptian traditions to the east and west (Crenshaw 2010:259; Sparks 2009:76-77).

### 2.2.3 Character of wisdom

#### 2.2.3.1 Wisdom literature as knowledge

The understanding of the sages of wisdom as knowledge includes the following aspects:

- 1) A specific collection of texts that formed the basis of a tradition. After the text is written it exists independently from the author to assist in shedding light on the meaning of the text.

---

See Sparks (2009:77) for Hittite Instruction and Protocol Manuals.



- 2) The ways in which to obtain and understand the specific knowledge by making use of memory, sensory perception, reason, experience and imagination. The text is therefore removed from its intended audience and is accessible to a limitless number of readers.
- 3) The instruction and learning process used by the teachers to transmit the tradition to their students. Wisdom as knowledge can go beyond cultural and generational boundaries and express its message in various contexts (Bergant 1997:7; Perdue 2000: 4).

Wisdom tradition is an embodiment of knowledge. It was a growing tradition in Israel that was eventually incorporated into several canonical and deuterocanonical compositions, namely: Proverbs, Job Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth), within the Palestinian (Masoretic) Canon Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Alexandria Canon (Crenshaw 1995:1; Crenshaw, 2010:5; the Septuagint; 31; Sparks 2009: 81). These compositions were influential in forming the language and content of other collections of literature such as the Psalms (Psalms 1, 19a, 19b, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127); certain prophets (Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah); and specific narratives (the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 and the succession narratives of 2 Samuel 9-20; I Kings 1-2 ). The themes and forms of Israelite and Jewish wisdom impacted significantly on apocalyptic literature (the Enoch texts); early canonical and non-canonical Christian writings (the Gospel of Thomas and the epistle of James) and the rabbinic texts (*Pirque Aboth*). Wisdom literature specifically influenced the content and formation of subsequent collections of sayings and ethical instructions that furnished part of the content for character formation and the moral life in the early Jewish and Christian communities (Perdue 2000:4).

Distinctive literary, social, theological and ethical features can be found in the wisdom tradition. The literary genres or forms include a variety of sayings (proverbs, riddles, questions, beatitudes, numerical sayings, prohibitions and admonitions), instructions, dialogues or disputations, didactic narratives and poems. Several different social contexts, most probably, gave rise to these traditions. The social contexts include the court, the royal and temple schools, and the family.

Among the sages were not only teachers, but also scribes, and officials working within the major social institutions of the court and temple. They also included parents and elders that were members of the extended households and clans. They were responsible for the instruction and socialisation of their families, specifically the children (Crenshaw 2010:31; Perdue 2000:5; Sparks 2009:81).

Through their teachings, the sages passed on and developed an oral and written evolving sapiential tradition. These various settings led to the merging of forms and traditions that became the extant wisdom books. The nature of the canon is primarily a theological and ethical collection of literature that is involved with faith, worship and morality. It thus comes as no surprise that the extant literary tradition of the wisdom scribes was also mainly theological and moral in nature (Crenshaw 2010:50; Perdue 2000:5).

Wisdom literature's content is largely moral and theological. This does, however, not mean that the teachings were accepted as a divine order of eternal truths that exceeded time and place. Teachers considered the wisdom tradition to be authoritative, even if only in a qualified manner. The wisdom tradition represented the best and tested insights of the sages that studied the divinely established world order and human society. They reflected on their experiences and observations, and noted their insights in their writings and passed what they have learned on to future generations (Bergant 1997:81; Perdue 2000:5).

#### 2.2.3.2 Wisdom and the imagination of the wise

Wisdom was not limited by knowledge gained from observations in the cosmic and social reality that was refined by reason and continuously tested in the realm of human experience. In the sages, linguistic portrayals of God, humanity, and the world were also aesthetes who activated their imaginations. Their goal was to project a reality of beauty and order in which society was a microcosm of symmetry and justice that is present in both creation and in the character and nature of God.

The sages used their language to build artistic and compelling literary worlds of delight and beauty. The ones who took up the path of wisdom to enable their understanding entered into a symbolic universe of order, goodness, and artistry. This was a universe built on the imagination of learned sages (Perdue 2000:8).

In order to speak of God's presence in this created world of order and wonder the sages made use of the metaphor of Woman Wisdom. Woman Wisdom on the one hand is an architect, who orders and sustains the regularities of the cosmos, and on the other hand she is a sage whose teachings offer the bounty of life to her students. This Woman Wisdom is God's child. Her delight and rejoicing in the world, habituated by humans, provided a communal bond between creation and its creator (Proverbs 8:22-31). She is known as the fertility goddess who initiates her reign and invites the ordinary to take part in her spread of life (Proverbs 9:1-6; Bergant 1997:81 & Perdue 2000:8-9).

Proverbs 8:12-21 speak of her as the queen of heaven by whom the kings and princes rule the earth; they are blessed by her bounty. Lastly, Wisdom becomes God's revelatory voice that can be heard in both the tradition of the wise and in creation that instructs the ordinary to life and insight (Bergant 1997:81; Proverbs 8:32-36; Perdue 2000:8-9).

Wisdom was, to the sages, an instrument of divine creativity that represented (on occasion) the transcendence of God as the creator and the providential judge in the sapiential literature. The immanence of God was, however, expressed in the metaphor of "Woman Wisdom" who, in the symbolic world of the sapiential imagination was a personification of divine truth, nurture, justice, instruction and insight. All these aspects were expressed in the Wisdom Literature (Perdue 2000:9).

### 2.2.3.3 Wisdom's role in discipline

Wisdom is seen by the wise as discipline. Discipline is an education that includes a course of study embodied in "teaching" and "instructions" as well as the moral; formation of character (Proverbs 1:2, 3, 7, 8, 3:11; 15:33; and 23:23).

Character formations and studies are to lead to “sagewood”, which refers to a wise person’s successful integration of character, action, speech and knowledge (Proverbs 8:33). The quest ‘to become wise’ is a lifelong undertaking, regardless of how intensely it is undertaken and can never be achieved fully and perfectly (Proverbs 1:2-7; Perdue 2000:9).

The sages’ goal was to incorporate the teachings into human character to control and master the different situations encountered in life to enter into a state of blessings that included good health, prosperity, honour, contentment, longevity, love and success. Conversely, the sages, through wisdom, strived to avoid dishonour, unhappiness, death, anger, poor health, failure and conflict. The sages thought that by achieving these goals they lived in harmony with God, creation, the community of humans and with themselves (Perdue 2000:10).

#### 2.2.3.4 Wisdom as piety

The sages did not distinguish between faith and rational enquiry or between the practice of religion and moral behaviour. This can be seen in their repetition of the affirmation that “the fear of [Yahweh] is the beginning of knowledge” (Job 28:2; Proverbs 1:7). The “fear of Yahweh” is an attitude of reverential piety that the person seeking and then acquiring wisdom is to possess (Crenshaw 2010:159; Perdue 2000:10).

According to Von Rad (1972:53-73), this piety became the most important and essential foundation of wisdom. This belief system posits that the sages’ Yahweh was the creator of the world and Yahweh sustained all orders of life. Yahweh should then receive the sages’ awe and uncritical admiration. This fundamental worship and confession was the foundation for the understanding and interpretation of the character and activity of God. This includes the nature of reality and the significant values that was the goal of the wise and cautious life. Early wisdom was thus not a secular enterprise devoid of theological affirmation and cultic observance (Perdue 2000:10).

### 2.2.3.5 Wisdom and order in the universe

The main principal to the understanding of wisdom is the concept of order in the universe, in human society and in human life. Through order, not only regularity and continuation is expressed, but it also connoted the moral idea of justice and righteousness. The wise was of the opinion that God established a universal order of justice at creation. God continued to maintain this cosmic order of justice through righteous rule. The root of the just order is in God's character, activated by a divine will and expressed through divine action. This order did therefore not operate mechanically or independently. Humans were not automatically rewarded or punished through their language or behaviour. The sages' understanding of order allowed for a doctrine of retributive justice and did not separate how retributive justice operated from the free will and activity of God. Examples of retributive justice are: "It is Yahweh's blessing and not human effort that makes a person wealthy" (Proverbs 10:22). "Humans may make plans but it is Yahweh who directs their steps" (Perdue 2000:10-11; Proverbs 16:9).

Order as righteousness had to flow through and sustain the life of human communities. The sapiential tradition shaped and reshaped the meaning of social justice and the virtues of the moral life. If the meaning of social justice and virtues were followed and implemented in the communal existence, it led to the well-being of the entire human community. The teachings of the sages contained God's moral laws. They were actualised in society's institutions such as the extended family and clan, the law, and government. The actions and speech of human beings, whether it was good or evil, righteous or foolish, impacted directly on both society and the universe. The actions of humans were not isolated and self-contained either in performance or in the results gained from it. The sages' thought that all actions and language in society had an effect (whether positive or negative) on the human community and on the order of creation. The behaviour and speeches of the people who embodied order were known as the "righteous ones". This moral order of justice was not viewed by the sages as intrinsic to human nature but was learned and realised through actions and words informed by wisdom (Perdue 2000:11-12).

The sages wanted to live in harmony with God, the universe, society, and with themselves. Through their actions and speech they surrounded, constituted and enhanced the orders of life in their cosmic, social, and individual dimensions. The moral life not only imitated the justice present in the character of God that is observable in the universe and actualised in society but it helped to create and sustain a just order in all spheres of existence (Perdue 2000:11-12). The sages wanted to be included in this sphere of cosmic and social life. They wanted to live in harmony with creation and the human community and to experience well-being in life (Perdue 1990:457-478).

#### 2.2.3.6 Wisdom as a moral instruction

In Proverbs, wisdom is understood as moral instruction. Wisdom as a moral instruction has the following features:

Firstly, the moral instruction in Proverbs primarily consists of material that is unoriginal and traditional. This is to a large extent due to the static view of the world order and the conservative nature of the teachings of the sages who strived to uphold a social reality that was not easily open to change. The moral discipline of the wise teachers did not advocate social change. They wanted to legitimate the existing social reality and the worldview that helped to sustain it.

Secondly, the moral instructions may be applied to a variety of individual situations and life circumstances. The general rules of conduct, thus, provide guidance for the ones who are being taught. They can then apply these codes or rules of conduct to the various situations in which they find themselves.

Thirdly, moral instruction wants to stimulate the memory of those who have received instructions in order to urge them to act on the basis of what they already know (Davies 1995:199-211; Perdue 1981:114-126; Perdue 2000:12).

#### 2.2.4 Theology of Wisdom Literature

Wisdom literature presents a huge difficulty in that it does not fit into the type of faith exhibited in the prophetic and historical texts. There is no explicit reference in the Wisdom Literature to the development of the doctrine of history and election of covenant (Wright 1952:103).

One of the oldest reasons cited for keeping wisdom separate on a theological level is that no reference is made in the Wisdom Literature to a saving history. No mention is made of Yahweh's self-revelation in the exodus, the promises to David and the election of Israel as the covenant people (Dell 2006:8).

Dell (2006:9) proposes a second reason for wisdom's separateness. In the attempt to construct Old Testament theology, wisdom does not fit in well with the main historical development of concepts such as covenant, election and salvation history.

Brueggemann (1970: 5-6), when speaking about the place of wisdom in connection to the salvation-history scheme, writes that there was a notion that wisdom didn't matter and that it was akin to an unwanted child, almost like a bastard in the family of faith; that wisdom is unchristian, unbiblical and not worth any of our time. Brueggemann (1970: 5-6) opines that it is only in the broadening of the quest for wisdom theology in the other parts of the Old Testament such as the narrative of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) and the Yahwist creation account (Gen. 2-3) that a better appreciation of wisdom's place in the Old Testament can be found (Dell 2006:9).

One of Wisdom Literature's characteristics is the complete absence of any reference to or obvious interest in either the historical context in which ancient Israel found itself or the cult, of the Jerusalem temple which was the focus point of Israel's religious practices (Martin 1995:91). The a-cultic and a-historical aspects of Wisdom Literature not only make the dating of the wisdom books in themselves almost impossible to date with some degree of accuracy but this also leads to its marginalisation in terms of Old Testament theology. Due to their lack of interest in Israel's "salvation history" or the temple, cult scholars have felt that they have little to nothing to contribute to the general theological perspectives of the Old Testament (Collins 1980:2-3; Martin 1995:91).

In recent times, wisdom in relation to the Old Testament has come to occupy a more central position (Murphy 1994:4). Murphy (1994:4) makes the following suggestions for the theological role of wisdom within the context of Old Testament and biblical theology. One of the most important contributions that wisdom can make to theology is the concept of “the fear of the Lord” as a fundamental principle of all life. Although wisdom provides scriptural authority for our twentieth-century more “secular” approach to life, Yahweh is still the original author of all that we are and do. ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ (Martin 1995:97; Proverbs 1:7).

Murphy (1994:5) states that “wisdom theology is creation theology.” Creation theology is often the sole area in which wisdom is permitted to make a contribution to Old Testament theology (Martin 1995:97).

The moralism in the wisdom material is self-understanding. This is especially true in the admonitions and sayings of the sentence literature in the Book of Proverbs and is an important contribution to theological ethics as a subject (Martin 1995:97).

Theodicy’s most difficult question is the problem of the relationship between the existence of evil and suffering, parallel to the existence of a loving and just God. This aspect is pursued from different angles although it is not definitively answered in the Book of Job, for example (Murphy 1994:5-6).

Murphy (1994:6) deals to a large extent with the personification of wisdom as a woman. He is of the opinion that wisdom, as a woman, reflects something of the nature of God as not being static or passive, but as the One who gives himself to us. The reader is often invited to respond to female wisdom in Proverbs in a language and manner that is very erotic. Zimmerli (1976:160) is of the opinion that it is a way in which humans can respond to God’s love for them. Wisdom’s depiction as feminine can be seen as a way of breaking the patriarchalism of the Old Testament (Murphy 1994: 6). Proverbs 8:35 reads: “Whoever finds me finds life and wins favour with the Lord.” The reader can hear Yahweh speaking. The personification of wisdom as a woman must therefore open up the culturally conditioned language that portrays God as masculine (Murphy 1994:7).



I agree with Murphy that the personification of wisdom as a woman breaks away from male-centeredness, masculinity and patriarcalism as the norm. Woman as wisdom allows for both men and women to reposition their view of women as well as the role that women can play when confronted with certain challenges and situations in life. Women viewed as wisdom gives them a strong and ethical character and portrays them as pillars of their communities.

Wisdom should not be viewed as a defective theology that lacks the fullness of divine revelation (Collins 1980:3). The omissions are important as they reflect an approach to theology that is fundamentally different from what is often assumed to be “biblical theology”. It is easy to read, especially the Old Testament, as if it is from God’s point of view. God as the subject in a large part of the Old Testament as He is the one who speaks and acts (Collins 1980:4).

It may give the reader the impression that they know what God did or said in an unambiguous way. This point of view can create the impression that the Bible is the record of a supernatural revelation. The idea of a divine, supernatural source of authority can be attractive to readers. For Protestant preachers whose theological training was influenced by Karl Barth and the Neo-orthodox movement, such a view of the Bible may be almost inevitable. It is obvious that proverbial wisdom raises problems for any approach that views the Bible as a purely supernatural revelation (Collins 1980:4).

Wisdom books are without a doubt written from a human point of view and not God’s point of view (Collins 1980:4). Collins (1980:4) argues that wisdom theology is natural theology and not supernatural. The term “natural theology” may need to be clarified as it was often used in the history of Christian theology to refer to many different things. Collins (1980:4) uses the term “natural theology” in contrast to “supernatural” to indicate the starting point of theology. In natural theology, we do not have definitive divine revelation at our disposal.

Natural theology builds its own theology by accumulating and interpreting human experiences of life, nature and the world. When Collins (1980:4) states that wisdom theology is natural theology, he is not connecting it to any specific philosophy, but that it should be seen as a philosophy in itself. Natural theology is an attempt to make sense of human experience from the point of view of humans (Collins 1980:4).

Natural theology is not an arrogant statement and humanity cannot solve all of its own problems and does not need any divine revelation (Collins 1980:4). Natural theology is more humble than its “supernatural” counterpart. A theology that claims to be based on a definitive divine revelation will most probably give all the credit to God. In practice, such a theology might express itself as superior to other theologies as it professes to know all the answers. The self-consciously natural or human theology, in contrast, has no divinely guaranteed answers and is therefore always reminded of its human limitations (Collins 1980:4-5).

## **2.3 Background and structure of the Book of Proverbs**

### **2.3.1 Definition of Proverbs**

According to Merriam-Webster, “proverbs” is a collection of sayings and counsels forming the canonical Jewish and Christian Scripture (Proverbs n.d.). Researchers in folklore and communication studies have discovered that almost all people can recognise a proverb but hardly any of them can give an adequate definition of proverbs. Paremiologists (students in proverbs) continuously debate definitions of proverbs (Koptak 2003:21). Taylor (1931:3) states that the “indefinable qualities” of proverbs is encouraging. Their incommunicable qualities indicate to people which sentences are proverbial and which ones are not. Mieder (1993:18-40) collected fifty definitions of proverbs from non-experts and came to the conclusion that proverbs are short sentences of wisdom highlighting the brevity and observational quality of proverbs. Koptak (2003:21) concurs that proverbs name and indicate situations giving guidance to those who hear and use them on how to respond in and to such situations.

Proverbs can then be viewed as speech-acts that cajole, taunt, teach and reprove depending on how they are used. Although it is difficult to define the term “proverb”, one can conclude that the Hebrew term *masal* is a saying that provides insight and stimulates thought. It connects with people’s ability to think in terms of comparisons (Koptak 2003:22). One model proposes that the *masal* is an ‘ethnic genre’ that draws from collective and personal memory and experience (Koptak 2003:22). The *masal* provides the reader with a model of reality, or even better, a model for reality. The term uses analogies to connect the saying with the audience’s actual situation. It is important that the reader of proverbs keep in mind that they are not simple ancient deposits of wisdom, but rather sayings designed to provoke a response from and in those who hear them and relate to them in their lives (Koptak 2003:22).

### 2.3.2 Title of the Book of Proverbs

Proverbs is the English translation of the Latin word *Proverbia*, a title given to the book by Jerome in the Vulgate (Van Leeuwen 1997:20). The name is derived from the Latin Vulgate title, *Liber Proverbiorum* (Longman 2006:21). In Hebrew, the book is known as “The Proverbs of Solomon.” The phrase “Proverbs of Solomon” allows for a wider range of reference than the English word “proverb”. The meaning of the word suggests “comparison” although some scholars connote “mastery,” which can mean mastery over language or life. The term refers to a variety of literary and oral genres, which include admonitions, sayings songs, poems, and parables (Van Leeuwen 1997:20).

According to Longman (2006:21), the Hebrew title of the book is *misle*, the first word, which is the construct plural form of *masal* which can be translated into the English “proverbs of.” It does, however, have a wider range of meaning in Hebrew than it has in English. The word *masal* is used in some parts of the Old Testament to refer to short, traditional (or popular) sayings that correspond to the English meaning of “proverb.” *Masal* is used in several Old Testament contexts to describe relatively lengthy discourses or speeches (Job 27:1, 29:1 or Numbers 24:3, 15, 20, 21, 23).

The Book of Proverbs contains other forms of literature such as Solomonic sayings, longer poetic units, instructions, personifications, “Sayings of the Wise”, the words of Agur and of Lemuel’s mother and the poetic conclusion in Proverbs 31:10-31, in addition to the “proverbial” or short sayings. More than half of the material preserved in the book bears any resemblance to the conventional meaning given to the English word “proverbs” (Farmer 1991:17).

The Masoretic title of Proverbs is “Proverbs of Solomon”. This title might naturally have been suggested in 1 Kings 4:22 from where it would be extended to the entire book as additions had been made to it from time to time. This was also the common Talmudic title. Early Christian writers commonly called the book “Wisdom” or “All-virtuous Wisdom”. These names were also given to Ben-Sira (Ecclesiasticus) and Wisdom of Solomon. The title “Wisdom” might have been common in Jewish circles and then passed on to Christians (Toy 1970:5-6).

“Proverbs of Solomon” is a traditional title with the purpose of honouring an important figure. It is evident that Solomon is not the author of the book in its current form. Some scholars have, however, argued that some sections of the book have its origin in the Solomonic court. Solomon is seen as Israel’s paradigmatic wise king (1 Kgs. 3-4:10). The issue for the ancient people was not the authorship in a modern sense, but rather the authority of the works written in the “spirit” of the archetypal sage, psalmist or lawgiver. Proverbs can be defined as a collection of collections edited and organised within its own Israelite character. Proverbs was compiled over several centuries and carries the stamp of the diverse origins in its headings of the sub-collections and sections (1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1) as well as the variety of its materials (Van Leeuwen 1997:20).

In general, scholars consider the Solomonic Collections (10:1-22:16; 25:1-29:27) as the earliest monarchical sections of the book. The first nine chapters and the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter are dated within the early Persian period after the Israelites returned from Babylonian exile (538 BCE). The possibility of Greek-Hebrew wordplay in 31:27 may have been compiled after Alexander the Great’s conquest of Palestine (332 BCE) (Van Leeuwen 1997:20-21).

In the Septuagint (LXX), the book is called *paroimiai* – Greek term used to translate *Masal* in the first verse. *Paroimiai* is similar in meaning to *parabole* or “parable” in English. Both these words represent the Hebrew *masal* and both can be translated to “proverb” or “parable.” Both words can refer to a wide variety of figurative language. The title in the Hebrew, Greek and English traditions point to the most distinctive genre of the book, namely the proverb (Longman 2006:21). The LXX, with its different ordering of the last sections, in effect constitutes another edition of the book. Multiple versions of the book thus existed during the Hellenistic period (Toy 1992:337).

### 2.3.3 The place of Proverbs in the canon

The Book of Proverbs has different positions in the Hebrew and Greek traditions of the Holy Scripture; both these traditions are Jewish in origin. The Greek version did, however, become the received Christian tradition and received its formal place in the canon via the Vulgate, the Latin form of Holy Scripture (Loader 2014:4).

The placing of Proverbs in the Vulgate was sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church (Loader 2014:4). In the English version of the Bible, the Book of Proverbs is situated after Psalms and before Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs (Longman 2006:22).

In the tripartite Hebrew canon (the *Tanach*), Proverbs forms part of the third division, namely: the ‘Writings’ (*Ketubim*). Proverbs then follows the Pentateuch (*Torah*) and the Prophets (*Nebiim*) (Loader 2014:4; Longman 2006:22). Proverbs is, thus, found in a different order of the books. In the *Ketubim*, the Psalms are placed first with Job second and Proverbs third. Proverbs is followed by Ruth and the Song of Songs. Psalms precedes Job in the *Ketubim* in order for the book of Psalms to introduce the third and final part of the *Tanach*. Job is then followed by Proverbs because of its ancient setting. Proverbs ends with a powerful poem that celebrates the virtuous woman and is followed by Ruth who is called a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11). Song of Songs ends this sequence with poems mostly sung by a woman. Proverbs, Psalms and Job are different from the other books in the canon as they have an accentual system. The accentual system indicates that the Masoretes viewed these books as poetical (Longman 2006:22-23).

In the Sephardic tradition, Proverbs comes after the Books of Psalms and Job (in that specific order). In the Ashkenazi tradition, Proverbs is positioned between Psalms and Job. The arrangement of Proverbs according to the Sephardic tradition that is after Psalms and Job occurs in the Codex Leningradensis<sup>12</sup>. It has become conventional in modern scholarship and is used in most printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. In both of these traditions, Proverbs, Psalms and Job are kept together despite the difference in sequencing. The clustering of the books are not coincidental because the books share the same system of accents. They share the “poetic accents”, as opposed to the other books in which the accent system is different, whether the text itself is poetry or not (Loader 2014:4-5).

There are four divisions in the LXX. Proverbs is part of the penultimate or poetical collection. The book follows the Pentateuch and the historical books and precedes the prophetic books. In this division, the first books appear in the following order: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles. This suggests that the three books of Solomon are arranged in such a way as to follow the one book that is ascribed to Solomon’s father, Psalms of David. This principle is, however, not sustained in the final organisation of the Septuagint in its current form. In the Septuagint’s order, the Book of Job separates the first three Solomonic books from another book that is ascribed to him, namely the deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon. The deuterocanonical Wisdom of Solomon is placed after another sapiential book Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus). Another Solomonic book, the Psalms of Solomon, marks the border of the poetical and prophetic divisions. This division thus begins and ends with a *Psalter* that was written by father and son, respectively (Loader 2014:5).

The Hebrew and Greek traditions thus became two canons. At first they were lists but then became codices. The Hebrew tradition questions the status of Proverbs among the “sacred writings”. Proverbs’ status among the sacred writings is, however, resolved by the narratives of the wise men of Hezekiah (Proverbs 25:1) who proved that the books in question are indeed suitable for the canon (Loader 2014:5).

---

<sup>12</sup> Codex Leningradensis’ pre-revolution name “St Petersburg” (and Petrograd”) was restored to the city of Leningrad after the Soviet Union collapsed. Some scholars did, however, call the Codex Leningradensis B19a in the Russian National Library at St Petersburg the “Codex Petrograd.” The Russian National Library requested the retention of “Codex Leningradensis” (Loader 2014:4-5).

Proverbs as part of the *Ketubim* did not have the same reputation as the *Torah* and the *Nebiim*. This can be testified to, indirectly, by the trouble Ben Sira had in order to safeguard the sapiential teachings by equating them to the *Torah* as unquestionable Holy Scripture (Sirach 14:22-15:1; 19:18). The influence of Proverbs on other Jewish literature such as the Wisdom of Solomon and *Pirque Abot* indicates the book's power and desire to keep the content as relevant as possible, specifically in the Jewish faith. Nonetheless, the book never laid any direct claim to a revelation by God. God is addressed only once (30:7-9), however, this fact never played a principal role in rabbinic theology. The Christian tradition did not formulate any ranking of books within the Old Testament canon. A *de facto* hierarchy did, however, exist in the sense that parts of the Holy Scripture were basically ignored, which is sometimes still the case (Loader 2014:5-6).

The Greek form of the Jewish Scriptures was received by Christianity as the textual authority for it proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ. The purpose of the Greek form of Jewish Scriptures became an equaliser among all the books of the Jewish Bible (Loader 2014:6).

The Jewish Bible became the Old Testament so that all the texts in it are on equal ground and in principle could be implored in the service of the Gospel. The Book of Proverbs could thus be used in this way as was in the case of Proverbs 8. The fact that Proverbs stood in the canon of Holy Scripture made it sufficient to base the farthest reaching theological doctrines and conclusions on words, verses and passages from this book. This made Proverbs as important as any other book in the Old Testament (Loader 2014:6).

The Protestant canon that lists the books of the Hebrew *Tanak* in the order of the Septuagint only came into existence as canonical when they were printed together with the New Testament in the Western translations. Protestants, on the one hand, were enabled by the new canon to follow the patristic appeal to Proverbs as a defence to anti-Arian Christology (Calvin), and on the other to find a biblical base in Proverbs for the Reformation doctrine of a primacy of preaching the word of God (Loader 2014:6).

#### 2.3.4 Proverbs as a book of wisdom

It is fully justified to call Proverbs a “book of wisdom” (Whybray 1994:3). The word wisdom (*hokmah* in Hebrew) occurs 39 times and the adjective “wise” (*hakam*) 47 times in the 31 chapters of Proverbs. These terms appear in almost every section of the book. The main theme of the book is that everyone should aspire to this specific quality of wisdom. This type of wisdom is attainable by all people – a conviction succinctly stated in the preface of the book (Proverbs 1:1-6; Whybray 1994:3).

In the Old Testament, *hokmah* (wisdom) refers to something like “skill” which indicates practical knowledge in any sphere from artisan to politician. In Proverbs, *hokmah* specifically refers to a life skill. Wisdom (*hokmah*) is a life skill in which the individual conducts his/her life in the best possible way in order to achieve the best possible outcome. *Hokmah* in Proverbs is clarified by other nouns with which it is closely and frequently associated, such as “understanding” and “knowledge.” It is, however, paired with honesty and the “fear of Yahweh” (Proverbs 9:10; Whybray 1994:4).

In Proverbs, there is no distinction between the pursuit of happiness and prosperity on the one hand and the attachment to moral virtues and religious faith and practice on the other. They are both embraced by wisdom (Whybray 1994:4).

Religion and morality are essential features in the pursuit of wisdom because they guide the individual to prosperity. They do, however, achieve this goal because they are intrinsically desirable and good. This view of life as a unit in which no distinction is made between “religious” and “secular”, as is made in modern day times, is not only found in Proverbs but is also a characteristic of the Old Testament in its entirety. This similarly includes the people of the Ancient Near East (Whybray 1994:4).

Proverbs in numerous passages states that wisdom is universally attainable. The book indicates the blessings in store for the wise, which is dramatically contrasted with the heartache and hardship that will befall the fool. The purpose of the antithesis is clear; it points to the reader that he/she has a choice to choose a life of prosperity and happiness or a life of pain and suffering.



Proverbs in its present form is thus a book with the sole purpose of persuading the reader to acquire wisdom. The book does, however, not tell the reader much about the source of the teachings or its context within the life of the people of Israel (Whybray 1994:4-5).

Proverbs has certain affinities to two other books of the Old Testament, namely, Job and Ecclesiastes. Both these books are designated as “wisdom books.” All three books have the same characteristics, namely, making no reference to Israel, to Israel’s history or to God’s actions within that specific history. God is, however, referred to as, Yahweh as the reference to God was exclusively used by Israel. There is no mention of another God or of a national consciousness. The reader is almost exclusively referred to as an individual that might be from any nationality (Whybray 1994: 4-5).

### 2.3.5 Author of Proverbs

Critical scholars generally acknowledge that the book is the work of a number of different authors from different periods (Whybray 1995:150; Waltke 2005:31). The multiplicity of authorship is proclaimed in the book itself by the headings prefaced to its different parts.

The headings of the collections name five different authors. They are Solomon (Collections I & II; 1:1; 10:1), “the men of Hezekiah” who collected and edited some of Solomon’s proverbs (Collection V; 25:1); Agur (Collection VI; 30:1); and Lemuel (Collection VII; 31:1; Whybray 1995:150; Waltke 2005:31).

Solomon (mid-tenth century BCE) is indicated three times as the author of Proverbs (1:1) or of the independent collections (10:1; 25:1). The references can, however, not be used to date the book as Wisdom Literature was conventionally ascribed to Solomon just as the Psalms were ascribed to David or the law to Moses. There is no reason to doubt that some texts in the book are “by Solomon.” As the king, he most probably collected, sponsored, or even wrote various kinds of writings, including literature as recognised by 1 Kings (4:29-31; Clifford 1999:3).

Scholars inconsistently regard the attributions to Solomon (950 BC) as pseudepigraphic (Waltke 2005:31). He is thus a figurehead to which they attached the ascriptions of wisdom. Apart from the reference to Solomon (1:1; 10:1) and to Hezekiah (25:1), there are no specific historical references made to Agur and Lemuel (Van Leeuwen 1997:21).

Proverbs contains an important chronological clue in 25:1 (Clifford 1999:3). These are proverbs of Solomon which Hezekiah's men collected. Hezekiah was the king of Judah from 715 to 687 BCE and was seen as a reformer (1 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32). Proverbs 25:1 states that the king added the proverbs to an existing collection under the name of King Solomon. The title was used for at least chapters 25-26 as these chapters are an artistic unit. Hezekiah's proverbs were most probably added to "the proverbs of Solomon" in 10:1-22:16. By the late eighth century BCE a collection of proverbs "of Solomon" existed to which the royal scribes added the second collection (Clifford 1999:3-4).

Proverbs was formed by a combination of collections of various dates and origins (Toy 1970:7). The probability that one man was the author of the philosophical discourses of chapters 1-9, the pithy aphorisms of chapter 10-22:16, the quatrains of 22:17-24, the couplets of 25-29 and the mixed material in chapters 30-31 is questionable (Toy 1970:7).

### 2.3.6 The date, composition and editing of the Book of Proverbs

Old Testament wisdom books are famously difficult to date, in particular Proverbs. This can be ascribed to the fact that Proverbs is considered to be so alien that it is incompatible with the religion of the Old Testament. It cannot be denied that it contains almost no obvious links to the normative faith of Israel. No reference is made in Proverbs to Israel and its political or religious history. Not much reference is made to Israel's institutions either. No proper Israelite names occur in the book of Proverbs apart from those of Solomon and Hezekiah. Only one God (Yahweh) is known, although it presents the deity in terms that may not appear to allow a specific link with the Yahweh of the rest of the Old Testament.

Some writers regard it as an expression of faith parallel with or in some sense alternative to the more traditional forms of Yahwism. It is, however, difficult to pinpoint its religious thought within the context of any specific stage in the development of the Yahwistic theology (Whybray 1995:150).

Most of the writers who have examined the Book of Proverbs have attempted to date the book but their opinions have been contradictory (Whybray 1995:150). The nature of its literature makes the dating of Proverbs extremely difficult. Proverbs (admonitions and sayings) refer to the common patterns and structures of human life. Admonitions and sayings are brought down from traditions and can preserve wisdom from earlier times in a fossilised form. The problem is complicated even more by the extremely brief scope of the various admonitions and sayings. In addition, there are virtually no historical “connections” to which a secure date or dates can be assigned to the whole text or its parts. Apart from the reference to Solomon (1:1; 10:1) and to Hezekiah (25:1), there is no specific historical reference in the book. Lemuel and Agur are unknown, except for the reference to them in Proverbs (Van Leeuwen 1997:21).

Agur (Proverbs 30) and Lemuel (Proverbs 31) appear to have their origin in Massa (Kitchen 1977:102). Massa was situated to the east of Israel-Judah on the fringes of the Arabian Desert. Agur and Lemuel are attested to in the mid-first millennium Assyrian texts. The overall period from the tenth to the sixth centuries BCE is a good indication of the involvement of Agur and Lemuel in the book. The earliest date at which their independent works could have been added to a scroll that contains the present Proverbs 1-29 is the seventh century BCE (Kitchen 1977:102).

The real date could, however, have been later. A final date in purely literary terms for the present Book of Proverbs (1-31) would not be earlier than the seventh century BCE. It may even be later, but how much later, (late monarchy or post-exilic), is unknown (Kitchen 1977:102).

Proverbs makes no reference to Israel’s history of redemption, such as patriarchal promises, exodus, covenants, law, gift of the land, exile and return. The silence should not be interpreted as that the various authors of the book had no interest in matters of redemptive history or in other biblical books.

Like many other books in the Hebrew canon, Proverbs does not reveal all of its authors' concerns. This silence in wisdom writings is a function of their genre and purpose (Van Leeuwen 1997:21).

Attempts have been made to date Proverbs from other sources. The language, editing devices, and themes yielded no success in providing assured results. In order to date Proverbs from its language, one must determine to which period of the Hebrew language the book belongs. Two phases in the language are generally distinguished prior to the rise of Rabbinic Hebrew as a literary language in the first or second centuries BCE. The first language is pre-exilic Hebrew (pre-sixth century BCE) that ceased to exist as a living language after the exile in Babylonia. The second language is late Biblical Hebrew (in the later books of the Bible). The second language was to some extent an imitation of the pre-exilic language. Most scholars are of the opinion that the bulk of the sayings of Proverbs are pre-exilic or exilic (Biblical Hebrew). These scholars concur that most of the speeches and instructions (Proverbs 1-9) and the final editing is post-exilic (late biblical Hebrew) (Clifford 1999:4).

Proverbs has some Aramaisms, but it does not allow for an argument for a late date as the Aramaisms are only found sporadically in pre-exilic texts. A large number in a book can, however, suggest a postexilic date when Aramaic became the language of government and commerce. The majority of Aramaisms occur in Proverbs 10-31 instead of Proverbs 1-9 which are considered later. No Graecisms are found in the book to suggest a pre-Hellenistic date (before 333 BCE). It is thus clear that the book cannot be dated with any certainty from the language used in it (Clifford 1999:4-5).

Official Aramaic was used during the exilic and post-exilic periods (Yoder 2001: 24). Aramaic was the language of commerce, diplomacy and administration. It was used in daily communication throughout the Babylonian and Persian empires. Evidence of direct or indirect influence of Aramaic on the linguistic structure and vocabulary of Hebrew may be found in texts composed during or after the exile (Yoder 2001:24).

Consonant-numbers is another possible means of dating Proverbs. Numerology was used by the final editor(s) of Proverbs to underline the unity of the book and to indicate the original parameter of the book to copyists. "The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel" adds up to 930 which are close to the 934 lines of the book in its present form. The numerical editing (evident in 1:1) could only have been done on the completed book as we know it today. Consonant numbers cannot be attested to before the second century BCE, which can indicate a later date for the final editing. The consonant numbers could most probably have been used much earlier than the second century and can thus not be used to indicate an exact dating (Clifford 1999:5).

The themes in Proverbs can also be used in a possible dating of the book. This approach does, however, not provide definite results (Clifford 1999:5). The argument, for example, that "law teaching" and "command" in Proverbs refer to the Torah of Moses would presuppose the missions of Ezra and Nehemiah in the fifth century BCE, which is not convincing. "Law" and "command" in Proverbs does not refer to the Mosaic Torah as it is pointed out in 28:4, 7, 9, and 18. In Proverbs, the words lack specificity and concreteness and do not refer to cultic or judicial norms but to prudent advice, which is considered to be inspired by and from God (Levenson 1987: 566-567).

Scholars have proposed that the warnings to young men to avoid relationships with foreign women is a reflection of the prohibitions in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah against marriages to foreigners that were outside the lineage of the "father's house." Warnings against foreign women are, however, attested in the Egyptian *Instruction of Any*. There are similar Babylonian warnings against unsuitable partners for moral reasons. Warnings in Proverbs are, however, not against exogamous marriages, but against extramarital affairs. The readers of the Second Temple Period might have read the warnings against the foreign woman with exogamy in mind (this period was concerned by it). It does, however, not follow that the texts in themselves were written for such a purpose. The prohibitions can thus not be used for the dating and composition of Proverbs 1-9 (Clifford 1999:5-6).

Although it is difficult to assign a specific date to the final redaction of Proverbs, it is possible to give a very general sketch of the development of the book. The rise of the monarchy in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century allowed for the palace scribes to produce liturgical and diplomatic texts, as well as the kind of *belles lettres* (which include wisdom texts) in the Levantine courts. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, a collection attributed to Solomon was in circulation when a second collection (25:1) was added to it by “the servants of Hezekiah.” It is presumed that by this time the familiar two-line sayings had become a subgenre. “The Words of the Wise” (22:17-24:22) and its obvious indebtedness to the Egyptian instruction Amenemope was most likely written during the period of cultural and trade exchange with Egypt during the monarchy (“Fear Yahweh and the king, my son”) (24:21). It is thus possible that all (or at least a substantial part) of chapters 10-29 was in circulation before the monarchy came to an end (Clifford 1999:6).

The reference to Amenemope in relation to Proverbs suggests that Israel’s Wisdom Literature might have been influenced by a much older Egyptian literary tradition. E.W. Budge published the Egyptian wisdom text (1023) which came to be known as the “teaching of Amenemope” (Papyrus 10474 in the British Museum). This was destined to open a new era in the study of the Book of Proverbs as well as Old Testament Wisdom Literature as a whole. Proverbs was now seen as belonging to an age-old international tradition. The book was also viewed as the product of a particular social and professional class, namely that of the “scribes”. Amenemope was immediately acclaimed as having a direct relationship to a considerable section of Proverbs (22:17-24:22). This yielded undeniable proof that Israel’s Wisdom Literature was not an indigenous product but a foreign importation (Whybray 1995:6). This study’s primary focus was not on the origin of Proverbs and the texts that influenced the development of Proverbs. This brief discussion of Amenemope thus only serves as a short identification of the relationship between Proverbs and Amenemope.

The period in which chapters 1-9 was written and prefaced to the anthology is difficult to determine. There is no clear indication of historical events in the chapters and the thematic and linguistic arguments are not conclusive (Clifford 1999:6).

The argument that the long poems were written later than the brief sayings has no validity in view of the coexistence of sayings and instructions in earlier literature. A lack of evidence for a final editing of Proverbs indicates that the best course would be to suppose that Proverbs was edited in the same general movement as much of Israel's other sacred literature in the early Second Temple Period. That would indicate the period from the sixth to the fourth centuries BCE (Clifford 1999:6).

The argument that the Hebrew *sopiya* in chapter 31:27 is wordplay on the Greek *Sophia*, which then presupposes a Hellenistic date for at least the final poem, is not a strong argument. The similarity might be a coincidence as well as the possibility of Greek influence before Alexander (Wolters 1985:577-587). The title's consonant-numbers suggests an editor who was of the opinion that the book had its own unity and wanted to give it a final definition (Clifford 1999:6).

## 2.4 Possible outline and sections<sup>13</sup> of Proverbs

Van Leeuwen (1997:29-30) suggests the following outline for Proverbs:

- I. Proverbs 1:1-9:18, The Parental Legacy: Wisdom's Worldview
- A. 1:1-7, Title and Prologue
- B. 1:8-19, Warning Against Outlaw's
- C. 1:20-33, Wisdom's Prophetic Warning
- D. 2:1-22, The Search for Wisdom
- E. 3:1-12, Instruction in the Fear of the Lord
- F. 3:13-35, On Wisdom: Blessing, Creation, Admonitions
- G. 4:1-27, Tradition, Wisdom and Ways
- H. 5:1-23, Adultery as Folly: Marriage as Wisdom
- I. 6:1-19, Money, Sloth, Good, and Evil
- J. 6:20-35, Teaching Against Adultery

---

<sup>13</sup> According to Clifford (1999:1-2) the nine sections of the present form is:

Introduction to the Book (1:1-7)

I. Collection of Wisdom Literatures and Speeches (1:8-9:18)

1. Lecture I: The Deadly Alternative to Parental Wisdom (1:8-19)

2. Wisdom Poem I: The Risk of Spurning Me (1:20-33)

3. Lecture II: Seek Wisdom and Yahweh Will Keep You Safe (2:1-22)

4. Lecture III: Trust in God Leads to Prosperity (3:1-12)

5. Interlude: Wisdom's Benefits and Prestige (3:13-20)

6. Lecture IV: Justice toward the Neighbor Brings Blessing (3:21-35)

7. Lecture V: A Father's Example (4:1-9)

8. Lecture VI: Two Ways of Living Life (4:10-19)

9. Lecture VII: With Your Whole Being Heed My Words and Live (4:20-27)

10. Lecture VIII: The Wrong and the Right Woman (5:1-23)

11. Interlude: Four Short Pieces (6:1-19)

12. Lecture IX: The Dangers of Adultery (6:20-35)

13. Lecture X: The Deceptive Woman (7:1-27)

14. Wisdom Poem II: Become My Disciple and I will Bless You (8:1-36)

15. Wisdom Poem III: The Two Women Invite Passers by to Their Banquets (9:1-6+11; 13-18; vv. 7-10+12 are assorted sayings)

II. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)

III. Words of the Wise (22:17-24:22)

IV. Further Words of the Wise (24:23-34)

V. Further Proverbs of Solomon, Collected by the Servants of King Hezekiah (chaps. 25-29)

VI. Words of Agur, and Four Sorts of Scoundrels (30:1-14)

VII. Numerical Sayings (30:15-33)

VIII. Words to Lemuel, King of Massa (31:1-9)

IX. Hymn to the Capable Wife (31:10-31)



- K. 7:1-27, A Tale of Seduction and Death
- L. 8:1-36, Wisdom's Cosmic Speech
- M. 9:1-18, Two Houses at the End of the Road
  
- II. Proverbs 10:1-22:16, The First Solomonic Collection of Sayings
  - A. 10:1-15:33, Antithetical Collection
    - 10:1-8, Introduction to the Antithetical Collection
    - 10:9-32, Sayings on the Antithesis of Good and Evil
    - 11:1-31, Further Sayings on the Antithesis of Good and Evil
    - 12:1-28, Whoever Loves Discipline Loves Knowledge
    - 13:1-25, On Listening to Wise Counsel
    - 14:1-35, Wise Woman Builds Her House
    - 15:1-33, End of the Antithetical Collection
  - B. 16:1-22:16, Royal Collection
    - 16:1-33, Introduction to the Royal Collection
    - 17:1-28, Better a Dry Crust with Peace and Quiet
    - 18:1-24, A Fool Takes No Pleasure in Understanding
    - 19:1-29, Better a Poor Man Whose Walk is Blameless
    - 20:1-30, Wine is a Mocker, Strong Drink a Brawler
    - 21:1-31, All Deeds Are Right in the Sight of the Doer, but the Lord Weighs the Heart
    - 22:1-16, The Royal Collection Concluded
  
- III. Proverbs 22:17-24:34, The Sayings of the Wise
  - A. 22:17-23:35, Listen to the Sayings of the Wise
  - B. 24:1-22, Sayings of the Wise Concluded
  - C. 24:23-34, An Appendix: More Sayings of the Wise
  
- IV. Proverbs 25:1-29:27, The Second Solomonic Collection of Sayings
  - A. 25:1-27:27, On the Court, Fools and Friends
    - 25:1-28, On God, King, Court and Conflict
    - 26:1-28, On Fools and Fittingness
    - 27:1-22, On Friendship and Paradox
    - 27:23-27, On Tending Ones Flocks

- B. 28:1-29:27, On Justice and Torah
  - 28:1-28, Torah, the Righteous, and the Wicked
  - 29:1-27. More on Torah, the Righteous and the Wicked
  
- V. Proverbs 30:1-33 Words of Agur, Curses, and Numerical Sayings
  
- VI. Proverbs 31:1-31, Words of Lemuel and a Hymn to the Valiant Woman
  - A. 31:1-9, Words of Lemuel
  - B. 31:10-31, Hymn to the Valiant Woman

Proverbs consists of several instructions and collections, poems, speeches, and two-line sayings (Clifford 1999:1). The titles of the collections are 1:1; 10:1; 22:17 and its appendices 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1. The title in 1:1, "The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, King of Israel" is not only the heading of chapters 1-9 but of the book as a whole (Clifford 1999:1).

The concluding poem in 31:10-31 has no title, but is clearly indicated by its alphabetical structure. The sum of the numerical values of its Hebrew consonants is 930 which is close to the 934 lines of the book. The book in its present form has nine sections (Clifford 1999:2). According to Loader (2014:7), Proverbs 30:15-33 and 31:10-31 that can clearly be identified, lacks context and in the concept of the redactor forms part of the Agur and Lemuel passages.

The author-editors of Proverbs not only collected sayings and instructions, but also rearranged and reshaped them. The placement of the material added a fresh meaning to the text. The ten instructions of chapters 1-9 resembles, for example, Mesopotamian and Egyptian instructions that were typically addressed to young people beginning their public careers. The instructions are placed with speeches of personified Woman Wisdom-seeking disciples. A novel placement of Proverbs elevates the instructions in Proverbs to a metaphorical level. It makes these proverbial instructions suitable for a much wider audience than only young men (Clifford 1999:2).

The urge to earnestly act cautiously and to be faithful to home and profession (the traditional aims of the instruction) are broadened into exhortations to seek wisdom before anything else in life. Once the metaphorical level of chapters 1-9 has been established the sayings and poems in the following chapters grow in depth and breadth. Traditional elements appear in a new configuration dominated by polarity. In chapters 1-9, the most important polarity is found between Woman Wisdom and the deceptive woman. Wisdom makes her final appeal in verse 1-6 and 11, while Folly makes hers in verse 13-18 (Clifford 1999:2).

## **2.5 Proverbs and biblical theology**

Theologians of the Old Testament struggle to integrate Proverbs into the rest of the Bible. It is well-known that Wisdom Literature forms an alien body in the world of the Old Testament (Gese 1958:2). The striking parallels between Wisdom literature's form and content and that of the pan-oriental literature indicates that Israel's wise men tried to shape Israel into an image similar to that of their pagan environment (Preuss 1974:393-417). Wright (1952:115) opines that in any outline of biblical theology the proper place in which to address/discuss Wisdom Literature is a problem. These problems occur due to the rest of the Bible pertaining to the irruptions of the Kingdom of God through his calling and his covenant with Israel. Wisdom literature never refers to Israel's election and covenant that will culminate in the messianic age when it will become a light to all nations (Waltke 2005:64).

The seeming lack of integration between Proverbs and the rest of the Old Testament is more superficial than real (Waltke 2005:64). They were united due to their common appeal to their audiences' "fear of the Lord" (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Joshua 24:14; Proverbs 1:7; Isaiah 29:13; Kaiser 1991:46). The Lord is God's personal name that was revealed to Israel due to their connection with his election of and his covenant with them (Genesis 12:8; Exodus 3:15; 6:2-8). To fear God thus means to submit to his revealed will whether through Moses or Solomon. Each of these books in their own way is seeking to establish the rule of Israel's God who wants to keep his covenant with them. The theology of Proverbs complements the theology of Moses and the prophets (Waltke 2005:64).

Goldingay (1979:194-207) indicates that wisdom focuses more on everyday life experiences and history. Wisdom focuses more on the regular than on the unique, more on the individual (without discarding their social relationships) than on the nation and more on personal experiences than on the sacred traditions. There are details of character in Proverbs small enough to escape the mesh of the law and the broadsides of the prophets and yet it is decisive in its personal dealings (Kidner 1964:13). Proverbs moves in this realm by asking what a person is like to live or work with and how the person can manage his/her affairs, on his/her time and himself/herself (Kidner 1964:13).

Waltke (2005:65) states that Solomon ascribes the same attributes and actions to God as to Moses and the prophets. According to Solomon, Moses, and the prophets, he is the creator of the cosmos (Deuteronomy 10:14; Proverbs 1:7; 3:19-20). He is also the creator of all humanity (Deuteronomy 4:32; Proverbs 14:31; 29:13; Isaiah 42:) and the living God who will punish wrong (Deuteronomy 32:35; 40-41; Proverbs 5:21-22; Nahum 1:2), and the same spiritual Being who comforts people and knows their ways (Deuteronomy 23:14; Proverbs 16:1-9, 33; 19:21; 20:24; Isaiah 45:1-13). God is the one who withholds or gives rain (Deuteronomy 11:13-17; Proverbs 3:9-10; Haggai 1:10-11). He disciplines his children (Deuteronomy 8:5; Proverbs 3:11-12; Isaiah 1:4-6) but in his mercy he answers their prayers (Deuteronomy 4:29-31; Proverbs 15:8, 29; Isaiah 56:7). He is a merciful God (Deuteronomy 4:31; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 63:7), who delights in justice and hates wickedness (Deuteronomy 10:17, Proverbs 11:1; 17:15; Isaiah 1:16-17). He also has aesthetic-ethical sensibilities (Deuteronomy 22:4-11; 23:10-14; Proverbs 3:32; 6:16-19; 11:20; 15:9; Jeremiah 32:35; Waltke 2005:65).

## **2.6 Proverbs and Pan-Oriental Wisdom Literature**

A theological explanation is necessary to understand the similarity in expression and in the theological content between Proverbs and non-Israelite literature such as Amenemope (Waltke 2005:65). Priest (1963:281) gives a questionable historical explanation for the similarities between Proverbs and Amenemope.

According to Priest (1963:281), the prophetic age and the age of wisdom occurred simultaneously. Priest (1963:281) is further of the opinion that there existed a common religious tradition in early Israel from which the priests, prophets and wise men chose specific emphases without necessarily refusing to accept the emphases chosen by other groups. This view then states that the prophet and the sage expressed all of Israel's faith, which the one could not do without the other. According to Waltke (2005:66), it would be better to make use of a contextual argument from within the book itself. Proverbs mixes every day sayings that may have its origin outside of Israel with distinct theological sayings that pertain to the Lord in order to give a holistic view and theological interpretation of wisdom. No evidence exists for a reinterpretation of so-called secular sayings by later theological sayings. It does, however, not change the difference in understanding the canonical book's theology (Waltke 2005:66).

The author of Proverbs 22:17 indicate that he/she adapted sayings by other wise men. This poet also adds: "In order that in the Lord may be your trust, I teach you today, even you!" The truth and promises of the sayings are anchored in Israel's God. A theological explanation should be added to this in order to distinguish between "the fear of the Lord" that refers to God's special relationship with Israel and "the fear of God" that refers to God's general relationship to all people. "Fear of God" refers to a certain standard of moral behaviour known and accepted by readers in general (Whybray 1965:96). People are motivated by their "fear of God" to righteous conduct, even if the state does not impose moral sanctions. Just as "the fear of the Lord" informing Proverbs in situations of common morality agrees with "the fear of God" informing Amenemope, one should be able to expect similarities in their content. The Egyptian and biblical corpora differ in that the God of Proverbs is named and known as such. In the literature of Amenemope, he is not named or known (Waltke 2005:66).

Similarities between Proverbs and extra-biblical literature are the result of Scripture's incarnation within its historical surroundings. The theological significance of Proverbs does not depend on the originality of the individual sayings or sentences any more than the theological significance of the so-called Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-23) that rests on the originality of the individual commandments.

The theological significance of the Old Testament is grounded in the relationship of all its literature with the Lord Yahweh who is known as the God of Israel. Proverbs' theological significance is emphasised by the book's acknowledgement that the Lord brought "wisdom" into existence and he revealed it to humanity and as its Guarantor he upholds the moral order as it was made known (Waltke 2005:66).

Non-Israelite wisdom, although it might be religious is not anchored in the covenant of God (Hubbard 1962:1256). There is an absence in the Egyptian texts in that none of the gods are mentioned by their names in any of the "teachings" (Frankfort 1961:76). In the Amenemope literature, there is only one god, but the individual can decide how he/she wants to represent the highest being (Keimer 1926:11). The use of the generic term for the deity is common in wisdom texts in order to intentionally leave the specifications open for interpretation by the reader and the situation (Boström 1990:44-45). The generic designations of the deity functions in some ways as a parallel to blank spaces in the liturgical text, which must be filled in with the correct expressions of the requester. Moses, the prophets, and the sages shared the same Lord, faith, hope, cults, anthropology, and epistemology. They spoke with authority and made the same ethical and religious demands on the hearers of the Word. They, thus, drank from the same "wisdom" well (Waltke 2005:67).

## **2.7 Meaning and relevance of Proverbs**

The influence of Proverbs on books, such as Ben Sira and the Wisdom of Solomon and its poignant use in Christological debates in the patristic times, shows a strong awareness of its importance in diverse contexts and at different times (Loader 2014:12). The themes present in the sayings and poems are definitely theologically relevant (Loader 2014:12). Preuss (1974:165-181), however, disagrees by stating that the book contains a secular substratum that was gradually covered with a theological dimension which makes it unusable for biblical theology. Loader (2014:12) opines that the theological relevance of the book entails not only its themes but also its character that indicates what it says and what it is or is not.

Proverbs is concerned with fundamental options in life rather than specific wise actions. It is, however, concerned with practical, down to earth deeds (Loader 2014:12). Wisdom is both a divine gift and an achievement by humans (Clifford 1999:32). Proverbs is a perspective in which the everyday activities of the world form the terrain in which *the 'fear of the Lord'* is lived out. This alone makes it a highly relevant book for theology (Loader 2014:12). Yoder and Yoder (2009:34) concur that the attainment of wisdom is a meeting between human effort and a divine gift.

The same thought is expressed in terms of 'knowing God' (Proverbs 3:6). The reader is encouraged to know God in all his/her ways and must therefore constantly seek to know God (Loader 2014:13). Fox (2000:149) underscores that "the fusing of knowledge, piety and action into one principle" is "at the core of the message of Proverbs 1-9." Knowing God does not indicate mere knowledge of him but knowing God brings about a trust in God (Proverbs 3:5) that must be expressed in the concrete behaviour of the individual (Loader 2014:13).

The sages accept that their conduct can be carried out and is a guide that can lead to success. This has important implications for theological anthropology as it indicates that human beings have potential which should be cultivated, respected and acknowledged in a positive manner (Loader 2014:13).

Theological interpretations of *the deed-consequence nexus*<sup>14</sup> that underlie many of the proverbs should take Proverbs' optimistic mind-set into account. This is also known as the retribution principle. The nexus of deed and consequence forms the basis for good and plain advice. It is representative of dimensions that should not be ignored or overlooked in any "theology of reward" (Loader 2014:13).

---

<sup>14</sup> The idea that wise/good deeds have favourable/positive results and unwise/wicked deeds have unfavourable/negative results (Loader 2014:13).

The *deed-consequence nexus* is an expression of a deep-seated consciousness of an order that was built into creation. Proverbs does not explicitly refer to God as an agent of such consequences or to those that suggest that a deed carries the seed of its own consequences within itself. The term is an attempt to formulate a conclusion to which numerous empirical observations in nature, the human condition and society have brought the sages. The observations of the sages had been made in the world. Creation belongs to God (Proverbs 8:22; 14:31), therefore the order is his order (Loader 2014:13).

The *deed-consequence nexus* is followed by a formal theological notice. The sages never arrogantly thought or imagined that they have the world formula entirely in their possession. The sages should not be made equals to the friends of Job in superficial generalisations as if they were the ones with all the so-called answers. The sages were actually very well aware of the fact that the ways in which the order manifested itself were full of enigmas. Such insight has profound theological implications. These implications are that neither God's ways nor he himself can be encapsulated in theories or manipulated in practical plans, no matter how wise these plans may be. Although these theories and plans may have limitations, we still need these theories and advice to guide us (Loader 2014:13-14).

If Proverbs is understood on this basis, the poems and proverbs do give pleasing practical advice, on which hope to succeed, can be built. They are, however, more than that. The sages are deeply ethical because their aim is to practically live out the Fear of the Lord (1:7; 9:10). They proclaim respect for one's fellow humans (17:13; 20:22) along with self-respect (11:15; 22:26-27), which places a combined focus on "love they neighbour as they self" (Loader 2014:14).

The often repeated claim that wisdom in Israel, as it is expressed in the Book of Proverbs, does not work with revelation is questionable and should at least be qualified from a natural theological angle. The idea of revelation in Proverbs may at most be inadequate in the sense that it lacks the conventional modes of expression that can be found in other biblical traditions and their genres.



When the expressions of wisdom as an understanding of God are compared to a non-sapiential way of articulating “revelatory” experiences, it presents a different variation of style and not dissimilarity (Loader 2014:14). Loader (2014:14) opines that “if the assertions held to be revealed by God are also held to be true in terms of common human insight” these truths then depend on a natural condition and not on them being spoken by God. This view then discards the stark grim distinction often made between the revealed religion as exemplified by the prophets or Israel’s great traditions and wisdom’s religious dimensions (Loader 2014:14; Terrien, 1962:115; Weeks 2010:136). Sapiential literature’s revelatory deficiency can be interpreted as a beneficial contribution to the rehabilitation of natural theology (Loader 2014:14).

Of equal theological importance, related to the above-mentioned point, is the absence of the prophetic proclamation: “Thus says the Lord!” (Loader 2014:14). According to Loader (2014:14), the putative absence of “Thus says the Lord” in the Book of Proverbs is an asset. The sapiential thoughts of Israel transcend itself; integrating Israel into the world and grafting the world into Israel. Its canvass is, thus, creation and the world and humanity universal. Viewed from this perspective, the Book of Proverbs is equal to Deutero-Isaiah by directing the reader’s eye beyond the salvation history of one specific nation (Loader 2014:14).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

It is apparent that the Ancient Near Eastern sapiential literature made a valuable contribution to biblical studies. The sapiential literature established a plausible position contending for a pre-exilic date for the content of the Book of Proverbs. It also contributed to the historical credibility of texts which attribute their authorship to Solomon (Waltke 1979:238).

The term “proverb” can now be defined more accurately and any confusion with other literary forms can be avoided. A firm reason exists to think that the text of the Book of Proverbs was conservatively transmitted. The attempt, thus, to arrange its sources chronologically by distinguishing between so-called earlier, profane texts from later sacred texts is incorrect.

There appears to be no disconnection between the structure of the literary forms within the book and of the book itself. Its anthological arrangement no longer appears to be disconnected as it once was. The reader of the sayings and poems within the book can now envision a godly, noble couple instructing their children on the ways of the wise as proclaimed in Proverbs. Wisdom can no longer be defined simplistically and seen as a practical application of knowledge. Wisdom must now be thought of as a broad, theological concept that denotes a fixed, righteous order to which a wise person submits his/her life (Waltke 1979:238).

The Word of God was popular in its own time, especially its form and shape. Some of the material found in the Word of God is similar to that found in the pagan world. The inspired sages integrated the contemporary literature with their faith and this integration provided a model for today's saints. One is then also reminded that although the Word of God is unchanging, our understanding of it is progressing (Waltke 1979:238).

Proverbs is a book rich in guidelines for wise living for both men and women. This is clear from the writings on wisdom as cited in this chapter. Years ago and even in modern society, Proverbs (especially Proverbs 31:10-31) is used to make judgements towards women and their conduct on both a personal and professional level. The placing of Proverbs within the wisdom genre and the indication of possible authorship of the book also provides the reader with a better understanding and background of Proverbs and the role it had to play within the culture, community and society from which it originated.

In Chapter 3, women's roles within their cultures, communities and societies of the Ancient Near East, Mesopotamia and the Old Testament are to be discussed. Proverbs 31:10-31 will receive specific attention and the pericope will be analysed and discussed in detail by incorporating various translations.

## Chapter 3

### Noble woman: an idea, illusion, myth or reality?

*To me a real lady is not frilly, flouncy, flippanant, frivolous, and fluff-brained, but she is gentle, she is gracious, she is godly, and she is giving. You and I have the gift of femininity. The more womanly we are, the more manly men will be and the more God will be glorified. Be women, be only women, be real women in obedience to God.*

*- Elisabeth Elliot -*

#### 3.1 Introduction

Proverbs together with Ecclesiastes deals with the human experiences that are shared by all people. They illustrate how theological thought can come from everyday human experiences. Theology does not rely on extraordinary events that occurred in a far-away country a long time ago or even miracles. Theology can arise from experiences such as birth and death, as well as joy and sorrow that are commonly experienced by all human beings. Proverbs does not bring new and exciting insights but it brings depth and invites its readers to examine and reflect on what it is to be human. In Proverbs 31:10-31 the writer believes the reader is invited to examine and reflect on the character of a woman who serves God (Collins 1980:1-2).

Truth statements made in the Book of Proverbs does not always follow a logical order. Some of the verses are grouped together in a specific thematic section, while others are meant to stand alone in order to emphasise a specific message or theme.

An understanding of Proverbs 31: 10-31 is only possible if the reader understands and appreciates the book's general purpose. Proverbs is a collection of wisdom; it expresses truths with direct or indirect statements, contradictions, and comparisons.

The book forms part of the Old Testament's Wisdom Literature which includes Job, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms. The aim of Proverbs is therefore to equip the reader to apply God's wisdom to specific situations and decisions that they have to make in life.

Proverbs 31 starts with an address to King Lemuel. Interpreters such as Fox (2009), Whybray (1994; 1995) and Yoder (2001) are of the opinion that Proverbs 31:10-31 is an instruction to King Lemuel by his mother. The instruction is aimed at young males to guide them as to the type of wife they should seek. In this study, the aim is to find out more about the dating and place of origin of Proverbs 31:10-31. Attention is given to where the pericope originated and special attention is given in the analysis of the pericope to the individual verses and how they were grouped together to form a specific theme. The social and economic setting of the time in which Proverbs 31:10-31 was possibly written, is discussed. Attention is given to the genre, purpose, and the audience Proverbs 31:10-31 was intended for.

The Old Testament gives the reader no indication as to who the noble (good) woman is in Proverbs 31:13-31. The noble (good) woman portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31 is a somewhat elusive figure. Boas is the first person in the Bible to make reference to a noble woman when he describes Ruth's reputation (Ruth 3:11, NIV). A second reference to the noble wife is made in Proverbs 12:4 (NIV): "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones."

This chapter discusses the lives of women in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel to present the reader with a better understanding of the marriage, family and work life of the women in the Ancient Near East. The aim is to find correlations between the lives of the noble (valiant) wife in Proverbs 31:10-31 and the lives of the women in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Israel as portrayed in the literature.

The question the chapter attempts to answer is: who is this woman portrayed as the noble (good) woman for the women of her time? She is not as prominent a woman figure in the biblical canon as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah and Ruth<sup>15</sup>, yet she had and still has an influence on how women are viewed today. Does this woman exist or is she an idealistic role model modern women can look up to?

### **3.2 Date and place of origin**

Proverbs 31:10-31 is an acrostic poem on the “capable wife” or “woman of worth” (Murphy 1981:82; Perdue 2000:275-276). The “capable wife” is an alphabetic acrostic; this indicates that the first letter of each of its twenty-two verses begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The Old Testament comprises several other alphabetic acrostics, some complete and some using only part of the alphabet. Proverbs 31:10-31 has no heading in the text of either the Septuagint or the Masoretic Text. Its form and contents clearly indicates, apart from small changes of some words that might subsequently have been made to the text, that it is a self-contained distinct poem (Whybray 1995:100-101).

The pericope comprises a wisdom hymn in praise of the “capable woman”. This acrostic poem is most likely a wisdom text that originated in Judah. Available evidence supporting a late dating of the text is largely indirect as there is no reference to the Judahite or Israelite kingdom or monarchy. The “capable woman of worth” herself assumes certain royal qualities which include strength and dignity (verse 25) and charity to the needy and poor (verse 20). The household is the major social institution and not the larger community. Households have a long history as a storied Israelite and Jewish institution that could fit into almost any biblical period. Absence of any reference to the larger social framework may suggest that the kingdom ceased to exist and had been replaced by Judah’s colonial status in the Babylonian and possibly even the Persian empires (Perdue 2000:275; Van Leeuwen 1997:260).

---

<sup>15</sup> Sarah see Genesis 12:5; Rebekah see Genesis 24:15; Rachel see Genesis 29:9; Miriam see Exodus 2:4; Deborah see Judges 4:1.

The expression “woman of worth” (Murphy 1981:82) can refer to a variety of characteristics given to women in the Old Testament.

These attributes are strength (1 Samuel 2:4; Psalms 18:32; Hebrews 18:35 and Hebrews 39), wealth (Genesis 34:29), and her ability, especially with regards to moral worth (Ruth 3:11; 1 Kings 1:42, 52; and especially Proverbs 12:4). The woman’s ability and moral worth seems to fit in best with what the poet had in mind when describing the married woman (Perdue 2000: 277).

There are several acrostic poems in the Old Testament, namely: Psalms 9-10, 24, 34, 37, 111, 119, and Lamentations 1-4. The acrostic may have been a mnemonic device with which to remember the poem. It could also have been a way of remembering the alphabet or a literary device used by scribes who one would expect to be accustomed to the use of language. The fact that the acrostic poem is most frequent among the sapiential literature<sup>16</sup> of wisdom poems (Psalms 34, 37, 111, 119) supports the last understanding as a good explanation for the origin of the poem. The poem appears to have no demarcation of major literary structures apart from the acrostic device. None of the strophes or units of thought extends beyond one line. Throughout the poem, one finds synthetic one-line sayings where the second half line extends the thought of the first (Perdue 2000: 277).

Lyons (1987:238) and Waegeman (1989:101) opine that Proverbs 31:10-31 can be dated anywhere from the pre-monarchic period to the second century BCE. Most commentators do, however, avoid putting a date on a text that does not form part of a particular historical setting (Fox 2009:899). Yoder’s (2001:15-39) attempt to assign the poem to the Persian Period<sup>17</sup> is the only sustained effort to date. According to Fox (2009:899), one should take note that the major turning point in the Hebrew language was not the first return from exile in 535 BCE, but rather the second with Nehemiah in the early to mid-fifth century. Yoder (2001:15-39) collected data from both Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 to argue for a post-exilic dating for both texts.

---

<sup>16</sup> Adjective from the Latin *sapere* meaning “to be wise” (Waltke & Yu 2007:897).

<sup>17</sup> According to Yoder (2001:15), the evidence indicates a *terminus ante quem* of the mid-second century BCE. Yoder (2001:15-39) took linguistic evidence, features of late biblical Hebrew and foreign influence into account in order to date Proverbs 31:10-31.

Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31 are, however, not a single text written by a single author. They differ from each other in form, in the type of woman that they describe as well as the type of wisdom ascribed to each of the women in the two passages (Fox 2009:899).

### **3.3 Social and economic setting**

Proverbs 31:10-31 is largely an economic text that deals with production and consumption. Reproduction, nurture, education, and the judicial features of the household are exemplified in the relationships and behaviour of this woman. They are important characteristics of the poem and its subject, namely the “woman of worth” (Perdue 2000:277).

The acrostic poem in its entirety is dominated by the activities of the “woman of worth”. In an agrarian society village, the economic functions of the household were a pragmatic focus for survival. The household of the woman in this poem consists of a husband, children, and servant girls. This appears to be an affluent and large household. One can presume that the male worked with the herds and in the fields. The women, including the one mentioned in Proverbs 31:10-31, is probably the senior female who is married to the head of the household. This woman is engaged in a variety of economic tasks. The main role of the senior female was to manage the household, not only within the physical structure of the family home, but beyond it into the fields. The senior female’s organisational tasks included assigning duties to children and servant girls; these were the two primary groups over which the senior woman had authority (Perdue 2000:277).

Yoder (2001:39-91) used documentary evidence from the Persian Period to describe the scope of women’s activities during this period. The evidence provided helps to illustrate the background of Proverbs 31:10-31. The types of activities described here are not restricted to the Persian Period. Elephantine practices, deep in southern Egypt, were not necessarily used in the Levant (Fox 2009:900).

Yoder (2001:103) is of the opinion that Proverbs 31:10-31 was written for affluent and moderately wealthy members of an urban commercial class. Fox (2009:900) concurs on this point except that the divide between the rural and urban should not be emphasised too much as a landowner with holdings near a city would also participate in city life.

The “noble woman” buys fields and plants vineyards (verse 16); she also deals with traders and merchants (verse 24) situated in the cities, while her husband played an important role in city affairs (verse 23). Yoder (2001:71) indicates with evidence from the Achaemenid Period that “women’s work” in the Achaemenid economy varied. Their responsibilities as managers of the household included the manufacturing of textiles, trading in the marketplace, and the supervising or owning of slaves. These women made and received deliveries, managed properties, and partook in the buying and selling of land and slaves. Women were workers in the royal economy, while non-royal woman engaged in a wide range of unskilled and skilled professions (Yoder 2001:71).

The numbers of women engaged in skilled and unskilled work were in some cases greater than that of their male counterparts. These women worked at varying ranks and degrees of specialisation. Women who had sufficient amounts of capital could get into the credit business by making loans of goods and cash at favourable interest rates. Royal women and women of high rank were estate and property owners (Yoder 2001:71).

According to the statements made by Yoder (2001:71), one can conclude that women worked just as hard as their male counterparts or perhaps harder in some cases. These were hardworking women taking care of not only their households but also their business undertakings. Proverbs 31:10-31 can then be interpreted as a poem giving examples to women on how a woman is to go about with her daily duties, including duties in the household, outside in the field or in business undertakings.

The picture painted above by both Perdue (2000:277) and Yoder (2001:71) of “noble woman” contradict the stereotype of women in ancient male-dominated societies in which women were severely restricted in the scope of their economic activities as well as their personal independence.



This does not mean that they had economic or social equality, but they were not confined to childbearing and hard work in the home. The picture we are confronted with of the woman in the Old Testament is not one of confinement. Original readers of the poem would not have perceived it as unusual for a woman to deal with merchants, to plant vineyards and to buy land (Fox 2009:901).

If one understands Proverbs 31:10-31 as it is explained by Yoder, Perdue and Fox, it is possible for modern women to identify with the noble woman in the pericope. The noble woman worked inside her home but also outside her home. She was well-known in the marketplace as a woman who sold her goods and made deals to buy land to ensure the prosperity of her family and substitute her income. More land for the noble woman meant more vineyards to plant for the benefit of her own household and others who bought the products she made from the harvest.

The socio-economic background of the woman of strength is emphasised by the picture Yoder (2001: 40-41) paints of an upper-class women in the Achaemenid period. Yoder (2001:40-41) does, however, fail to show that this situation pertains only to the Achaemenid Period. Yoder's (2001: 40-41) conclusion of a Persian-period dating is biased as her survey is based on a corpus of texts from the Persian Period. A thorough examination of texts from earlier and later times must be conducted to exclude alternative settings, such as the Hellenistic Period (Fox 2009:901).

The woman's scope of rights and action in economic matters in the urban centres of the Graeco-Roman world is not as different or unlikely as the one suggested by Proverbs 10:10-31 (Fox 2009:901). According to Pomeroy (1975:125), the less the movement of the queens were restricted in the spheres of activity, formerly reserved for men, a style was set that was emulated by wealthy and aristocratic women. Women's economic and legal responsibilities increased but their political gain was an illusion. Hellenistic women did not gain any meaningful legal emancipation from the control of men, yet these women from the urban elite were able to take on offices and liturgies and become public benefactors. These are not contradictory pictures as both pertained, to a degree, to postexilic Judea.

The influence of the Hellenistic Period is not yet excluded from the evidence (Fox 2009: 901).

Another problem that arises from using data from the Achaemenid Elephantine in order to reconstruct the background setting of Proverbs 31:10-31 is that we do not know if women, like the woman in the poem, were allowed to pursue such ambitious economic activities as the women in the Elephantine. In Proverbs 31:10-31, the women of strength buy and sell but the women in ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East were never denied activities, such as the buying and selling of goods (Fox 2009:901).

A striking activity by the woman of strength in Proverbs 31:10-31 is her purchase of a field, an activity that woman did not perform in earlier Israelite literature and law (Fox 2009:901). In this regard, the woman of strength might be acting as her husband's agent and not as a property owner (Westbrook 1991:80). Yoder (2001:104-105) is of the opinion that the author and audience are members of the *golah*<sup>18</sup> community whose forefathers had returned to Judea from Babylonian exile.

The noble wife did not own or buy the land but, acted as an agent or 'middleman' for her husband (Westbrook 1991:80). If one is to argue that this woman is not necessarily royalty or upper class, she is a good example of a hardworking woman who, with restricted means and access to money and land, did what she had to do to ensure the prosperity of her family and household.

### **3.4 Genre and purpose**

The uniqueness of the poem of the woman of strength makes it difficult to determine its genre and it is therefore possible to make several classifications.

---

<sup>18</sup> The *golah* community was validated by the Persian administration as the legitimate restorers of the Jerusalem temple. They had the socio-economic and political upperhand over the indigenous population (De Vaux 1978:21; Yoder 2001:104).

One should seek categories that are not so broad that they can be deemed useless (“poetry”), or so narrow that they have only a couple of known members (“poems in praise of a capable woman”). The poem’s purpose will lead to an expression of its genre (Fox 2009:903).

Wolters (1988: 447) opines that Proverbs 31:10-31 is a hymn and sees in it features of heroic poetry, which celebrates the deeds of heroes in battle. Contrary to Wolters’ (1988: 448-449) use of “hymn”, it is properly used to describe songs in praise of God whose deeds are unique. Proverbs 31:10-31 lacks the characteristic “hymnic participles” except for one in Proverbs 31:27. Nothing can, however, be gained from stretching the concept of hymn beyond its usual use. Wolters (1988:448-449) is correct that some of the material has martial or heroic overtones, but it is still distant from heroic poetry in which the exploits of a warrior is eulogised.

Fox (2009:903) states that it is best to classify Proverbs 31:10-31 as an encomium. The encomium is best known from Graeco-Roman rhetoric and lyrics. It is a declamation of lofty praise for a person or a type of person. Schmitt (2003:360) studied Greek and Jewish encomia and includes Proverbs 31:10-31 in the Jewish encomia. In the Old Testament, an encomium is found in the Psalms that praise the righteous man. Fox (2009:903) argues that the righteous man and the woman of strength is a type of person that can be viewed or experienced as a role model and not a specific individual.

The woman of noble character (valiant wife) does not exist (Fox 2009:903). Proverbs 31:10-31 is a word-picture of a woman that real-life women can look up to. Today, female role models are portrayed as extremely skinny to anorexic magazine cover models or movie stars who function mostly on drugs and alcohol (Borowsky, et al. 2016:297-311; Jacobs & Tyree 2013:5788-5803;). The woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a woman with values; she is strong and caring towards both her household and the needy. She is a woman that women, young and old, can look up to. Most importantly, she fears the Lord; she has a relationship with God and he steers her life path. Women do not have to be like her in every aspect of their lives, but women can use the Proverbs 31:10-31 women as inspiration as to how a wife, mother and pillar of the community can function successfully.

### 3.5 Original audience

There is no explicit indication in Proverbs 31:10-31 as to its intended audience (Fox 2009: 905). Schwab (2009:456) opines that as the Book of Proverbs grew over time, the intended audience changed. The smaller units were most probably written as part of an educational programme to train young sons to serve in government and to be able to successfully converse and navigate the royal court. The majority of the elite were privileged enough to be literate. Outside of the political and religious circles few people would have had access to the original book of Proverbs (Schwab 2009:456).

The pericope lacks a vocative such as “my son”. The editor has, however, determined the audience by attaching the pericope to a book that defines the intended audience as young men and uneducated boys (1:4). The pericope itself implies male readership as it states the benefits that they would derive from such a woman. Men are implicitly addressed in Proverbs 31:31; husbands and future husbands are mentioned in 31:28. He calls upon them to praise and reward such women in their lives. The poem can work in different ways, for example, when a young man reads the pericope it can teach him to choose a wife, not for her beauty, but for her moral and practical strengths as these qualities would benefit her husband (Fox 2009: 905).

When a young woman perceives the pericope, it holds up a certain standard of excellence. Proverbs 31:10-31’s striking parallels to *Xenophon’s Oeconomicus*<sup>19</sup> enhances the likelihood that Proverbs 31:10-31, although it speaks about women in the third person, is meant as an instruction for girls and young women. Women are taught how to succeed in domestic life and how to win esteem and prosperity. When this text is recited to a wife and mother, which was customary in contemporary Jewish practice, it is an expression of gratitude for her achievements and contributions to the family (Fox 2009: 905).

---

<sup>19</sup> Xenophon is the writer of the *Oeconomicus*. It is a “Discourse on the Skill of Estate Management” in the form of a Socratic dialogue in the first third of the fourth century BCE. The *Oeconomicus* contributed greatly to our understanding of the economy of ancient Greece. It is the only existing Greek didactic work to draw attention to the *oikos* (“estate,” “household or family”) as an economic entity (Pomeroy 1995:180).

Times have changed and so has the audience of Proverbs 31:10-31 for whom the interpretation was intended. Today, the pericope is often used to instruct women on how they are supposed to juggle family and work life or in which ways they may be falling short compared to the women described in the pericope. Conversely, the pericope is no longer used as an instruction to men. The text is, however, often used by some men to list the shortcomings of their wives. Some modern women are not praised by their husbands but, in most cases, the women are made aware of their shortcomings, which may lead to these women feeling despondent. The pericope is then discarded by women, as they perceive themselves as lacking the noble woman's qualities as a wife, mother, and manager of her household. The text should be a celebration of women in all spheres of their lives. Women should bring other women closer to God because what women do should be seen as a labour of love to God rather than people, just like the noble wife who fears the Lord. Wisdom begins with fearing the Lord (Proverbs 9:10).

### **3.6 Women and their social status**

In the Hebrew Bible, women are primarily portrayed as minor or subordinate figures. Women, however, play an essential role in the record of Israel's faith. An important key to understanding the images, roles and limited appearances of women in the literature of the Old Testament is to focus on the predominantly patriarchal and patrilineal structure and family-centred economy of families in the Ancient Near East (Camp 1985:81 & Vivante 2006:51).

The prominence of female and mother goddesses in the very early period of Israelite history, the proliferation of female figurines as well as the possible existence of female polyandry do not provide any evidence or proof of matriarchal rule. Despite the predominantly patriarchal structure, the religious realm and the domestic sphere provided women with a source of identity and power (Camp 1985:81 & Vivante 2006:51).

The household was often shared by the father's parents and siblings, who did not have their own households.

The family of the women usually did not reside in her husband's household, unless they had no male relatives that could care for them or if the wife enjoyed wealth and status in her community. In all the periods of Israelite history the typical Israelite family was a male-headed household in which the property could only be inherited by and through males (Camp 1985:81; Freedman 1992:951-952; Vivante 2006:51).

A woman's life was typically divided into the phases of infancy-childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. The social institution of marriage usually indicated a woman's entry into recognised social adulthood. People in the ancient world did not see individuals as sufficient within themselves. Their purpose and identity in life was subsumed within their role in the family and the role of their household in the larger community. A woman's role in her family was thus central to her identity (Freedman 1992:952; Vivante 2006:51).

### 3.6.1 Marriage, divorce and widows

Marrying a girl who is still a child was frowned upon and not a common occurrence, if at all allowed. Girls and boys were expected to marry soon after they reached puberty. Elopement was not viewed as an acceptable practice and permission from the parents was important for a marriage to be recognised. Engagement<sup>20</sup> arrangements were made by the fathers and in some cases, the mother was involved. If the father was deceased, the mother or the eldest brother would initiate the betrothal arrangements. The role of the girl in the engagement and wedding arrangements is not clear but one can assume that her consent to the engagement and marriage was welcomed and even required. In dynastic marriages, the young woman's consent was not necessarily needed when the marriage was arranged – this would cement political alliances. Love may, however, have played some role in the couple's decision to get married (De Vaux 1978:32-33 & Marsman 2003:73-84).

---

<sup>20</sup> The betrothal or engagement was a promise made some time before the formal celebrations of the wedding. This custom existed in Israel and the Hebrew word *aras*, occurs 11 times in the Bible, however, historical books provide little information with regard to engagements (Marsman 2003:73).

Although the Mesopotamian laws had double standards, it was assumed and required that love and sexuality be confined to the marital relationship. It was thus expected of the husband not to seek sexual gratification from prostitutes or slave girls (De Vaux 1978:32-33; Freedman 1992:948; Marsman 2003:73-84).

The marriage<sup>21</sup>, with some exception to time and place, was formalised by the exchange of gifts by the two families. A dowry was usually given to the bride by her father. The dowry was very important to the girl for if her husband should divorce her, she took back her dowry. If the wife died, her dowry was given to her heirs. In return the father of the bride received a bridal gift from the groom's father or from the groom. If the groom wanted to, he could provide his bride with a gift to insure her support after he died. Rites of passage, such as the anointing of the young girl to make the transition from being unmarried to married, is mainly confirmed in early Sumer and late Assyria. Washing and potations might have had significance in Babylonia (Greengus 1966:55-72), while in Assyrian laws, the veiling of the bride is mentioned (De Vaux 1978:32-33; Freedman 1992:948; Marsman 2003:84-91).

Monogamy<sup>22</sup> in marriage, except among royalty, was the rule. In cases such as sterility or disease, however, the husband was allowed to take a mistress as a secondary wife to have his children. The first or primary wife's superior position might then have been determined in a contract. In the Old Assyrian period, the traders had a native wife in Assyria and a foreign wife in the country to which they travelled (Freedman 1992:948).

---

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that in both Israel and Mesopotamia marriage was a civil contract. A marriage was not endorsed by any religious rite (DeVaux 1978:33).

<sup>22</sup> The patriarchs followed the traditions of the time. The *Code of Hammurabi* (about 1700 BC) states that the husband may not take a second wife unless the first wife is infertile. He loses this right if his wife herself gives him a slave as mistress. The husband is, however, allowed to take a mistress even if his wife had children. The mistress does, however, not have the same rights as the wife. The husband may not take another mistress even if his first wife is infertile (De Vaux 1978:24). The wisdom books that provide a sketch of their society never mentions polygamy (De Vaux 1978:25). In the Ancient Near East, a married woman was not always the husband's sole sexual partner. Marriages could be monogamous, bigynous or polygynous. Even if a woman entered a monogamous marriage, her husband could continue his relationship with his mistress or slave girl. In Mesopotamian texts, a woman had the highest marital status when she was a wife. The *Code of Hammurabi* refers to her as *hirtu* (first ranking wife), which this distinguishes her from the *amtu* (handmaid) with whom her husband could have children (Marsman 2003:122-123).

Marriage and divorce contracts were relatively common but over time the two contracts became a rarity. It is, however, not possible to say if this was accidental or a reflection of the deterioration of the position of women in society. A woman's virginity<sup>23</sup>, which was an expectation at all times, is unambiguously referred to in the later marriage contracts (Freedman 1992:948).

Divorce<sup>24</sup> was not a common occurrence. If a man divorced his wife for no legitimate reason after they have had children together, the husband, at least during certain periods, lost his property. Prior to having any children the husband would have to pay his wife a limited sum of money as compensation. In the Old Babylonian Period, the wife seemed to have had the right to divorce her husband but only if she could prove before witnesses that she was ill-treated by him (De Vaux 1978:34-35; Freedman 1992:948-949; Marsman 2003:168).

A wife that was abandoned by her husband could usually legally remarry after five years. Cohabitation with a widow was considered a common-law marriage under certain conditions. The son was responsible for maintaining his widowed mother, arranging the marriages of his sisters if the parents were deceased and providing dowries for his sisters if provision was not made in the father's will. Women who did not have living male family members or possessions did not have many avenues that they could pursue for survival. These women were usually doomed to a life of slavery and prostitution. The two great economic centres of Mesopotamia, namely, the temple and the palace, served as welfare institutions that provided food and shelter for homeless women and children. These women then became part of their enormous work forces (Freedman 1992:948-949).

---

<sup>23</sup> The nuptial night's blood-stained linen was preserved in order to prove the wife's virginity and was used as evidence if she was insulted by her husband (De Vaux 1978:34).

<sup>24</sup> A husband was allowed to divorce his wife. The husband made a declaration in which he would state: "She is no longer my wife and I am no longer her husband." A man who falsely accused his wife of not being a virgin when they married could never divorce her (Deuteronomy 22:13-19). Women, on the other hand, could not ask for a divorce. The Jewish colony of Elephantine, who was subjected to foreign influence, did however allow a woman to divorce her husband. According to the *Code of Hammurabi*, in Mesopotamia, a husband could divorce his wife by reciting the correct formula. He did, however, pay compensation. Although the Old Testament makes no mention of any financial condition in a divorce, Israel did, most probably, have financial conditions attached to a divorce (De Vaux 1978:36-37).



The vulnerability and dilemma of women (and orphans) are common in the literature of the Ancient Near East. Widowhood<sup>25</sup> might, however, have offered a woman or wife her only opportunity for true independence (Freedman 1992:948-949).

In the time of Assyria, a woman without a male guardian, without a father-in-law or sons, was given the right to go wherever she wanted to go. In some cases, though rare, a widow could have primary right of inheritance of her husband's estate, in which case even her children were excluded from the inheritance (De Vaux 1978:40; Freedman 1992:948-949; Marsman 2003:291).

The noble wife, one can argue, might have reached out to desolate women as verse 20 (NIV) of Proverbs 31 states that she opened her arms and extended her hands to the needy. The needy can be seen as desolate women or orphaned children. The noble wife has a heart for those in her community that are suffering. She tries to comfort them and better their lives by reaching out to them. The noble wife is then not only a well-functioning pillar of strength in her community, but she is extending a helping hand to those in need.

### 3.6.2 Wife and mother

Once a woman had successfully given birth to a living child, her status as an adult woman was complete as she was then seen as a wife and mother. The Israelite woman's life centred on her responsibilities in her home and the duties to her family. An ideal picture of such an adult female she is depicted as a mother of many children, preferably sons as well as the wise and industrious manager of her household, looking after the welfare of her husband and children (Proverbs 31:10-29).

---

<sup>25</sup> In Mesopotamia (Ancient Near East), a married woman's status changed after her husband died. She no longer stood under the authority of her husband and as a widow she became legally independent. This did, however, not always happen. In Mesopotamia, the widow did not have legal independence if her father was still alive and acted as the *pater familias*. Mesopotamian texts often portrayed widows as vulnerable women in need of protection. In Egypt, however, it seems that widows generally became destitute (De Vaux 1978:39; Marsman 2003:291-292; 295).

The last image, which does not give much attention to the role of the wife, is the result of wisdom's reflection created to guide men regarding the road to success in life. Knowledge of women and their conduct played an important role in this regard. The Book of Proverbs cautions against the loose or foreign woman, especially the adulteress who can cost a man his life (Proverbs 5:3-5; 6:24-35; 9:13-18), while counselling loyalty (5:15-19) and praising the "woman of worth" in thorough and lengthy praise (Proverbs 31:10-31). A wife with such qualities will "do him good, and not harm" (verse 12). The emphasis in this description is on expertise, creativity, trade, astuteness and charity instead of fertility or beauty. Beauty is regarded (verse 30) as "deceitful" and "vain" (Freedman 1992:953; Vivante 2006: 56; Yoder 2001:59).

In South Africa, society has a different view of women and their adulthood. A girl becomes a woman as soon as she turns 18. In the *Children's Act* of 2010, 18 is the coming of age for both boys and girls. A girl, thus, does not have to have a child to become a woman. Women are also encouraged to complete some or other form of tertiary education before getting married and starting a family. She enjoys the same status as her male counterparts in society. Many young women choose to start a career, some very successful careers, before entering into marriage and family life. A woman has the opportunity to go back to her career after having children and she is therefore not forced to stay at home and care for her children. Working women do care for a household, husband and children. She makes use of housekeepers and child-minders just as the women in the Old Testament made use of slave girls.

### 3.6.2.1 Motherhood<sup>26</sup>

The role of a wife is seldom disconnected from the central role of mother. Motherhood was a universal role for the women of Israel. Being a mother was not only a biological requirement for the generation to survive but motherhood permeated value and meaning to a woman. Motherhood most probably provided a key source of power within the Israelite community (Camp 1985:81).

---

<sup>26</sup> Marsman (2003:191) states that being a mother was the most important position for a woman in the ancient world. There were two sides to this prestigious position. Firstly, to her husband she was the one who had his child/children. Secondly, to her son(s) and daughter(s) she was their parent.

In the Old Testament, the role of mother dictates the references to women. Motherhood was awaited and honoured imitating a specific social need (Judges 21:16-17) and divine approval (Genesis 1:28). A prominent theme in the Old Testament is the aspiration to bear many children, especially sons (1 Samuel 2:7; Genesis 30:1; Psalms 127:3-5; Psalms 128:3-4). Having sons was important for both men and women in the Israelite community as its roots were in the economic needs of agricultural survival and the social need to maintain lineage. The mandate on a woman to bear children was compensated for by prestige and security within the community (Deuteronomy 5:16; 27:16). The result of this is that women distinguished children with status (Genesis 30:20; 1 Samuel 1:2-8). Becoming and being a mother accurately meant a woman's whole life (Freedman 1992:953; Vivante 2006:56).

The woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 secured her prestige, status and security through her children. Although the pericope does not indicate whether this wife of noble character had sons, daughters or both, one can assume that through the status that she enjoys in her community she must have had sons (Proverbs 31:28). In modern society, however, women no longer have a higher status if she has male children. Both boys and girls enjoy equal rights and status in society. In some African communities, the status of a woman is still determined by her ability to have sons as male-children enjoy a higher status and value within the community.

### 3.6.3 Infertility<sup>27</sup>

Infertility was seen as a definitive disgrace as it was understood as a sign of heavenly disapproval (Genesis 30:32; 2 Samuel 6:20-23). The infertile or childless woman not only suffered a lack of regard, but also a threat of divorce and exclusion from her husband's household when he died.

---

<sup>27</sup> Infertility was deemed a trial (Genesis 16:2; 30:2; 1 Samuel 1:5) or a punishment from God (Genesis 20:18). The texts show that the Israelites primarily wanted sons to continue the family line, fortune and the ancestral inheritance (De Vaux 1978:41). In the Ancient Near East, a childless marriage was therefore considered unsuccessful (Marsman 2003:192). Fertility was linked to the following spheres: vegetative fertility (flora), reproductive fertility (fauna), and generative fertility (humans). Human fertility was viewed as the most important of these spheres and therefore a person with no children was viewed as less than a complete humanbeing (Van Rooy 1985:225; Marsman 2003:193).

The infertile wife is unable to continue her husband's lineage and therefore cannot claim any inheritance from her husband. The infertile woman also has no sons to support her in her old age (Freedman 1992:953). Fertility and infertility was both a blessing and a curse and was of the utmost importance in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament (Van Rooy 1985:225). The power to multiply was the best way in which the blessing could manifest itself as fertility was regarded as the most important blessing that a woman could receive. The most severe curse a person could receive was the inability to "create" a future (Van Rooy 1985:225).

The noble wife described in Proverbs 31:10-31 did not have to face the disgrace of infertility. She has children who praise her (31:28) and she has positioned herself within her husband's lineage and need not worry about support in her old age. Therefore she can laugh at the days to come (31:25). Infertility today is not seen as a disgrace and infertile women are not disapproved of; they enjoy the same status in society as women who have or have had children.

#### 3.6.4 Child bearing and child death

In the characteristics that make up the Old Testament portrait of women there seems to be a collection of qualities and similes that ultimately derive from an association of birthing and nurture or womb and breast. The danger and pain associated with childbirth has carved itself into the consciousness of the male narrators and poets of the Old Testament who make use of images of women in labour as representations of the anguish and helplessness associated with childbirth (Isaiah 13:8; 31:3; Jeremiah 48:41; Micah 4:9-10). The birth of a child is presented as the greatest risk to the woman's life and a variety of texts see a woman's struggle in childbirth comparable to the danger and pain a man faces in battle (Vivante 2006:88).

The maternal pain associated with the death of a child is different from the mother's pain when giving birth. The death of a child was dignified by a ritual of weeping of women at the burial and in the specialised female profession of performer, keener and composer of chants (Jeremiah 9:16, 19). A bond between a mother and the fruit of her womb is understood to be profound and enduring (Isaiah 49:15) overriding self-centredness (1 Kings 3:16-27).

The mother's bond is prolonged even beyond death as demonstrated in Rizpah's vigil over her slain sons (2 Samuel 21:8-14), safeguarding her sons in death (a female role) as she could not in life (a male role). Female roles in death and burials is also clear in the New Testament where women prepared the dead for burial and visited the graves (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-24:1). Caring for the dead may be seen as an extension of the mother's primary role of taking care of the living that originates in the nursing of infants (1 Samuel 1:22; Numbers 11:12; Isaiah 45:15) and continues in the caring for and nursing of the sick and frail (2 Samuel 13:5; 1 Kings 1:2; 2 Kings 4:18-30) (Freedman 1992:953).

The noble wife in Proverbs 31:10-31 had to endure the danger and pain associated with childbirth more than once as the pericope speaks of her "children" (Proverbs 31:28).

She knows all too well the danger and fulfilment child bearing brings to a woman as well as the status the woman receives in her society for bearing not one but many children. She is a doting mother as the pericope describes how she cares and provides for her children (Proverbs 31:15; 21). No mention is made in the pericope of any of her children dying. The woman in the pericope is, however, such an example that she would most probably have mourned the death of her child(ren) as is expected of her by her community. She is, however, a very fortunate woman to have all her children alive, healthy, and able to praise her.

### 3.6.5 Caring for the children and household

The mother's principal role was to take care of her children, both boys and girls from birth until they were weaned at around the age of three. Education and discipline of the older children was also the mother's responsibility. The mother played an important role in the socialisation and ethical teachings of the minor children. These moral instructions were critical for both sons and daughters. The mother's instructions seems to have had a formal and extended character, even for their sons as was shown in the Wisdom Literature (Proverbs 1:8; 31:1).

The mother's role as teacher and counsellor is extended as can be seen in the "wise woman" whose ability in negotiations and persuasion commands acknowledgement in public (2 Samuel 14:1-20; 20:16-22). Mothers had the exceptional role of educating their daughters in the qualities and capabilities expected of an adult woman (wife) as well as other particular female traits (Freedman 1992:953; Vivante 2006:56-57)

The household was almost always the principal locus of women's labour (Pollock 1999:24-24). Mothers had to provide food and clothing for the whole family or household. The provision required arduous and time-consuming industry from the mother that included cleaning, parching, sorting, and the grinding of the grain. They had to bake bread, draw water, and collect fuel. A task that they shared with their husbands, included cleaning and butchering small animals, milking, mixing butter, and making yoghurt and cheese. They had to tend to the vegetable gardens and fruit trees and preserve meats and fruits for storing (Vivante 2006:56-57).

The clothing of her family did not only involve spinning, weaving, sewing and tailoring but also the preparation of raw wool or flax fibres (Proverbs 31:13). Spinning and weaving were symbolic of the female's activity and domestic skills. Queens and other wealthy women were also portrayed holding a spindle (Proverbs 31:13, 19; Judges 16:14). Mothers and other females in the household also bore the weight of the cleaning and washing (Freedman 199:2953-954, Meyers 1988:151-152; Vivante 2006:56-57).

Nowadays not many households have stay-at-home-mothers. Many women work outside the home and many have professional careers just like their male counterparts. In the households where the wife or mother works, often a housekeeper is responsible for taking care of the household chores. This does not mean that women today do not tend to the household; the bulk of the household chores are simply done by the housekeeper who is equivalent to the slave girl(s) described in Proverbs and other Old Testament texts. Women today are, however, expected, especially in communities that are still very much male-dominated, to fulfil dual roles.

She must perform exceptionally well in her workplace and be able to cope with all the demands at work but also be an excellent wife and mother. Women might have more rights nowadays such as opportunities to work in previously male-dominated work spheres but her duties as a wife and mother must still be fulfilled.

### 3.6.6 Female hierarchy in a household

Within an extended family or household, the female head who in most cases was the mother of the extended household, managed the work of the dependent females. The females included daughters, daughters-in-law, and servants. There is, however, no direct evidence giving any clear indication as to the way in which the responsibilities to manage the house was shared by multiple wives. A system of seniority may be assumed, especially in cases where the second wife was the husband's mistress. Each of the women would, however, be responsible for the discipline and care of their own children. A woman normally gained authority through age as it would allow for her to have more freedom and time for leisure. Most of the specialised roles and activities of women outside the home or relating to public recognition and action (mediums, wise women, midwives, keepers, and prophets) were executed by older women who were no longer burdened by taking care of their children (Freedman 1992:953-954; Stol 2016:182).

The wife of noble character in Proverbs 31:10-31 is most probably an older woman as the text indicates that she is the head of her household. She provides not only for her husband and family but also her female servants (Proverbs 31:15). The noble woman is known in her community as a provider (Proverbs 31:20) and honoured as a wise woman. She is able to perform all her tasks without any distractions as her children appear to be grown up. Her diligence and hard work is praised by her husband, children and at the gates of the city, by other elders (Proverbs 31:28, 31). She is well loved within her wider community. The wife of noble character does not take any leisure time but rather works hard from early in the morning to very late at night (Proverbs 31:13-18). She thus uses her freedom and leisure time to ensure the prosperity of her household.

### 3.6.7 Women's sexuality and adultery

In the Israelite society (as in all the other societies), sex was not free, although it is described as free and freely given in the love poetry of Songs of Songs. The patrilineal and patriarchal system demanded that the men have exclusive rights to their wives' sexuality. The woman's sexuality was therefore protected before marriage by her father (Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 28-29) and after the marriage her sexuality was protected by her husband (Numbers 5:11-31). The ancient laws of adultery were primarily aimed at women. In Mesopotamia, adultery was always defined in terms of extramarital relations of the wife but never of the husband. Adultery was the most severe female crime. The adultery of a wife was immediate cause for divorce, even if her husband did not want to divorce her. The penalties incurred by the adulterous wife, include ostracism from the community, enslavement, and even death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). In some circumstances, the husband received the same punishment as his adulterous wife. In Proverbs, the adulterous wife is identified as an evil or dangerous woman (Proverbs 5:2-4; 7:10-23). The male adulterer is, however, portrayed as a frail and stupid victim that surrendered to the adulterous woman's advances (Proverbs 6:32; 7:7-13, 21-27; 9:13-18) (Freedman 1992:954, Stol 2016:234, 244; Vivante 2006:60-62).

Proverbs 31:10-31 does not explicitly indicate the role of the noble wife's sexuality. It is, however, stated in the text that her husband's heart trusts in her (Proverbs 31:11). The pericope states that she makes coverings for herself (Proverbs 31:22) which the reader can interpret as that she protects her sexuality from others, especially other men, as her sexuality belongs to her husband exclusively. The pericope does not give any indication of adultery by either the noble wife or her husband. Judged by the noble wife's husband's confidence and trust in her (Proverbs 31:11) as well as his position in society (Proverbs 31:23), they have a happy marriage with no sign of adulterous activities from either partner. She is thus not only a woman other women can look up to, but her marriage is an example to others in their society of trust and devotion to one's partner.



The fact that adultery was seen as something that only the wife should be punished for indicates the disadvantaged position women in the Ancient Near East found themselves in. These women were to be blamed for most of the things that could or might go wrong in their marriages and household. Although the marriage of the “noble wife” of Proverbs 31:10-31 seems to be a good marriage, one cannot help but wonder how the noble wife would have reacted to her husband if he should have portrayed adulterous behaviour.

### 3.6.8 Activities outside the household and family

A woman in the Ancient Near East’s daily life consisted of several tasks. Most of these tasks were gender-related. If one examines the tasks the women had to do at home, it is clear that a gender division existed. Certain tasks are shared by women and men, such as the preparation of food as well as building and rebuilding activities. Other jobs were commonly regarded as either a man’s or a woman’s job (Marsman 2003:404).

Women’s roles and activities outside their household work, included work such as assistance in basic tasks of production (agriculture and animal farming); textual evidence exist of women’s involvement in harvesting (Ruth 2). Women were also responsible for caring for the herds (Genesis 29:9; Exodus 2:16), specialised professional services (child care and midwifery), and weaving and grinding of flour (Freedman 1992:955). The three main areas of unpaid work performed by women are: child care, food production, and textile production (Vivante 2006:95). Child care is not discussed in this section as it was previously discussed in detail.

In the Ancient Near East, there were a few areas in which women and men worked together; one such area was the preparation of food in the household. In general, the women were responsible for preparing the food. The butchering of animals and the preparation of the meat, fowl, and fish was deemed to be the man’s responsibility. In Egyptian tomb scenes, men where almost exclusively portrayed in scenes preparing and cooking meat. In scenes portraying baking of bread and brewing of beer, men and women are portrayed as working together. Grinding of grain was, however, exclusively done by women.

Although women are shown to complete these jobs at home, there is no indication of them performing these tasks professionally (Marsman 2003:405).

In ancient Mesopotamia, women could brew and sell beer professionally. The *sabitu* fades from the scene at the end of the Old Babylonian Period. The large amount of archives of the Neo-Babylonian Ebabbar temple at Sippar barely mentions women, certainly not in any professional capacity. Women completed the modest tasks of weaving and grinding flour (Marsman 2003:405-406).

Extracting and carrying water to the household was the task of both men and women in the Ancient Near East. In the Orient it is, however, still the women who fetch the household's water from the well (Oleson 1992:885). Egyptian women may have done their own laundry, but professionally, laundry was a man's job. In Mesopotamia, the professional laundry washers were generally men (Marsman 2003:406).

Food and textile production differ from child care as both could be turned into lucrative businesses. An enterprising woman could produce surplus which she could sell or trade in the community or international market. Food was the basis of the economy as it sustained life. Agriculture, herding and gathering created opportunities for women to substitute bread, a staple food, with other foods such as grapes, pomegranates, and dates (Stol 2016:341).

The third principal activity of women was the manufacturing of cloth. This entailed the gathering of raw material (wool and flax), the weaving of the flax, cotton, linen and wool fibres, as well as the dyeing, when appropriate and needed, of the textiles in order to make the necessary clothing, bedding, and table, wall and floor coverings. Women devoted their lives to these different stages of textile production. In order to fulfil the demand for new cloth, textile production became a major industry. Weaving, pottery and churning were necessary for the economy and women were most definitely involved. Weaving, pottery and churning were part of the daily tasks of women. Women were without a doubt, although not much evidence exists of their daily economic activities, part of the economic activities in their communities (Freedman 1992:955, Lion & Michel 2016: 14-19, Stol 2016:343; Vivante 2006:105).

In the Ancient Near East, both men and women took part in agriculture and animal farming. In both Mesopotamia and Egypt<sup>28</sup>, women worked in animal farming and agriculture, while men and women worked together in building activities. In Mesopotamia, little is known of women working in the building field. One can, however, assume that slave women participated in building projects. Egyptian<sup>29</sup> women could be employed as servants in building projects. Unlike agriculture and building tasks, textile production was the jurisdiction of women only. Seals from the third millennium Mesopotamia show women as textile workers busy with spinning, weaving, washing, and painting of fabric. Administrative lists from the Early Dynastic to the Uruk periods indicate women working in the textile industry often under the supervision of other females. The textile production industry was managed by temples and royal palaces (Marsman 2003:407).

Women's contribution to production is not easy to determine as it is influenced by seasonal need and geographic, demographic, technological and political factors such as drought, war, and disease. The unusual ecological conditions of a frontline society required an intensification of female labour in both productive and reproductive tasks during the early settlement period of Israel which led to an intensification of female status (Meyers 1988:50-63).

A considerable number of women from the lower social classes were working in temple and palace workshops (Stol 2016:339). In the Ancient Near East, women often worked in the households of the higher and middle classes of society. They functioned as personal assistants to princesses and royal wives. In Egypt, female domestic servants were common (Marsman 2003:406). Certain women were free but many others were enslaved. Female slaves in the temple and palace workshops worked in traditionally feminine occupations such as cooks in the kitchen, pastry makers, and domestic servants.

---

<sup>28</sup> Iconographic evidence from Sumer show women milking cows and women as shepherdesses. Egyptian tomb scenes indicate women assisting men in grain harvesting, while women were solely responsible for harvesting flax (Marsman 2003:407; Stol 2016:344).

<sup>29</sup> Egyptian women were often recruited as part of the government *corvées* to support the needs of large building projects (Bryan 1996:40; Marsman 2003:407).

These women were all usually under the management of men. It is assumed that lower-class women must have helped their husbands in whatever work the woman could find in order to support the family. Women also seemed to have worked in agriculture, such as in the fields of the palace and temple. Women also cared for the animals in the palace and temple (Stol 2016:339).

Wealthy, independent women were always few and far between. They were always busy buying and selling slaves and real estate, and the hiring and renting out of houses and slaves. During some periods, women were the owners of taverns and general stores. In the Old Babylonian Period, the female tavern keeper was an important moneylender to her clients. Wives of the Old Assyrian traders managed a type of textile cottage industry and hired transporters to deliver their goods (Freedman 1992:949).

One remarkable woman that should be mentioned is the Nuzi<sup>30</sup> mother who, as the head of her family, was involved in more than 30 land purchases (Grosz 1983:203). This is, however, a special and limited example of women's esteemed economic positions.

During the Sumerian and Babylonian period, women were educated to work as scribes and as physicians (Stol 2016:367). In both Egypt and Mesopotamia, female scribes were rare. Despite this, the tutelary deity of scribes was a woman. Furthermore, the women who acted as professional scribes served only women (Marsman 2003:409, 411). Ancient Near Eastern texts barely mention female professional healers and female physicians<sup>31</sup> were uncommon. Records from Suruppak indicate a female physician acting as a witness. During the Old Babylonian Period, a female physician appears in the text from the palace at Larsa A Mari.<sup>32</sup> Letters mention a female physician who was negligent in taking care of the women of a harem.

---

<sup>30</sup> Stol (2016:306).

<sup>31</sup> Asher-Greve (1985:161) doubts whether the female physician would practice her profession independently.

<sup>32</sup> Stol (2016:340)

Texts from Old Kingdom Egypt specifically mention a female manager of the physicians (Peseshet). No female physicians are, however, mentioned in Egyptian texts from later periods. It thus seems that although women could provide medical care in their households, professional healing was reserved for males in both Mesopotamia and Egypt (Marsman 2003:411).

Midwives<sup>33</sup>, and wet-nurses were usually women, although “ordinary” women were most probably not assisted by professional midwives (Marsman 2003:413). In Egypt, Mesopotamia, and ancient Babylon, rich families and royal households had nurses to feed and care for their children once they were weaned at the age of three (De Vaux 1978:43). Women were also trained as singers, dancers and musicians, while the majority of the temple and palace staff were women (Stol 2016:367, 371).

### 3.6.9 Religious life

Little is known about how women experienced their beliefs and the rituals relating to their faith (Stol 2016:627). In Israel, a woman’s religious life is only known through depictions of male religious activities (1 Samuel 1:13-18). In some cases, her religious life is emphasised by a specific mention of women in combined references (Nehemiah 8:2; Deuteronomy 16:11). Deuteronomy 16 further mentions the wife in a single masculine address to the male household (verse 13). Incidental involvement of women in activities credited to the “people” or “congregation” or conveyed in “generic” male terms helps to sketch a picture to the reader, but may not be an accurate representation of the women’s definite participation, which may have been restricted or marginal. A woman’s religious undertakings may have been expressed in other forms that might have been kept from public evidence (Bird 1987:408-410). Explicit ritual attention is, however, given to women in relation to reproduction, with specific instructions for cleansing after menstruation and childbirth (Leviticus 12:1-8, 15:25). In the scope of public religious practices, female experts were confirmed in several roles, especially in sources from the premonarchic time.

---

<sup>33</sup> Stol & Wiggermann (2000:17) summarise the midwives’ duties during childbirth.

Women who publicly expressed their religious practices, include those who ministered at the gates of the tent of gathering (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22) and female prophets namely: Deborah (Judges 4:4-16), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20), and Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14; Freedman 1992:955).

Proverbs 31:10-31 does not explicitly state the religious life of the noble wife. No mention is made of any prayer life or temple visits. Her way of living and the way in which she goes about her daily activities and routine, indicates that this noble wife relies not on her own or her husband's strength. Proverbs 31:30 states that a woman who fears the Lord should be praised. The reader can conclude that the noble wife is religious and is not shy to proclaim her love for the Lord. Her relationship with the Lord is not subject to or in relation to her husband's relationship with God. The noble wife was able to do all the wonderful things that she is praised for in Proverbs 31:10-31 due to her unwavering relationship with the Lord and that she knows that her help, strength, and ability comes from God. She independently serves the Lord and portrays the God-fearing woman. The noble wife is therefore able to do all that she is praised for due to her relationship with God. One can deduce that the noble wife's success and praise is in line with her relationship with the Lord.

### **3.7 Text translation**

This study employed the Proverbs 31:10-31 pericope from the NIV and the RSV as these two translations are widely used; is easily accessible and written in understandable English. The use of two translations for the same pericope is to indicate that different translations make use of different descriptive words for the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31. She is often revered to as a noble wife (NIV) or as a good wife (RSV). These words appear to be the preference of the translators of the pericope and some translators prefer the word "good" over the word "noble". Readers of the pericope, especially in South Africa where there is no "Royal Family" as in countries such as England, the word "noble" is a foreign concept and not something that people can relate to. However, the term "good" makes the pericope accessible, relatable and identifiable for all readers of the pericope.

**Table 1: Comparison of Proverbs 31:10-31 in NIV and RSV**

<b>Proverbs 31:10-31 Epilogue: The Wife of Noble Character (NIV)</b>	<b>Proverbs 31:10-31 Epilogue: The Wife of Noble Character (RSV)</b>
<b>10</b> A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.	<b>10</b> A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.
<b>11</b> Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.	<b>11</b> The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.
<b>12</b> She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.	<b>12</b> She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.
<b>13</b> She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.	<b>13</b> She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.
<b>14</b> She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.	<b>14</b> She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from afar.
<b>15</b> She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants.	<b>15</b> She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens.
<b>16</b> She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.	<b>16</b> She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
<b>17</b> She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.	<b>17</b> She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong.
<b>18</b> She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.	<b>18</b> She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.
<b>19</b> In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.	<b>19</b> She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.
<b>20</b> She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.	<b>20</b> She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.
<b>21</b> When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.	<b>21</b> She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.
<b>22</b> She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.	<b>22</b> She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

<b>Proverbs 31:10-31 Epilogue: The Wife of Noble Character (NIV)</b>	<b>Proverbs 31:10-31 Epilogue: The Wife of Noble Character (RSV)</b>
<b>23</b> Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.	<b>23</b> Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.
<b>24</b> She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes.	<b>24</b> She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant.
<b>25</b> She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.	<b>25</b> Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.
<b>26</b> She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.	<b>26</b> She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
<b>27</b> She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.	<b>27</b> She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.
<b>28</b> Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:	<b>28</b> Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
<b>29</b> "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."	<b>29</b> "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."
<b>30</b> Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.	<b>30</b> Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
<b>31</b> Honour her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gates.	<b>31</b> Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.



### 3.7.1 Introduction

Proverbs 31:10-31 comprises a great wisdom hymn that praises the “capable woman/wife” (Van Leeuwen 1997:260). This is an acrostic poem, which means that the initial consonants of each verse follow the order of the Hebrew alphabet (Waltke 2005 514). The acrostic Psalm 112 is somewhat parallel to verses 10-31, but the Psalm describes a man who fears the Lord. Proverbs 31:10-31 describes and focuses on the woman’s wise and energetic activity; the poem is full of words of action. The common Hebrew word for “doing”, “making”, “acting” and “working” appears five times (verse 13, 22, 24, 29 and 31). It then culminates in a declaration stating that her works praise her (verse 31). “Capable” is an adjective that has the same meaning as the Hebrew word (*hayil*) translated as “strength” (in verse 3) and “noble things” (in verse 29; Van Leeuwen 1997:260).

A thematic envelope is created by this repetition, linking the two sections of chapter 31, creating an envelope or inclusion marking the beginning and end of the acrostic poem. The two poems in chapter 31 are linked by the care for the needy and poor, which both the capable woman and king exhibit. They each exhibit themselves in ways appropriate to them (verses 9 and 20). The phrase “capable woman” is only found three times in the Old Testament (verse 10, 12:4 and Ruth 3:11). It is significant to note that Ruth follows Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible (Van Leeuwen 1997:260).

This eulogy to the noble wife is not only an acrostic poem, but also arranged logically (Waltke 2005:515). The broad thematic divisions of the poem are as follows:

I.	Introduction: Her value	10-12
	A. Her general worth inferred from her scarcity	10
	B. Her worth to her husband	11-12
II.	Body: Her activities	13-27
	A. Her cottage industry	13-18
	B. Seam (or Janus)	19
	C. Her social achievements	20-27

III.	Conclusion: Her praise	28-31
	A. By her family	28-29
	B. By all	30-31

The rhetorical artistry of the acrostic poem reinforces its thematic unity. There is a logical progression from the introduction to the conclusion where the woman is praised by her husband. The conclusion is chiastically connected with the introduction by three catchwords. These catchwords are “wife”/“woman” (verses 10 and 30), “valiant”/“valiantly” (verses 10 and 29), and “husband” (verses 11 and 28). The seven-verse structure consists of two chiastically matched sections: the wife’s worth in general (verses 10 and 30-31) and her worth in relation to her family (verses 11-12 and 28-29). The listing of her activities proceeds logically from her income, which is based on her weaving skills, her trading abilities (verses 13-19), and her economic accomplishments (verses 20-27). Verse 27 is linked with verse 26 by the initial qualifying participle presenting the two sentences as one (Waltke 2005:515-516).

Mention needs to be made of two preliminary issues. The first regards the genre of the poem (Waltke 2005:516). The panegyric to the valiant wife belongs to the genre of praise hymns, found in the Psalter, especially Psalm 112 (Wolters 1988: 446-457).

Proverbs 31:10-31 and Psalm 112 are acrostics that use the “hymnic participle” and they both celebrate a person who fears the Lord (31:30; 112:1), indicating their God-fearing works, their wisdom (31:2; 112:5), wealth (31:16, 18, 29; 12:3) compassion and liberality to the poor (31:20; 112:4, 5), and a fearless attitude to the future (31:25, 112:7) (Wolters 1988:446-457). A few aspects do, however, undermine this view. Firstly the introduction of Psalm 112 begins with the praise psalms’ essential hymnic motive, which is a call to praise the Lord. The motive is, however, lacking in the introduction. Secondly, the ‘hymnic participle’ usually begins and dominates the body of praise psalms, but it only occurs once in verse 27 and draws the main body to a conclusion and its function is to qualify verse 26 and not verse 10. Finally, the lexical similarities do not establish a formal identity between the poems and the hymns of Israel (Waltke 2005:516).

Wolters (1988:456-457) classifies Proverbs 31:10-31 as belonging to the heroic poetry of Israel. These heroic poems are characterised by recounting the mighty deeds of the heroes, usually their military endeavours. The heroic poem functions as a polemic, first against the praise of women in Ancient Near Eastern literature. It counters writings that are preoccupied with “the physical charms of women from an erotic point of view” with a celebration of “her activity in the ordinary affairs of family, community and business life” (Wolters 1988:456-457). Even King Lemuel’s mother deflates physical beauty as being praiseworthy (verse 30). Subtly and indirectly the heroic poem also critiques “Hellenism’s intellectual ideals” (Wolters 1988:457).

The aim of the eulogy is not to praise an abstract theoretical wisdom that is rooted in impartial rationality but a “practical and concrete wisdom that is rooted in the fear of the Lord” (Wolters 1988:457). This can indicate a dispute against the ideal wife’s counterpart in the Greek literature of the classical and Hellenistic periods (Waltke 2005:517). Waegeman (1989:101-107) states that the Greek literature mentions the silent, “homebody” spouse, that is unlike the ideal wife in this Hebrew heroic poem who is diligent, “takes charge”, is engaged in profit-making ventures, and who is also a philanthropist and wise teacher. The heroic poem, as in rabbinic literature, redefines (*gebûrâ*) from a “heroic prowess” to “academic and moral victories” (Marks 1983:181-194; Wolters 1988:457). The heroism of the battlefield is interchanged in this case to a woman’s *vita activa* (active life) in her community and home (Wolters 1988:457).

Moore (1994:18) adds that the poems use of military images to describe how the domestic sphere presents the godly wife “as a spiritual heir of Israel’s ancient heroes” and “a champion for those around her diligent application of wisdom”. The brave wife is thus seen as a heroic figure that is used by God to do good deeds for His people just as the ancient kings and judges did for God’s people through their heroic military endeavours (Moore 1994:18).

The question then arises as to whether the valiant wife personifies wisdom like the Woman Wisdom in the prologue (Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6) or does she model an ideal for a real wife who incarnates wisdom.

If this woman/wife is an allegory for wisdom, then the son who embraces her as a wife receives the strength to provide for his family (verse 4:4-9). If this woman/wife represents a woman as real as Ruth, who is praised in the gates as “a valiant woman” (Ruth 3:11; Proverbs 2:10), she emerges as an important contributor to the economy of the community and her family. Her economic contributions enable her husband to play a prominent role in the public domain (Waltke 2005:517).

McCreesh (1985:25-46) rejects such a literal interpretation, because that leaves the husband with little or even nothing to do. McCreesh (1985:25-46) argues for a symbolic interpretation by indicating the valiant wife’s adherence to the sapiential values. Just like Woman Wisdom and the values she represents, the wife is valiant (verse 10; 14:1), rare (verse 10; 1:28, 3:13, 4:22; 8:17, 35), precious (verse 10; 3:13, 12:4, 16;16; 18:19; 21:15), trustworthy (verse 11; 3:1-6; 4:6, 8, 9 12; 10:9), energetic, not idle (verse 13, 27b; 6:6-11; 26:13-16), resourceful (verse 16; 1:4), strong (verse 17; 24:5), ever prosperous and wealthy (verse 18; 3:10; 13:9), soft-hearted towards the poor (verse 20; 3:27; 11:24-25; 14:21), invigorated (verse 21; 1:26-27; 30:25), a loving and wise teacher (verse 26; 8:14, 32), and devoted (verse 30; 1:7) (Waltke 2005:518). These similarities show that the woman/wife/heroine incarnates wisdom. Commentaries do not seem to indicate or prove that she is fictitious.

Woman Wisdom’s echoes that are portrayed purely on the symbolic register in the prologue of this portrait of the valiant wife are compatible with the ideal wife on the historical register (Waltke 2005:518). McCreesh (1985:28-30) does not argue convincingly that the wife is a symbol from the words and phrases of the poem. The exegesis that will follow later in this study will validate the traditional entity (Waltke 2005:518-519). Whybray (1994:154, 158) finds support for the symbolic interpretation with the return, in the book’s conclusion, to the prominent role of the feminine figure of the prologue of Proverbs. This *inclusio* is not a coincidence but functions intentionally as the frame of the book. It does, however, not follow that because the feminine portrait in the prologue is symbolic. The feminine portrait in this climatic pinnacle cannot be real. In Proverbs 9:1-6 Woman Wisdom is purely symbolic, but in Proverbs 9:13-18, the foolish woman personifies Folly (Waltke 2005:519).

According to Reiss (1997:141-148), due to the insistence of Protestants on the *sensus literalis* (interpreting the Bible in a literal sense), the valiant wife has been interpreted as a real wife. Most scholars of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century agree that this woman incarnates wisdom's ideals, without taking her out of the historical realm. If the author intended to identify with the figurative Woman Wisdom, he would most likely not have referred to her as "a valiant wife". The real woman is then denoted in, for instance, its occurrence in Proverbs 12:4. It is indeed true that in every other occurrence in Proverbs, "woman" refers to a real woman (Proverbs 14:1; 18:22; 31:3; Reiss 1997:141-148). Hawkins (1996:12-23) indicates two differences between the two female portraits in the book's frame. His interpretation supports the traditional view that Woman Wisdom is never clearly portrayed as a mother or a wife, unlike the valiant wife. Woman Wisdom is presented as a composite figure (teacher, prophet, and mediatrix). The capable wife, however, is exclusively a homemaker (Waltke 2005:519).

Contrary to the view of Hawkins (1996:12-23), the capable wife is not only a homemaker, but a hardworking wife, mother, and manager of her household. "She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar" (Proverbs 31:14). "She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness" (Proverbs 31:27). She supports her husband in his public work. "Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land" (Proverbs 31:23).

The panegyric portrays in a one-sided way that the wife is the only breadwinner of the family, just as the rest of Proverbs lopsidedly only spoke of sons and never of daughters. A more complete message of this type of literature is obtained by collating all the poems and proverbs into a coherent montage. It would be short-sighted of interpreters and readers to think that only the wife engaged in philanthropy (verse 20) and that she is the only one able to speak with wisdom (verse 26). The preceding pericope prevents such a misinterpretation (verse 8-9). It is also short-sighted to think that only the valiant woman tends to the domestic sphere, while leaving her husband with nothing to contribute. Earlier proverbs do warn the son against laziness and portrays him as gathering the harvest (Proverbs 6:6-9; 10:4-5), working in the vineyard (Proverbs 24:30-34), and caring for the flocks (Proverbs 27:23-27).

The paean of praise to the valiant wife indicates that her husband has founded the home on a sound economic foundation (Proverbs 24:27). This creates a context wherein the wife can settle down and function to optimal capacity (Waltke 2005:519).

It is evident that there is a mutual understanding and working relationship between the valiant wife and her husband. They appear to be a team who both strive for the same success and prosperity of the family and household. The husband succeeds in his work, more often than not outside of the household, which he ultimately does for the benefit of his wife and family. The wife can focus on her work, whether it is inside or outside of the household, in order to help her husband and her family to prosper and attain success. Both the husband and wife will then flourish in and outside the household.

According to Crook (1954:140) and Garrett (1993:228), the valiant wife is canonised as a role model for the whole of Israel. Wise daughters aspire to be like her and she therefore functions as a role model for women. Wise men want to marry her and she thus portrays the image of a woman whom a man can aspire to marry. All wise people strive to incarnate the wisdom she embodies in her unique sphere of activities. The reader should avoid emphasising a single application at the expense of another. The reader should not forget that, by nature, proverbial material is a set of examples that ask the interpreter to make the appropriate application to their own spheres (Waltke 2005:520).

The proverbial material in Proverbs 31:10-31 is only a set of examples that needs to be made appropriate and applied to the reader's sphere (Waltke 2005:520). This does not mean that the pericope should be used as a tool to point out a woman's shortcomings or inability to perform such skilful tasks as is portrayed by the noble (valiant) wife. The society in which the writer lives is often still used as a margin or tick list of skills against which women's abilities and performance inside and outside the household is measured. Times have, however, changed and modern women do not live in the same society as the noble wife. Modern women face different challenges than those posed to women in ancient times.

However, Proverbs 31:10-31 still has a place in the lives of modern women. The pericope should be used as a guideline and not as a measuring tool for women's ability or inability within the household or professional spheres. The noble wife can then be viewed as an attainable goal towards which modern women can work.

### 3.8 Text analysis

#### 3.8.1 Introduction: Proverbs 31:10-12

*10. A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies (NIV)*

*10. A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels (RSV)*

In Proverbs 31:10, the verse emphasises the love language of finding a wife and wisdom that is pervasive in Proverbs 1-9 (Van Leeuwen 1997:260). Van Leeuwen (1997:260), Waltke (2005:520) and Clifford (1999:274) opine that the rhetorical question "who can find?" aims to encourage the audience to find such a wife or to emulate her. The rhetorical question expects a hyperbolic answer: "no one". This is not because such a woman does not exist but rather that this woman is a rare find and therefore priceless, like Lady Wisdom herself (Van Leeuwen 1997:260). The rhetorical question equates the valiant wife with a treasure.

The description ("She is worth far more than rubies") makes it clear that this woman is rare, attractive, and exceedingly precious (Waltke 2005:521). This figure is based on an Ancient Near Eastern practice by which a man obtains a wife by means of a "bride-price."<sup>34</sup> This woman is precious, because she uses her ability, wisdom, strength, and valour to serve others. Such a wife is a gift from God and a man should seek her through faithful prayer (Waltke 2005:521). A man who finds such a wife finds a great gem and enjoys the favour of Yahweh. He inherits a house and wealth from his parents but a capable (valiant) wife is from Yahweh (Clifford 1999:274).

---

<sup>34</sup> The Old Babylonian texts speak of a *terhatu*. The amount for the bride-price was calculated in silver. The amount that was agreed upon could be linked to the price payed for a slave-girl. A young girl cost about five shekels and a woman ten to fifteen shekels. In the time of Hammurabi the bride-prices were much higher and could amount to twenty or thirty shekels (Stol 2016:117).

The question in the opening verse of this pericope can be understood as a question which is meant to state that a man who finds a good (noble/valiant) wife is in a very fortunate position as rubies and jewels are considered to be items of great value. The woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31 is far more valuable than any worldly goods such as jewellery, which a husband can ever own. She is so rare that a price cannot be named for her. She is invaluable and cannot be bought, because she is a gift belonging to God (Clifford 1999:274).

*11. Her husband is full of confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.*

*12. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life (NIV).*

*11. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.*

*12. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life (RSV).*

These verses indicate the good the wife does for her husband. The book as a whole is addressed to young men on the verge of adulthood and marriage (Van Leeuwen 1997:260). The statement “his heart trusts in her” indicates that his well-being is determined by the reliability of his wife (Waltke 2005:521). Just as the wise trust in God, so the wise husband must, on a human level, trust in his wife because she will “bring him good and not harm” (Proverbs 31:12). The word “gain” in this context contrasts with the ill-gotten gain of brigands. This term is quite unusual in this context and indicates that the woman is like a warrior who brings home the loot from her victories (Van Leeuwen 1997:261). Verse 12 functions as a seam between the introduction (verse 10-12) and the poem’s main body (verse 13-27). The word “All” is commonly used in summations, while the generalisation of verses 10-12 serves to prepare the reader for the specifics of verses 13-27. In these verses, the woman’s value to her husband and why he trusts in her are defined by the extent and the duration of “what she does for him” (Proverbs 3:30; 11:17), for example, the duties that she deliberately performs. “Good” is a metonym for all that is physically and spiritually beneficial and desirable in life. In the body of the poem, “good” is primarily defined in terms of her economic benefits. “All the days of her life” (Proverbs 2:19; 21:26; 23:7) indicates that at no point in her life did this woman fail her husband. This wife’s commitment to her husband’s well-being is true, constant, not temperamental, reliable, not fickle, and discerning (Waltke 2005:522).



The woman described in the pericope is a gift from God to her husband. It is no surprise that this woman will support her husband and work towards his greater good as a strong woman. Her strength makes it possible for her husband to do what is expected of him. If the husband did not have such a strong wife, he might not have been able to prosper and fulfil his duties in society successfully.

### 3.8.2 Noble wife – a portrayal (31:13-27)

In the body of the poem, the “noble wife” is now praised and her deeds listed which then defines her as “noble”. The listing of her deeds extends her value to the whole household and to the community. This includes the poor and needy in her community. Her contribution to the economy of the household indirectly empowers her husband to provide leadership to the entire land (verse 23). The thematic, syntactic and poetic factors combine to show that the body of the poem consists of two sections (verse 13-18, 20-27). Verse 19 functions as an almost invisible seam that stitches these verses together. Thematically, the first section lists her contribution to the family economy through the trade of her surplus textiles. In the second, section her obvious contributions to her family and community are listed on the specific economic bases. Syntactically, each verse in the first section begins with an initial verbal form. In the second section, however, an initial nonverbal form is used. The initial verse reappears in the conclusion (verse 28). Poetically, the first section develops according to an alternating structure, while the second section developed according to a chiasmic structure (Waltke 2005:522).

3.8.2.1 Her sources of income (31:13-18)

**13.** *She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.*

**14.** *She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.*

**15.** *She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants.*

**16.** *She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.*

**17.** *She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.*

**18.** *She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night (NIV).*

**13.** *She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.*

**14.** *She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.*

**15.** *She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens.*

**16.** *She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.*

**17.** *She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong.*

**18.** *She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night (RSV).*

The repetition of key terms highlights the alternating structure and underlines the argument that the wife's "cottage industry" is the economic basis for her trading to enrich her household (Waltke 2005:522).

**13.** *She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands (NIV).*

**13.** *She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands (RSV).*

This section provides a detailed account of the woman's great industry and wise competence in a dialectic of provision and acquisition (Proverbs 31:13). The wife carefully selects the raw material that her hands will work into cloth. She portrays a good understanding of the nature of things and she has a good understanding of the quality and use of the materials she acquires. The ending of this section forms an envelope with its beginning (*inclusio*), for her hands make yarn from the materials she sought.

Throughout the poem, cloth, clothing, and goods made from cloth are symbols of industry and intelligence. “House” is a keyword in this section (verse 5; twice in verse 21 and verse 27) – just as “wisdom” builds and supplies her house, the capable wife builds and fills her house with goodness (Van Leeuwen 1997:261).

The noble wife is not lazy; she works hard because she knows that her hard work will pay off later when she has to clothe her family. The noble wife prepares to fulfil the needs of her family and household. She is aware of what her family needs and makes provision with “willing hands” (Proverbs 31:13). The noble wife wants to take care of her family and provide for their every need.

**14.** *She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar* (NIV).

**14.** *She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar* (RSV).

The entire creation is encompassed by the woman’s scope of action (Proverbs 31:14). Land and sea both provide resources for her house as she brings goods from near and far. She is comparable to a trader’s ship fairing over the sea bringing her goods from near and far (Van Leeuwen 1997:261). Her weaving industry provides the economic basis for her trade in exquisite food from far-away places (Waltke 2005:524). Women in ancient societies who had acquired skills in weaving and spinning were admired and greatly desired. Israel was not a seafaring nation, but they made use of the Phoenician traders of Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos (Gottlieb 1991:286-287).

The woman in this poem appears to live in the rocky Judean hills. She probably bought the grain for her household from the Jezreel valley in the north, also known as Israel’s bread-basket. She is busy at night (verse 15, 18) and during the day (verse 12, 25). In verse 14 (RSV), there is, however, a turn from acquisition to provision (Van Leeuwen 1997:261).

The noble wife is willing to go to great lengths to fulfil the needs of her family. She goes the extra mile: “brings her food from afar” (Proverbs 31:14) to ensure that her family not only eats and get what they need, but also what they enjoy the meals that she prepares for them. She is aware and focused on what her family needs and enjoys, and she goes the extra mile to ensure their every need is provided for.

*15. She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants (NIV).*

*15. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens (RSV).*

This verse continues the turn to the provision for the household (Proverbs 31:15). It is important to note that this verse (of which the last phrase may be an editorial expansion) contains important links to other passages in Proverbs. One should rather speak of “portions” than “tasks” for her servant girls (Van Leeuwen 1997:261). Waltke (2005:524) is of the opinion that verse 15 is syntactically subordinate to verse 14. The figure of a preying lioness supplements the preceding figure of a trading fleet. “And she arises while it is still night” is part of the preying imagery and should not be interpreted literally. A lioness hunts for her food at night, but not a woman of aristocratic decent. This figure indicates that, in keeping with her character, she puts the well-being of her household before her own comforts (Waltke 2005:524). “She rises while it is still night” is parallel to Proverbs 27:27 and the reference to the servant girl<sup>35</sup> links it to the house of Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 9:3). Abigail is portrayed as an energetic and wise godly woman in 1 Samuel 25:42 and she also had “servant girls” (Van Leeuwen 1997:261).

This woman is prepared. She takes control of the food preparation by getting up early in the morning to ensure that her family is well-fed and has everything that they need. She seems to prepare the tasks she wants her maidens to complete in her household, while she is busy seeking the wool, flax, and food her family needs from far-away places. She needs the maidens to tend to the house while she is out purchasing land. Although this woman is very busy outside of her household, she makes sure that her household is still properly cared for through the household tasks she assigns to the maidens.

---

<sup>35</sup> The reference to the servant girls is only made three times in the whole of Proverbs (Van Leeuwen 1997:261).

**16. She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard (NIV).**

**16. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard (RSV).**

The woman evaluates and surveys a field to see if it is quality land and if and how it can be developed (Proverbs 31:16). The text does not indicate how the woman acquired the land because Israelite women were not allowed to own land (Proverbs 27:26; Van Leeuwen 1997:261). She carefully considered the land and bought it from the profit she made from selling the textiles she made with her palms (Waltke 2005:525). Van Leeuwen (1997:261) describes her as a military general that conquers her territory and subdues it (she takes it; the verb only rarely refers to buying; conquest can be found in Genesis 48:22; Deuteronomy 3:14). The Judean highland is as large as 10 acres and to transform it into a vineyard is a difficult undertaking (Ecclesiastes 2:4; Isaiah 5:1-5, 10). The highland is a rocky hillside that is not good for much else (Micah 1:6). The woman takes part in the task of “mastering the earth” (Genesis 1:28-29). From the “fruit of her hands” refers to the work she did on her textiles as well as the financing and planting of a vineyard to produce quality fruit. In her case, commerce and creation are combined in order to produce prosperity for her household (Van Leeuwen 1997:261).

The noble wife is a business woman. Although women were not allowed to purchase land, the noble wife’s husband may have involved her in the decision-making process. Once the noble wife had her land, she started to prepare and plant vineyards, not only for personal use, but also to sell in her business undertakings. This woman does not sit on the side-lines delegating work to others. She works in and on the land herself. She is thus ready to pull up her sleeves and complete the tasks at hand by herself and with the help of others.

**17. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night (NIV).**

**17. She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong (RSV).**

In this verse, the woman is represented as having the capacity, although she has servant girls, to do the required and sustained manual labour to plant a vineyard and manufacture textiles (Proverbs 31:17).

Women such as Sarah (Genesis 18:6-8), Rebekah (Genesis 24:18-20), and Rachel (Genesis 29:9-10) all show that women of high rank and wealth also did manual labour, even menial labour (Exodus 2:16); 2 Samuel 13:5-9).

In the complimentary parallelism which indicates her strong body parts such as “loins” and “arms”, the verses both represent her spiritual preparation for the hard work as well as her physical ability to accomplish it. The phrase “she girds her loins” metaphorically paints a picture of her gathering the strength that she needs (Waltke 2005:525-526). Meinhold (1991:525) states that it is like a belt that is tied around that specific body part in order to strengthen the entire body. The idiom “to bind the loins” means to get ready for some type of difficult or heroic action. This difficult action can be hard running (1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 4:29), an escape from Egypt (Exodus 12:11), or some type of physical labour (Proverbs 31:17) (Van Leeuwen 1997:261). Waltke (2005:526) opines that the metaphor points to her psychic and spiritual motivation as well as preparation to equip her powerful body. She is thus girded mentally and spiritually, which signifies that she both resolves to make her arms strong and that she has the endurance and strength to complete the task at hand to which she commits herself after cautious evaluation (Waltke 2005:526).

The noble wife is prepared to complete the tasks she has set out for herself. She is strong enough to complete the challenging tasks that lie ahead. Planting a vineyard requires physical strength and stamina due to long hours outside in the elements to prepare the land and to plant the vineyard. She is not caught off guard by the challenges that she will face while preparing and planting the vineyard. This woman is physically and mentally prepared for the task that lies ahead (Waltke 2005:526).

**18.** *She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night* (NIV).

**18.** *She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night* (RSV).

This verse describes the wife with language attributed to Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 31:18). “That her merchandise is good” is identical to the Hebrew in Proverbs 3:14 “for she is more profitable.” The verb in verse 18 (NIV) literally means “she tastes”.

The beautiful woman in Proverbs 11:22, however, lacks taste or good sense. “The light of the capable woman never goes out” refers in part to the woman rising early, while it is still dark (verse 15). It does, however, mainly refer to her adequate provision of oil for the lamp<sup>36</sup>, which keeps the lamp burning through the night as it is done in the temple. The burning of her lamp throughout the night is an indication of her enduring prosperity (Proverbs 13:9; 20:20; 24:20; Waltke 2005:527).

In the first part of verse 18, it is clear that the goods that the noble wife sells are of outstanding quality. Again, her good business skills and her ability to provide on many levels are emphasised by her profitable merchandise. She works well into the night but also wakes up early in the morning to prepare for the challenging day that she will face. “The lamp that does not go out at night” is possibly a symbol of how well prepared she is. She is always ready, wherever and whenever she is needed, day or night.

#### 3.8.2.2 Janus verse (Proverbs 31:19)

Verse 19 functions as a seam that unites the two sections of the main body of the acrostic, namely: her income (verse 13-18) and her production. Thematically, it forms an *inclusio* with verse 13, which brings closure to the unit on her textile manufacturing (verse 13-18). The Janus verse develops from the valiant wife’s selection of the raw wool and flax for use in her textiles (verse 13) to the actual making of the thread in reference to the spindle. The verse is syntactically linked to the second half by the line-initial, non-finite verbal forms characterised in verses 22-27 and the double chiasmic structure is apparent in verse 20 (Waltke 2005:527).

**19.** *In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers* (NIV).

**19.** *She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle* (RSV).

**20.** *She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy* (NIV).

**20.** *She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy* (RSV).

---

<sup>36</sup> Here one can compare the capable wife and her provision of oil for the lamp to the foolish and wise virgins in Jesus’ parable (Matt 25:1-13) (Van Leeuwen 1997: 261).

These two verses form a carefully constructed chiasmic couplet that forms the heart of the poem (Proverbs 31:19-20). In the Hebrew language, the woman uses both her hands and palms to produce and to provide for those in need. There is no evidence from the Ancient Near East to substantiate the use of a distaff. A distaff is also not grasped with both hands. In the Hebrew language, the word most probably refers to a “doubling spindle” (Van Leeuwen 1997:262). The word “distaff” and “spindle” occur nowhere else in the Old Testament and their meaning is ambiguous. Both objects are, however, used in spinning wool. A “spindle” is used in Mishnaic Hebrew but the context does, however, not indicate whether the writers mean a distaff or spindle (Whybray 1994:428).

“She puts her hands to” is an idiom connected to military mastery which reinforces the heroic character of the activities with which this woman busies herself. This woman’s provision for the needy and poor links her activity to that of King Lemuel (verse 9). The hands with which she produces also opens wide to provide (Van Leeuwen 1997:262).

Verse 19 discusses some of the work that the noble wife did inside her house, while her entrepreneurial skills and work outside of her household received much attention in the previous verses. Verse 19 indicates that the wife of noble character (NIV) worked just as hard inside her household as she did outside. Although she had maidens and delegated some of the household tasks in verse 15 (RSV) to them, she also cared for her household on many levels, such as taking up the spindle and distaff.

Hebrew Scripture (Leviticus 19:18) emphasises that one should love their neighbour (NIV). This is exactly what the good wife is doing. She is following God’s orders by providing for those less fortunate than herself. The good wife knows that all her prosperity comes from God and therefore she is able to spread God’s blessings to the less fortunate. In this act, she is portraying the character of God to those less fortunate than herself. She is an example of how a community should care for one another; it does not matter whether you are rich or poor, it is all about spreading God’s love.



### 3.8.2.3 Her production (Proverbs 31:20-27)

In the second section of the poem, its body (verse 20-27) shifts from the syntax of line-initial verb to the line-initial non-verb and itemises the woman's most palpable contributions to her household and the community in a chiasmic structure (Waltke 2005:528). The second part of the acrostic forms an envelope that begins with "no fear" and ends with "a woman who fears the Lord" (verse 30) (Van Leeuwen 1997:262).

**21.** *When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet (NIV).*

**21.** *She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet (RSV).*

In these verses, the focus is on the woman's provision for her household (twice in verse 21 and verse 27) (Proverbs 31:21). The verses specifically focus on the splendid clothes she makes, sells, and wears in her household (in contrast to Proverbs 23:21). Snow was an infrequent and delightful phenomenon for the Israelites, except in the mountains of Lebanon (Psalms 147:16-17). The presence of snow places the woman in the Judean hill country (2 Samuel 23:30; 1 Maccabees 13:22). The clothes that she wears allows for her to have no fear and she is therefore able to "laugh at the days to come" (verse 25; Van Leeuwen 1997:262).

The good wife is prepared for any circumstances that she might find herself in. In verse 21, it is clear that it is winter. She is, however, not caught off guard as her family are well-clothed for the cold.

**22.** *She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple (NIV).*

**22.** *She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple (RSV).*

The word "coverings" (Proverbs 31:22) is an exotic word that forms another link between the capable woman and the woman of Proverbs 1-9. It is in contrast with the wealthy adulteress in Proverbs 7:16 (Van Leeuwen 1997:262).

Although this woman does not dislike working with her hands, her clothes are made of the finest imported material. The byssus or fine linen was imported from Egypt. “Purple” is a foreign word of unknown origin. It refers to wool or clothes which were dyed purple with a dye extracted from the murex<sup>37</sup>. Just like linen, the purple dye was exported as a luxury item throughout the ancient world (Van Leeuwen 1997:262).

The coverings the good wife makes for her bed can be linked to the fact that it is winter and snowing. This woman knows that in winter she needs extra covers to protect her family from the cold. Coverings can most probably be translated to “blankets” as it is used today.

The good wife takes care of her appearance. She not only makes sure that her family is well looked after but she also takes good care of herself. Fine linen (verse 22) may refer to the noble wife’s good taste and ability to dress according to socially accepted standards. The colour “purple” used in her garments forms a link with a wife of noble character. She portrays queen-like characteristics and even dresses in the colour fit for a queen. She is the queen of her husband, household, business, and community. The good wife has a business and could therefore afford to wear imported material and dress like a queen.

**23.** *Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land* (NIV).

**23.** *Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land* (RSV).

There is no reason to think that the husband’s reputation directly affects the immaculate appearance of his wife (Proverbs 31:23). The husband is, however, known due to the wife’s successful enhancement of the family’s wealth. He is referred to as an influential and solid citizen (Whybray 1994:429).

---

<sup>37</sup> Tyrian Purple (Royal Purple or Imperil Purple) is a dye that was extracted from the murex shellfish that was first produced by the Phoenicians in the city of Tyre in the Bronze Age. The first historical record of the dye is found in texts from Ugarit and Hittite sources. This indicates that the manufacturing of Tyrian Purple began in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century BCE in the Eastern Mediterranean (Tyrian Purple 2016).

It is eluded that the husband was a well-known citizen. He was popular among his peers and enjoyed the admiration he received due to his wife's devotion to him, her family, her business, and the community. The husband was therefore well-known because of his wife and not because he necessarily achieved something exceptional in their community.

**24.** *She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes (NIV).*

**24.** *She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant (RSV).*

"Linen garments" are possibly from Egyptian origin (Proverbs 31:24). The phrase occurs in Judges 14:12-13 and Isaiah 3:23 but the meaning remains ambiguous. Scholars doubt that it is related to the English word "satin". The merchant is not a familiar Canaanite but most probably a Phoenician trader (Whybray 1994: 428-429).

The noble wife was praised for her fine linen clothing. She might have seen this as another lucrative business and capitalised on her fine taste by making and selling clothes.

**25.** *She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come (NIV).*

**25.** *Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come (RSV).*

In verse 25, the author turns back to the woman's clothes but metaphorically (Proverbs 31:25). "Strength and dignity" (although not in combination with each other) usually worn by the king (Psalms 8:5, 21:5) as well as Yahweh (Psalms 29:1; 93:1; 104:1). "She laughs" forms an envelope parallel to "she has no fear" (Van Leeuwen 1997: 262). For a second time, military virtues such as strength and honour are attributed to a woman. The noble woman's strength makes it possible for her to face the future with confidence. She is able to laugh at the future like a self-assured warrior (Clifford 1999:276).

Strength in this context can have two meanings. First, she is physically strong enough to plant a vineyard, trade with merchants, and make clothes to sell. Second, she is emotionally strong as her strength comes not from herself, but from God. Her dignity comes from the fact that she is a loving and caring person who also reaches out to the needy. Her dignity is evident in the dignified manner in which she treats the underprivileged. She is such a well-prepared woman that she has no reason to worry about the future. Furthermore, she is already prepared for the future and therefore she can laugh as she is ready for any challenges that may arise. There is nothing that the future can bring which this woman, clothed with strength and dignity, cannot address.

**26.** *She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue* (NIV).

**26.** *She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue* (RSV).

The verse forms the centre of the second part of the poem (Proverbs 31:26). The wisdom of this woman is clearly indicated by her actions. Although it is the main focus of the hymn, the phrase “opens her mouth” with wisdom (verse 23 (NIV); 24:7) once more links the noble woman to King Lemuel (verse 8-9). This indicates that she takes part in the splendid words of Wisdom. The phrase “teaching of kindness” or “faithful instruction” only occurs here in the Old Testament. If the first meaning is correct, it is possible to refer to Lemuel’s mother who teaches her son compassion for those who are destitute and afflicted. The capable wife practices what she preaches (verse 20) (Van Leeuwen 1997: 262).

The wisdom with which this noble wife speaks further emphasises the wife’s noble character. She does not gossip about others. When she opens her mouth, it is with authority and wisdom, which eludes to the fact that she might be an older woman. Another indication that she might be an older woman is that, when she speaks, it is with faithful instruction. She has gained experiences in life which she wants to share with those willing to learn. Her willingness to share her wisdom with others indicates that she wants other women to gain knowledge and a certain understanding about life.

*27. She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness (NIV).*

*27. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness (RSV).*

The verse starts with a well-placed bilingual pun (Proverbs 31:27). The first Hebrew word in verse 27 (NIV) forms a transliteration of the Greek name *Sophia*, which also means wisdom. The Hebrew word for wisdom occurs in the previous verse. It is possible to translate the line as follows: “The ways of her house are wisdom.” Verse 27 (RSV) can then be read as “and idleness [in the concrete meaning of “idlers”] will not eat bread”. Clothing, food and eating are recurrent themes in the poem. Metaphors for food and eating are used in verses 14, 15, 16, 18, and 31. Food provision is seen as a sign of wise diligence and not of idleness (Van Leeuwen 1997: 262).

The noble wife takes good care of her household. Her household is well fed (not only bread) as she brings food from afar (verse 14). Idleness or laziness can imply that you look to others to provide for you. In this situation, she is not lazy and thus does not have to look to others to provide for her household. Her hard work in and outside the household makes it possible for her to take care of the needy (verse 20). Verse 27 again emphasises that she is hardworking, prepared and focuses primarily on the prosperity of her family and household.

#### 3.8.2.4 Praise for the noble woman (Proverbs 31:28-31)

The poet concluded the encomium by rewarding the wife with praise. She is firstly praised by her household (verse 28-29) and secondly, the poet calls upon the community to praise her (verse 30-31). The poem’s introduction and main body focuses on the blessings she confers on her husband (verse 11-12, 20, 23) and her home (verse 15, 21). The conclusion, however, focuses on the mutual good they do to her. The husband praises his wife publicly for the good she has done. She “rises” to continue her tireless efforts for her household. They in return “rise” to praise her and honour her in public. The city gate, the place of her good works (verse 23-24), is now the place where the works of her hands are praised (verse 31).

She who is always concerned for the well-being of others now becomes the centre of others' praise and concern. Most notably, this woman who otherwise does "not fear," "fears the Lord" (Waltke 2005:533).

**28.** *Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her* (NIV).

**28.** *Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her* (RSV).

She is called "blessed" by her children, because she is just like wisdom, a source of blessings (Proverbs 31:28). "Children" can be a double entendre that can mean the works of her hands praise her (Van Leeuwen 1997: 263). Here it is suggested that the wife's fulfilment is not in having given birth or raised her sons, but in maximising opportunities on her husband's behalf. Her husband and sons now rise in her presence as a symbol of their respect for her. "And pronounce her blessed" signifies how much the father and sons esteem her as well as a declaration of her lust for life, living life optimally as God intended it. She is bequeath with the benefits of wisdom. "And praises her" can be linked to all humans that should be praising God (Waltke 2005:534).

The praise of her husband and children<sup>38</sup> is well deserved acknowledgement and thankfulness to the wife/mother for all she has done for her family and household. Due to her care and support, her family can prosper and flourish. Her husband is especially in a fortunate position. It is because of his wife's abilities and care that he enjoys high esteem in society. God should be praised by all just as the noble woman is praised by her husband and children (Waltke 2005:534). The noble wife's intentions with her hard and diligent work are to praise God. Her intentions were, thus, never to be praised, but to glorify God through what she did not only for her household but also for others.

---

<sup>38</sup> She may have had sons and daughters who all praised her as verse 28 refers to "children: and makes no distinction as to the sex of the children.

**29.** *Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all* (NIV).

**29.** *Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all* (RSV).

The husband's words of praise to his wife are quoted in this verse (Proverbs 31:29). The husband states the wife's incomparability with others. Similar idioms are used to praise Yahweh. In these idioms, "women" are literally "daughters" which in return reflect the "sons" in the previous verses. "Do noble things" represents the envelope structure of the poem, especially when it is combined with woman/wife in verse 30. The expression refers to the gaining of wealth (see Deuteronomy 8:17-18; Ezekiel 28:4) and to heroic military exploits (Numbers 24:18; 1 Samuel 14:48). This signifies that the "elders at the gate" are inspiring Ruth to "do noble things/valiantly" in the context of building a house (Ruth 4:11). "You surpass them all" is an idiom that often refers to some form of military activity. The levels of excellence, according to which the capable woman must be praised, are summarised in verse 30 (Van Leeuwen 1997: 263).

The noble acts of the noble wife can possibly be linked to her relationship with God, although not explicitly indicated or referred to in the pericope. That is why verse 29 states that she surpasses all others. She functions from a position where she relies on God and does everything in order for Him to be glorified. She is then immediately distinguished from her counterparts who might not have such a close and personal relationship with God. The noble woman functions from a point of complete reliance on God.

**30.** *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised* (NIV).

**30.** *Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised* (RSV).

In this verse (Proverbs 31:30) the transition from "you" to "she" indicates that the poet takes over from the husband (Waltke 2005:535). The verse can be seen as an implicit attack on the ancient but also modern valuations of woman focussing primarily on their sex appeal and outer beauty. Ancient literature that praise women, are consistently erotic.

The hymn in praise of the capable wife serves as a profound corrective to these earlier erotic references to women. This wife also does her husband good “all the days of her life”, which reminds the reader that a wife is and becomes even more of a treasure in old age. Most importantly, this woman fears the Lord. Her fear of the Lord is the ultimate source of her joyous and energetic wisdom. The woman’s fear of the Lord gives meaning, structure, coherence, and completeness to her life. A grand envelope structure is created in Proverbs by this phrase, not only with regard to women but also with regards to the theological key: the fear of the Lord (Waltke 2005:535).

Verse 30 can be interpreted as an instruction to men to not focus on a woman’s outer appearance as it can be misleading. A man should rather seek and pursue a woman who seeks God in everything she does; she must be a woman who fears the Lord. This does not mean that she should be scared, but it should be a fear that seeks God in everything and wants to praise and glorify God in all spheres of her life.

**31.** *Honour her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gates (NIV).*

**31.** *Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates (RSV).*

Verse 31 is a synonymous parallelism; its repetition adds emphasis. The poet changes from the imperative of a direct and personal address “you” in verse 31 (NIV) to a jussive of impersonal and indirect address “let them” in verse 31 (RSV). The variation (NIV) suggests that the poet addresses the authoritative citizens in the gate (RSV). The final words, “her works”, are a parallel that describes “the fruit of her hands.” Climactically, it summarises the woman’s wonderful accomplishments as it is listed in the poem. The woman receives so much praise for her work that she is publicly acclaimed and acknowledged. An appropriate climax to the eulogy of the poet is thus the writers move from citing the wise family’s spontaneous praise, to compelling everyone in the gate to praise her. The author does, however, not imply that adoration and praise for “true” beauty is wrong (Waltke 2005:536). “If we do not admire [what is praiseworthy], we shall be stupid, insensible, and great losers” (Lewis 1958:92).



The praise and honour that the noble wife will receive will not stop in her household but will move to the gates of the city for all to see. She has accomplished her goal to bring God glory. The praise at the city gates can once again be an opportunity to glorify God by a woman in a public space where women historically had no place. She flourishes where ever she goes, especially where the works of her hands and mouth puts God at the centre of the attention as “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10) (NKJV).

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The Book of Proverbs is meant for ordinary people. Proverbs invites the reader into an ancient and continuing conversation about what is good, wise and true in life (Yoder 2012:232).

The words of Lemuel (31:10-31) create a hermeneutical framework through which one can read the brief sayings in the sentence literature. The pieces plot the development of the addressee. They plot a journey of character that moves from the hearth (1:8-9:18), to the throne (31:1-9), to the noble home (31:10-31). The pursuit for wisdom is brought full circle by the poem. The opening of the book is aimed at a liminal, quiet son, who is being instructed in the basic socio-moral values. Proverbs ends with a married, noble adult who has merged the moral vision in the Book of Proverbs (Ansberry 2011:182).

The distinct compositions in the final collection of the Book of Proverbs signify the conclusion of the book’s pedagogical instructions. They develop a specific motif and highlight certain themes to form a specific moral vision for the recipient of the word. The vision not only emphasises the importance of certain qualities but it places a more distinct focus on the identity of the addressee (Ansberry 2011:183).

The courtly character of the collection is enhanced by the words of Lemuel (31:1-31). The words of Lemuel give a solid indication as to the identity of the addressee. The valiant panegyric counts the multi-layered activities of an aristocratic wife.

She is a woman who represents the ideals of wisdom and strengthens the image of her noble husband.

The concluding sections of the book form a hermeneutical framework through which the aphorisms in the sentence literature can be read. The framework together with the thematic movement of the material propose that the noble addressee who nurtures the moral vision presented in the book arises from his liminal state to accept a seat either on the throne or among the elders at the gate. In view of the discourse setting, thematic development and the courtly flavour of the book, the conclusion reached in Proverbs 31:10-31 and specifically the final verses, comes as no surprise (Ansberry 2011:183).

The author's intension with the detailed discussion of the dating, background, social and economic setting, genre and purpose as well as the intended audience of Proverbs 31:10-31, was to make it more accessible to the reader and to give the reader a better understanding of the context in which the pericope came to life. Proverbs 31:10-31 belongs to a specific time and place but that does not mean that it cannot make a significant and positive impact on the lives of modern women.

The purpose of searching for the woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31 is all about getting to know her better. The author intended for the reader to explore and discover the models, images, and/or realities that underlie her personification and shape her character. The origin of Wisdom does not lie in alleged mythological antecedents or abstract literary constructs, but in the concrete every day realities of women (Yoder 2001:111).

The noble wife is not a standard or measure women need to live up to. She is an "ideal" woman and the woman God wants. She is an example of how women must live their lives while they are pursuing a relationship with God.

It is clear from the analysis of the pericope that the woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31 does not really exist. She is a paradigmatic figure and her good qualities and values should only be used to inspire women to seek and emulate some of her qualities. She should be seen as a role model and the pericope must be used as a description of the role model other women can look up to.

In chapter 4, feminism and how it has developed over the years as well as its role in theology will be discussed. Specific mention will be made to a diverse group of women who played an integral role in the perception of women in South Africa. Specific attention will be given to African women and their relationship with feminist theology and Christianity. Proverbs 31:10-31 as an empowering text for all women will also be reviewed. A Northern Sotho (Bosadi) black woman's feminist re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 will receive special attention.

# Chapter 4

## Feminism and “woman of worth”

*Feminism isn't about making women stronger. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength.*

*- G.D Anderson<sup>39</sup> -*

### 4.1 Introduction

One cannot analyse a biblical text such as Proverbs 31:10-31 in which a woman's good deeds are praised and young men encouraged to seek such a “woman of worth”, without focusing on feminism.

Throughout the years, women have struggled to receive recognition as human beings equal to their male counterparts (Sandberg & Scovell 2013:3). Women of all races, ethnicities, and countries around the world have struggled to receive equal treatment and treated as equally ‘worthy’ human beings. Claassens (2016:xiii) opines that to be human, one must resist dehumanisation. Even in the darkest periods of humankind such as the ghettos, extermination camps in Nazi Germany, on the plantations of the American South, during the violent civil rights era, and during the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, women and men rose up to the challenge. They stated in many different voices: “Do not treat me like this. Treat me like the human being that I am” (Claassens 2016:xiii). “The dignity of being a human made in the image of God was manifested precisely in the bearing witness to the violation and in the protest against those violations, whether the assaults were physical, emotional or spiritual” (Mitchell 2009:4).

---

<sup>39</sup> G.D. Anderson was born in Montreal and is currently a teacher in Sydney, Australia. She has been writing poetry for the past four years and published over two hundred poems for a wide variety of audiences including children, mainstream, and underground publications (G.D. Anderson 2007).

This chapter focusses on the different struggles women faced over the years at the hands of Church leaders and their inhumane and now ludicrous reasons for keeping women from fully participating in all aspects of Church and community.

The origin of feminism will be discussed as well as how it developed throughout the years. The reasons for the creation of a feminist movement will also be discussed, with a special focus on how women of colour incorporated their own view of feminism within a new feminist movement called “womanism”. Special attention will be given to the female role models, especially women of colour who played an integral role in the abolishment of apartheid in South Africa and how this victory is now celebrated as Women’s Day each year.

The reader is presented with a feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 by a woman of colour. A distinction is made between the private and public spheres as it is presented in Proverbs 31:10-31. Attention is given to how the distinction between the private and public spheres has not only influenced the lives of the women in the Bible but continue to influence women’s lives and how women have fought to abolish such distinction in order for them to develop within both these spheres.

## **4.2 Feminist theology as a liberating theology**

Denise Ackermann opines that if one critically and systemically reflects on the corporate and private pain of sexist oppression in the light of faith and the liberation of women and all men into transformed religious constructs, one is engaging in feminist liberation theology (Ackermann, Draper & Mashinini 1991:xvi). This will enable men and women to contribute to naming and shaping their experiences and truths so that all people’s humanity is acknowledged in unbiased and loving faith practices. Feminist liberation theology is a branch of theology that is concerned with women being liberated from everything that discriminates against and oppresses them. Feminist liberation theology lays immense emphasis on the notion that personal freedom requires communal responsibility (Grey 2007:105-106).

The words “feminist” or “feminist theology” often brings elements of bafflement, curiosity, interest, and even hostility to mind. Women and men from Africa and around the world tend to have a vast range of responses to these words. In the last 35 years, a revolution has been taking place which sociologists regard as the most vital of any revolution for the future of humanity. In both theory and practice, this revolution proclaims that women are truly and fully human beings. The dignity of women should thus be an intrinsic consideration in every way in which human beings structure their lives (Rakoczy 2004:4).

Feminist theology has political, economic, sociological, cultural, and religious elements. Women of faith are also involved in the transformative strategy to ensure that their understanding of God, self, and others within the context of their specific religious commitment also reflects the full humanity of women (Rakoczy 2004:4).

Within a Christian perspective, feminist theology forms part of a world-wide undertaking of women of faith to participate in a fundamental evaluation of Christian life. This fundamental evaluation means going to the roots and the foundations of Christian thinking and praxis (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1993:63). The question asked by Christian feminist theologians is thus whether the basis of Christianity is strong enough to support an innovative way of thinking, speaking, and acting that supports the full humanity of women (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1993:57). Feminist theologians also criticise past and present theology and praxis, challenging presuppositions, opinions, dogmas as well as the rest of the Christian life from the perspective of the dignity of women. The questions asked by feminist theologians are far-reaching: what do Christians hold as holy? What are some women and men afraid of and why do they critique this theological project of feminist thinking as unorthodox and threatening? Others seem to embrace the spirit of liberation as they begin to ask questions and follow the path feminist theology is taking with love and perseverance (Rakoczy 2004:4-5).

### 4.3 Feminist theology as a new way to practice theology

Feminist theology forms part of the family of liberation theologies<sup>40</sup> which began in Latin America in the 1960s. Liberation theology was developed by male Catholic theologians who studied in Europe. However, upon their return to their own countries, they found that their theological reflection was not relevant to the context of poverty and military oppression. The birth of liberation theology took place right after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This strand of theology launched a far-reaching transformation in the life and practices of Catholicism (Grey 2007:105-106; Rakoczy 2004:5).

A Peruvian priest, Gustavo Gutierrez<sup>41</sup>, is known as the “father” of liberation theology. In 1971, his revolutionary book *The Theology of Liberation* was translated into English. The book set out to make a novel and fundamental interpretation of the method and content from the point of view of the poor. Theology is defined by Gutierrez as a “critical reflection on praxis in the light of the world” (Sobrinho 1988:11).

Rakoczy (2004:6) and Berryman (1987:24) agree that every word in Gutierrez’s definition is important. If one looks at theology from a critical standpoint, one asks questions and do not see the past as a given. One should therefore stand both inside and outside oppressive experiences. The insider is one who knows what poverty is and what it means to be oppressed or to suffer at the hands of a discriminative society and Church. The outsider, however, may see the entire picture of discrimination and comprehend that the experience is not rare and distinct but forms part of the structure of social sin in its entirety.

---

<sup>40</sup> Liberation theology is theology characterised by a systemic disciplined reflection on Christianity and its implications. Liberation theology cannot be understood unless it is seen as a strand of theology that interprets Christianity as it relates to the experiences of the poor (Berryman 1987:6-7).

<sup>41</sup>Gutierrez wrote documents on poverty in the church. His framework was primarily that of Scripture and modern theology (Berryman 1987:24). He is now a member of the Dominican Order.

An intrinsic part of theology is reflection. The classic definition of theology as “faith seeking understanding” communicated by St Anselm of Canterbury<sup>42</sup> in the 11<sup>th</sup> century is not rejected by liberation theologians. Liberation theology sees reflection as a way of looking back, pausing, and discerning thoroughly. Liberation theology can also be described as a challenging way of practicing theology because it involves all of a person; their heart, mind and imagination is involved in a process during which one asks questions about one’s beliefs and how one acts (Rakoczy 2004:6).

Hanks (1994:663) regards praxis as the practice of a field of study or profession as opposed to the study of its theory. The word “praxis” allows for liberation theology to state its distinctiveness as a theology. Liberation theology proclaims that praxis and transformative action is inherent in its approach to life. Liberation theology is not a practise in the sense of repeating the same action. Praxis is therefore a participatory action directing change.

The phrase “In the light of the Word” makes the method of praxis distinctively theological. The foundation and hallmark of liberation theology in Christianity is the Word of God. The Word of God and the Bible is synonymous with a “two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12) that cuts through the layers of oppression and inequality characteristic of various contexts (especially in the lives of women), to expose the truth that will lead to transformation and justice (Rakoczy 2004:6).

Liberation theologians, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff from Brasilia, describe three mediations which are essential to liberation theology (Boff & Boff 1987:24-29). They make use of the “see, judge and act” methodology which they adopted from Young Christian Workers<sup>43</sup> and Young Christian Students groups<sup>44</sup>.

---

<sup>42</sup> Italian born theologian and philosopher known as the father of scholasticism. It is a philosophical school of thought that dominated the Middle Ages (Saint Anselm n.d.).

<sup>43</sup>Young Christian Workers is an international organisation founded by Reverend Joseph Cardijn in Belgium as the Young Trade Unionists. The organisation adopted its present name in 1924 (The YCW 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Young Christian Students is a Catholic movement of students founded in 1920. It has its roots in the development of several Young Christian Students national movements in Belgium and France (Young Christian Students (YCS n.d.).



First, socio-analytical mediation examines the nature and causes of oppression. When analysing the experience of poverty, theologians look for the causes of poverty in the actual context in which poor people live on a daily basis. Liberation theology selectively uses Marxist thought as a tool and three aspects of Marxism are used in the social-analytical movement. These aspects include: economic factors, which are important to society, the reality of the class struggle, and the influence of ideologies, including religious beliefs (Grey 2007:107; Boff & Boff 1987:27-28).

The use of Marxism by liberation theologians has led to some criticism. Liberation theologians, however, rebutted by arguing that they selectively use Marxism and not all Marxist principles. Liberation theologians, for instance, unwaveringly deny its atheism. They also proclaim that there is a class struggle in Latin American society and that the Marxist theory is helpful in understanding its origin and domineering dynamic (Grey 2007:107; Rakoczy 2004:7).

Second, “hermeneutics” in the context of hermeneutical inquiry refers to “interpretation” and is mainly used in the interpretation of texts. The notion also exists that we are acting, in many ways, hermeneutically in our daily lives. Human beings are in fact hermeneutical creatures because we interpret what we perceive, read, and experience in order to understand the world around us (Rakoczy 2004:6).

There are usually three aspects to interpretation. Firstly, the reader interprets a text, which includes the “text of life” as in experiential theology. Secondly, the reader brings a pre-understanding, which is a result of his/her own life context, to the text. Thirdly, people’s interpretation of the text broadens or reforms the meaning of the text, because the reader brings a particular life experience to his/her interpretation. Hermeneutics is therefore a process of understanding and interpreting (Ackermann 1997:xvii).

In hermeneutics, the Word of God is the heuristic tool. The focus is on what biblical texts relay about oppression and poverty in the whole of society, but also a group and individual experience of oppression and poverty.

In liberation theology, certain books of Scripture are considered more important than others, such as Exodus<sup>45</sup>, the Prophets, the Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Book of Revelation. Catholic liberation theologians find their hermeneutical resources in their body of Catholic social teachings of the last 110 years (Rakoczy 2004:7).

Third, liberation theology starts with involved action and advances to enduring transformative action, which brings us to practical mediation or praxis. Action emerges from faith, prayer, and deliberation, which are paramount to the Christian faith. Liberation theology is approached with a variety of committed actions. The professional theologian can practice liberation theology through his/her work that outlines broad areas for action. The pastoral theologian can practice liberation theology because he/she is in a close-knit relationship with the people and can propose specific courses of action. The popular theologian can practice liberation theology through his/her work in basic Christian communities. He/she decides with the people what local and practical action should be taken. Theological commitment is reflected by a person's commitment to the poor and oppressed (Rakoczy 2004:7).

#### **4.4 Liberation theology as an amiable method**

Not long after Latin American liberation theology started to take the centre stage in the 20<sup>th</sup> century theological movement, oppressed people in other parts of the world recognised that its methodology was applicable to their lived experience (Rakoczy 2004:8). This included women, although “despite talk of including the marginalised, women were not paid much regard or given much priority in Latin American liberation theology” (Isherwood & McEwan 2001:89). Ana Maria Bidegain of Uruguay and Columbia recalls that the women who participated in the liberation movements in the 1970s “were required to abandon our female identity. Anyone embracing the feminist theory, then being developed among European and North American women, was put in her place with the allegation that feminism was an imperialist theory calculated to divide and weaken the popular sector” (Bidegain 1989:27).

---

<sup>45</sup>The paradigm of liberation theology rests on the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian slavery (Rakoczy 2004:7).

Liberation theologies' inductive approach begins with people's true experiences of oppression thus making it possible for liberation theologies to travel to other contexts. Liberation is a concrete experience and therefore its methodology of action-reflection-action can be used in any situation of discrimination and oppression. African and Asian women also practice theology in response to the suffering they have experienced (Rakoczy 2004:8-9; Ruether 2004:14). Mercy Amba Oduyoye<sup>46</sup> (2001:22) from Ghana depicts contemporary African perspectives in which she describes how poverty has changed significantly from the traditional African norms of human interactions. It is unavoidable that African women's theology will imitate the poverty syndrome by working to build a liberating theology (Oduyoye 2001:22). Musimbi Kanyoro opines that culture is the primary concern in the theology of African women. She defines feminist theology as "protest theology" and questions whether God is not looking for brave men and women who are willing to promote change in some of the cultural traditions that devalues some members of their communities (Kanyoro 1996:9).

Korean feminist theologian Chung (1990:220) states the following: "Asian women's cries and screams, from the extreme suffering in their everyday lives. They have shouted with pain when their own and their children's bodies collapsed from starvation, rape and battering" (Chung 1990:22). Asian women, like their Latin American counterparts, have to cope with the claims by male theologians, who accuse them of conforming to white capitalist feminism of the West. Chung's (1990:22) response to this was that modern Asian women are delineating feminism for themselves in a context of their own.

Black theology can be defined as a theology for those who are dominated and therefore for the liberation of the dominated (Antonio 2007:81; Frostin 1988:87). Black theology as a liberation theology in South Africa is not interpreted in reference to the context of its authors, but in terms of its relation to external factors such as American black theology, the World Council of Churches, and Western political theology. The first seminar on black theology in South Africa was organised by Sabelo Ntwasa.

---

<sup>46</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye is the Director of the Institute of Women in religion and culture at Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon Ghana. She is affectionately known as the "mother of African women's theologies" (Mercy Amba Oduyoye 2016).

At the seminar, a black theology was developed that specifically related to the South African context. American black theology did, however, contribute significantly to the intellectual expression of the South African black theology. Black South African theologians can be characterised as participants in a conciliar process where they clearly acknowledge the influence of traditional theology, US black theology and Latin American liberation theology (Frostin 1988:89-90).

In the first phase of South African black theology, two theologians are of specific interest, namely: Manas Buthelezi and Allan Boesak. Other theologians who also contributed to the first phase, include Desmond Tutu, Bonganjalo Goba, Simon Maimela, and Mokgethi Mothlabi. During the 1980s, the list of contributors to black theology in South Africa included Itumeleng J. Mosala, Buti Tlhagale, Frank Chikane, and Takatso Mofokeng (Frostin 1988:92). During this time, the important role of women was rarely discussed. This could have been because of the social context of the theologians. Black theologians often stated that the voice of the black man is rarely heard in the Church. Arguably, this is truer of the voices of black women. Feminist concerns have, however, in recent years been given more standing in black theology (Grey 2007:111; Frostin 1988:94). The change in the recognition of both black and white women within the church and theology is discussed in section 4.15 Oeuvre of African women theologians.

Today, liberation theologies are prominent in Africa, Asia, among African-Americans in North America, the Dalit people in India, and women all over the world. Two features of liberation theology are particularly compatible with the apprehensions of women, namely: 1) the preference given to individuals and groups living in poverty and those who are marginalised by society (including women); 2) the Church as well as God's universal love for all people (Rowland 2007:2; Rakoczy 2004:9).

## 4.5 Patriarchy and feminism

When prejudice and power join hands, ideologies such as sexism, racism, and anti-Semitism are born. Personal prejudice, for instance Hitler's hatred of the Jews, became Nazism and an ideology of power, which cost millions of people in Europe their lives and led to the death of 6 million Jews. The power of government and racism lead to South Africa's apartheid regime and its interlocking discrimination and injustice of millions of people. Sexism is power and prejudice aimed directly towards women undergirded by constitutions such as patriarchy. "Patriarchy" comes from the Latin word *pater*, which means "father." The term means to be ruled by a father or fathers; the male is therefore the standard by which everything is measured. Women are viewed as subordinate to men intellectually, biologically, socially, and anthropologically. All women are viewed as fundamentally "less than" compared to all men (Rakoczy 2004:10).

Patriarchy<sup>47</sup>, which means "rule of the fathers", represents a legal, economic, and social system that justifies and imposes the sovereignty of the male as the head of the family and other members of society. Practically, patriarchy means that women, children, workers, and property are all subordinate to the male heads of families, tribes, and societies (Ackermann, Draper & Mashinini 1991:xvi). Viewing the patriarch as "the one who knows" leads to the muting of others across hierarchies of gender and age (Van der Westhuizen 2017:161). Patriarchy thus brings to the fore profound implications for women's personal, societal, and religious experiences. This is the reason why patriarchy is the central focus of feminist criticism. As women developed an understanding of the systemic nature of patriarchy, they have been able to analyse how gender, race, and class are interconnected in the preservation of patriarchy (Ackermann, Draper & Mashinini 1991:xvi).

---

<sup>47</sup> "Patriarch" is often used interchangeably with "androcentrism" and "sexism." Schüssler-Fiorenza (1993:214) distinguishes between both sexism and androcentrism. She argues that both sexism and androcentrism are ideological mindsets or legitimations created by patriarchy, and racism, sexism, and classism as structural components of a patriarchal society and ideology. Understanding patriarchy primarily as male supremacy and misogyny cannot express the interaction of racism, classism, and sexism in modern-day society.

At the foundation of women's humanity, and seeing it as totally defective, patriarchy is a belief system, a dogma, an opinion, and arrangement of human life that legally, socially, politically, and religiously imposes male power and dominance. Society, culture, and religious bodies, including that of the Christian Church, are all shaped around this principle (Rakoczy 2004:10). A society and culture built on patriarchal norms "is initiated by men in positions of power, continues to be maintained primarily by men, and has men as its principal beneficiaries" (Clifford 2001:18).

Patriarchy has a long and complicated history. The start of patriarchy in the West can be dated back to the thought of the Greek philosopher Aristotle<sup>48</sup> (384-322 BCE). Aristotle described society as a series of hierarchical interactions and therefore that the superior should preside over the inferior, implying that men should preside over women all the time and in every possible manner. However, such hierarchical differentiation leads to oppression and prejudice. Patriarchy can then be viewed not only as the foundation for sexism but also of many other "-isms" such as colonialism, racism, and economic classism which misrepresents and destroys relationships between human beings (Rakoczy 2004:10-11; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1993:214).

Androcentrism is central to patriarchy as it is the systemic nature of patriarchy. "Androcentrism" may be defined as "male-centeredness" and deep androcentrism is therefore revealed through patriarchy. "When what is thought of as being universally human is not determined by what women and men together understand and experience, but has been exclusively laid down, described and categorised by men, androcentrism prevails" (Ackermann, Draper & Mashinini 1991:xvii). It proclaims the false understanding that "male" is the standard of human life. Androcentrism proclaims that, to be truly human, you have to be male, making females inferior and a defective type of being that most probably is a divine mistake (Rakoczy 2004:11). "A woman is viewed as 'the other', the object whose meaning is determined for her by men" (Clifford 2001:20).

---

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle emphasised that the patriarchal relationships of household and state are not based on economic functioning and social convention but rather on "nature." He defined marriage as the union between "natural" ruler and subject. He did not view slavery as opposing human nature but maintained "that all human beings that differ as widely as the soul from the body...are by nature slaves" who must be ruled by the authority of patriarchy (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1993:214).

The interpretation of every aspect of human life by men, including religion, is accepted as the directive by men and many times by women as well (Rakoczy 2004:10-11; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1993:214).

“Kyriarchy” is a word coined by Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (2001:211) to describe patriarchy but is a much stronger word than for the system. The feminist term “kyriarchy” is derived from the Greek word *kyrios*, which means “master” or “lord”. *Archein* (to reign) is a “socio-political system of domination in which elite educated propertied men hold power over women and other men.” Schüssler-Fiorenza (2001:118) defines kyriarchy as “a complex pyramidal system of intersecting multiplicative social structures of super ordination and subordination, of ruling and oppression.” A black person in South Africa who experienced the total effect of apartheid in every aspect of his/her life, will be mistaken if he/she thinks that it was their fault. The recognition of the ideological power and force of patriarchy, sexism, androcentrism, and kyriarchy empowers women to stop condemning themselves for the oppression they experienced. The phrase “the personal is the political” is important to feminism as it means that an individual’s encounter with oppression is linked to that of other women. Oppression and injustice is experienced by women by virtue of them being women. Women do, however, also experience the authority of liberation together (Grey 2007:113; Rakoczy 2004:11).

Juliana Claassens (2016:67-68) is a professor in Old Testament theology at the University of Stellenbosch, where her primary focus is human dignity. In her studies on human dignity, she indicates that patriarchy is often associated with direct violence, such as rape and other forms of sexual violence. Claassens links her awareness of violence in a patriarchal system with John Galtung’s (1990:291) identification of three interrelated forms of violence, namely: (1) direct violence is found in acts of war or physical and sexual assault; (2) structural violence is systemic ways, in which individuals and groups are marginalised and exploited and prevented from reaching their full potential; (3) cultural violence is linked to those aspects of language, religion, culture, and ideology, which according to Galtung (1990:291), “make[s] direct and structural violence look, even feel, right-or at least not wrong.”

Claassens (2016:68) states that in Israelite society, for the most part, patriarchy was considered the norm. Women had little or no say or power in a system dominated and controlled by their fathers, husbands, and sons. The situation of Israelite women is captured well in Nancy Bowen's (2006:190) definition of patriarchy:

Patriarchy constitutes a form of structural or systemic violence against women by using the force of ideology and social structures in ways that harm women by failing, for example, to consider that women have the right to autonomy, including the right to construct culture, to control property, to maintain bodily integrity, to make their own decisions, and to express their own views (Bowen 2006:190).

Carol Meyers (2014:27) argues that the term "heterarchy" is more appropriate than patriarchy, especially when one acknowledges the existence of hierarchies within a patriarchal society. Meyers (2006:27) recognises "that different power structures can exist simultaneously in any given society, with each structure having its own hierarchical arrangements that may cross-cut each other laterally." Meyers (2014) and Schüssler-Fiorenza (2001) thus agree on the conviction that women in the Old Testament were not helpless victims, but were quite regularly in a position to exercise some measure of control and action (Claassens 2016:69-70).

#### 4.5.1 Proverbs 31:10-31 and a critique on patriarchy

According to Masenya (1996:145), a critique on patriarchy always informs the feminist reading of a text. Patriarchy and its influence specifically on Proverbs 31:10-31 will therefore be discussed in further detail.

Several feminists argue that Proverbs 31:10-31 benefits patriarchy. "As always in male-centred Scripture, the positive and negative roles of women are viewed primarily from the perspective of what they provide for the men involved" (Fontaine 1988:516; 1992:146).



Feminists are critical of the status of the “woman of worth” in the poem. Some are of the opinion that this woman is not independent but a provider for her husband and children. This assertion is supported by Fontaine (1988:516; 1992:146). The “woman<sup>49</sup> of worth” was good for the time she lived in. Women can therefore identify with this woman in a historical setting but not in the modern era. The “woman of worth” cannot be a role model for modern women because she is portrayed in terms of her relationship with her husband and children, implying that she cannot exist in society in her own right (Masenya 1996:146).

Family life is just one aspect of the “woman of worth” and does not have to define her. Modern women have choices and can decide for themselves how they want to be defined. The “woman of worth” portrays many facets from which a woman can choose to enrich her life; she does not have to be defined by one or the other. One must not ignore the fact that the “woman of worth” is also a business woman whose business dealings are not only for the family, but also for her benefit.

Some scholars of the text are ambivalent about the portrait of the “woman of worth” portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31. She is portrayed as a powerful and independent woman, yet she is defined in terms of her family, specifically her husband and children (Camp 1996; Carmody 1988:72). Depending on how the poem is interpreted, it can either oppress or empower<sup>50</sup> women (Masenya 1995:146).

The poem may be interpreted as having the intention of oppressing women as they are urged to conform to patriarchal ideologies. This is most probably true for communities where male domination is still the norm. The poem may, however, also be interpreted as an empowerment tool for women. All women are “women of worth” and every woman is defined by God and his perception of them. Proverbs 31:10-31 might historically have been used by patriarchal structures to oppress and allow women to question their self-worth.

---

<sup>49</sup> Anne Braude, a Jewish feminist scholar (in conversation with Masenya 1995).

<sup>50</sup> Oppress or empower. See telephone conversation Masenya and Camp (1995) (Masenya 1996:146).

Conversely, Proverbs 31:10-31 may be interpreted as empowering women to focus on God's image of them with all the facets (family, work, and household) that a woman can choose to define or could incorporate in her life if she so pleases. A woman is not less worthy when she chooses to combine a career and family life, neither is she less worthy for choosing to focus on her family and household over a career.

In 2018, movements such as #MeToo<sup>51</sup> are an example of women refusing to allow patriarchal systems to oppress and silence them. Proverbs 31:10-31 portray a woman who is powerful, independent, and praised by her family and community. The "woman of worth" would have arguably supported the #MeToo movement because in such movements women's worth are fought for and cherished.

On the one hand, Proverbs 31:10-31 sketches a paternalistic picture<sup>52</sup>. The poem does not liberate anyone. Waegeman (1989:101) and Lyons (1987:238) are, however, of the opinion that the "woman of worth" is independent and powerful.

This liberation lies in the fact that this woman is powerful and independent by way of her economical activities: purchasing land, taking care of all aspects of her household, and the fact that she is praised<sup>53</sup> by her family and the community. The "woman of worth", her family, and community are liberated by her actions, which ultimately lead to wisdom and reliance on God. The "woman of worth" is independent, powerful, and sets an example for other women to also be empowered and live an independent life (Lyons 1987:238; Waegeman 1989:101).

It is evident that some feminists regard Proverbs 31:10-31 as not having escaped patriarchal ideology. Feminists do, however, differ about the impact and extent of patriarchal ideology on the text.

---

<sup>51</sup> #MeToo is a movement to empower women who have fallen prey to the sexual abuse of men in positions of power. The movement was founded more than 10 years ago by Tarana Burke. Burke (2018) states that the power of a foundation such as #MeToo lies in the action women now take to not allow the oppression and abuse to continue in order to empower women to speak up and speak out about all forms of abuse (#MeToo Movement...2018).

<sup>52</sup> Ruether in a telephone conversation with Masenya (1995).

<sup>53</sup> "Let her deeds publicly declare her praise" (31:31 NLT).

Although patriarchal ideologies were imposed on the text in a variety of contexts and communities, women (whether they are feminists or not) can be empowered to gain wisdom and serve the Lord. The Lord should be the ultimate empowerment and liberation, not ideologies created by humankind to oppress those created in His image.

#### **4.6 What is feminism?**

“Feminism” is an umbrella term that is used to state women’s commitment to their struggles against oppression. The commitment is converted into practices of liberation for women from everything that oppresses them. Feminism is not for the benefit of any specific group, race, or class of women and it does not promote privileges for women over men. Feminism stands for a different consciousness, a perspective that radically transforms and questions social, political, cultural, and religious traditions; the movement calls for a structural change in all these domains (Ackermann, Draper & Mashinini 1991:xvi).

Feminism can be defined as a critical and constructive stance which challenges the patriarchal gender paradigms in which males are associated with human characteristics that define them as superior and dominant (rationality and power). Females, on the other hand, are viewed as inferior or auxiliaries (intuition, passivity). Feminists recreate the described gender paradigm to incorporate women fully and equally in humanity. Some feminists reverse the characteristics, usually attributed to men, making females morally superior and males more prone to evil. This view revalorises traits traditionally attributed to males and females (Rakoczy 2004:11; Ruether 2004:3).

Feminist theory and theologies commence with the experiences and bodies of women in order to encourage their full humanity (Ruether 1993:18; Schneider & Trentaz 2008:5). It is engaged in reforming human society, including religious institutions, in order to reflect that women are equal to men (Rakoczy 2004:11). Not many feminists have consistently been female-dominant in their views. The majority of the time there has been a fusion of egalitarian and feminine superiority themes. Ruether (2004:3) views the egalitarian impulse of feminism as the normative point of view.

Ruether (2004:3) does, however, recognise the reversal patterns as part of the difficulty in imagining a new paradigm in gender relations that is not based on a hierarchy of values.

The first person to use the word “feminism” is a 19<sup>th</sup> century woman called Hubertine Auclert. She used the word in order to name the struggle of women in Europe and North America to gain political rights (Clifford 2001:11). Auclert’s focus was primarily on political rights for women so that they could vote and own property in their own names which were the defining characteristics of the first-wave of feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Rakoczy 2004:12).

Women made important contributions to the reform movements. Women fought for the elimination of slavery, self-restraint, prison reform, better conditions for those who were mentally ill, and a transformation of the education system. Although these were small changes, it was significant when considering the infringement upon the dignity of slaves brought from Africa to the Americas, for example. It led to the recognition of women who were enslaved by the patriarchal structures of Church and society alike (Rakoczy 2004:12).

“Woman” is no longer seen as a stable category (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:5). Schüssler-Fiorenza (1999:4) states that it is not a “unitary category but is ambiguous and ideologically typed. The category ‘woman-wo/men,’ like those of gender, race, or class, is rhetorical-politically produced in the interest of relations of domination and subordination.” The co-existence of domination and marginalisation come into being in and through one another, therefore, complicating the lived experiences of human beings (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:5).

Schüssler-Fiorenza (1999:5) appeals for an extensive reading of the feminist theological agenda. In her interpretation, she describes feminism as follows:

One cannot just be concerned with gender inequities and gender marginalisation but must also address other forms of domination, such as, racism, poverty, religious exclusion, heterosexism, and colonialism, all of which are inflected by gender and inflect gender ... contemporary feminism is not only a political movement that is akin to other emancipatory movements but also an intellectual process for theorising the situation of wo/men<sup>54</sup> in kyriarchal<sup>55</sup> societies and religions (Schüssler-Fiorenza 1999:5).

Feminism and feminist theologies are not simply academic disciplines that are seeking to understand the gender structures that are at play in the world, the divine, and the self. They endeavour to change these systems in a quest for human and ecological prosperity. These theologies are involved in theory and practice as well as thought and action at both an academic and foundational level (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood 2007:2). The authors describe the commitment as follows:

This is not an ivory tower debate and the outcome are not simply nice conclusions on a page or in a report. Feminist theologies arise from the lives of all women and are aimed at expanding those lives through justice-seeking and right-relation; this is an embodied activity which loses all credibility when confined to the page (Althaus-Reid & Isherwood 2007:2).

#### 4.6.1 The first wave of feminism

Patriarchy has been challenged and questioned by women throughout history (Schneider & Trentaz 2009:794).

---

<sup>54</sup> Schüssler-Fiorenza favours the use of the signifier “wo/men” to elude to an essentialist reading of women and to link oppressed groups of men and women together, showing the connecting realities of systems of oppression (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:15).

<sup>55</sup> See Section 4.5, Kyriarchy.

The first wave of what developed into a modern Western feminist movement began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe and the United States (US). The oppressive institutions of the bourgeois family during this time period ignited the rise of the first wave of feminism (Hobsbawn 2003:279, 281). It was solidified in the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848 and continued until the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in which women achieved the right to vote in 1920 (Clifford 2001:268).

The Female Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1833 and criticised the inhumanity of slavery, while also campaigning for the right for women to speak publicly against slave labour within the Christian Church. A women's movement started in the US that included women such as Sarah and Angelina Grimké and the American freed slave, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)<sup>56</sup>. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), along with other women, produced a commentary on the Scriptures called *The Women's Bible* in which they indicated how women are oppressed in the Bible. Stanton, along with Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott, campaigned for the legal and economic equality of both women and men in the US. The inter-relationship of the first wave movement for women's rights, the elimination movement and the struggle for African American Rights was not an easy one. Both before and after the civil war (predicting the tensions between race and gender toils that would continue until today in the US), it is due to the persistence and hard work of these 19<sup>th</sup> century activists that women in the US gained the right to own property. It also made way for women such as Carrie Chapman Catt to earn women the right to vote in the US and actions lead to many women across the world winning the right to vote (Clifford 2001:11; Schneider & Trentaz 2009:794-795). Today, women vote in nearly every country in the world (Rakoczy, 2004:2-13).

The liberating effect of the actions from the first wave of feminism are still felt and disputed around the world today. Their achievements with regards to property rights and suffrage did not come without any compromises.

---

<sup>56</sup> Sojourner Truth who is famous for her "And Isn't I A Woman" speech described the double oppression of class and race that she and many other enslaved women were exposed to (Rakoczy 2004:2).

Successive movements or waves of feminism have, however, attempted to address these compromises. Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that the first wave of feminism “allowed itself to remain limited to a civil rights and educational struggle and backed away from a critique of socioeconomic relations and cultural stereotypes of maleness and femaleness” (Ruether 1995:24). The first wave moved away from its close connection to the struggle for racial justice. They were trying to use the “cult of true womanhood” to their benefit. The “cult” which argued that women (more specifically white upper and middle class “ladies”) were morally superior to men but arguing against the idea that women are too vulnerable to partake in the political arena. These shortcomings did, however, make way for new generations and a successive wave (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:795).

When South Africa’s present Constitution was accepted in 1996, the rights of women were protected without discord. After the right to vote was won in the early 1920s, the first wave of feminism withdrew. Challenges brought on by the Depression in the 1930s and World War II in the 1940s did not lead to a new phase in women’s liberation and the subsequent women’s liberation movement only began in the 1960s (Rakoczy 2004:2-13).

#### 4.6.2 Second wave of feminism<sup>57</sup>

After voting rights were achieved in 1920, much of the first wave movement disintegrated. Voices such as that of Simone de Beauvoir in France, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the US in the 1960s led to women noticing that inequality was not just experienced among African Americans. Women noticed that white women were still not socio-politically equal to white men (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:794).

---

<sup>57</sup> Second wave feminism refers, in general, to the rise of liberal feminism in the West in 1960. It was promoted by white, middle-class, heterosexual women. It later included socialist and radical feminism. Third wave feminism, although difficult to pinpoint, grew from a black and lesbian critique on the exclusionary and narrow-minded character of the second wave from the late 1970s. “Wave” of feminism is viewed as Western and has been criticised as only focusing on the white women’s resistance or excluding the black women’s resistance that preceded the first wave or that occurred in pre-colonial and colonial contexts (Van der Westhuizen 2017:214).

Second wave feminism that was shaped in the US by both black and white women started calling for an increase in political and economic rights for women, together with the Civil Rights Movement. Women stood together in protest against the Vietnam War. These voices extended their feminist interests to those of peace and justice beyond their immediate communities. A small group of female theologians who were taught in the Social Gospel, linguistics, and liberation theories started to realise that the ways in which women understand and experience themselves as women are related to how they experience and understand the Divine, how they relate to the Church or how the Church relates to them. These women started questioning the male-gendered language used to refer to God. The movement evaluated traditional theological treatments of Christology and Mariology to identify ways in which these doctrines helped or inhibited the quest for women's liberation. They read the Bible with new critical lenses in order to recover pieces supporting women's flourishing but also in preparation of a critique of patriarchal texts (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:795-796).

During this struggle, women became aware of the so-called chains that were still binding them. The movement demanded greater social and political equality in terms of work and remuneration, equality in reproductive rights, especially women's right to contraception and abortion, and for the recognition in law of the human dignity of women (Rakoczy 2004:2-13).

The influence of feminism on religious institutions makes the second wave of feminism all the more important. Women appealed for the right for their calling to the ordained ministry and to be recognised and confirmed. Protestant churches had been ordaining women for several decades. The call to ordain women in ministry was now made to the Episcopalian Church in the US in the 1970s and the world-wide Anglican Communion. This call was also made to churches in South Africa. The first ever gathering of the Women's Ordination Conference in the Catholic Church was held in 1975 in Detroit, Michigan in the US (Rakoczy 2004:2-13).



### 4.6.3 South Africa's women's rights movement

South African women have also had to fight for their rights and are still fighting in many spheres of life for their right to be seen, treated and accepted as equal to their male counterparts. The purpose of this part of the study is to provide the reader with a short background of South Africa's history and to focus primarily on the role women played in South Africa's history, especially in the women's rights movement in South Africa. The courage and resilience of these women paved the way for women to stand their ground and find a place in ministry and modern society.

#### 4.6.3.1 Women's rights in South Africa: the beginning

During the 1950s, women were standing up against the apartheid government's influx control measures and pass laws as the system's increasingly repressive policies began to pose a direct threat to people of colour. In 1952, women stepped up to join the Defiance Campaign. Prominent women figures in the Defiance Campaign include Florence Matomela<sup>58</sup> (Eastern Cape President of the ANCWL), Bibi Dawood<sup>59</sup>, and Fatima Meer<sup>60</sup>. Fatima Meer was an Indian woman who protested.

---

<sup>58</sup> Florence Matomela (1910-1969) was Eastern Cape President of the ANCWL. In 1950, she was angered by the new influx control regulations in Port Elizabeth. She was the leader of a demonstration in which the participants burned their permits and one of the first women who volunteered in the 1952 Defiance Campaign. Matomela spent six weeks in prison for civil disobedience. In 1950, she was the Cape provincial organiser of the African National Women's League (ANCWL) and the vice-president of the FEDSAW. She was one of the 156 defendants in the Rivonia Treason Trial, although the charges against her were later retracted. She was also prohibited and restricted to Port Elizabeth in 1962, whereafter she received a five-year sentence for advancing the objectives of the banned ANC. After she was released from prison, she was banned again and died under the banning orders in 1969 (Florence Matomela 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Ayesha (Bibi) Dawood's (1927-) political involvement started when she joined the local trade union to organise a strike against the unjust laws in May 1951. By 1953, she was sent to Copenhagen, Denmark, by the Committee of Women (a predecessor of FEDSAW) to attend the Women's International Democratic Conference where she spoke of the political situation in South Africa. After she returned to South Africa, Dawood was arrested for incitement in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act in 1954. She was later detained for high treason in 1956. In 1968, Dawood and her husband were deported to India because she refused to work with the apartheid forces. She spent more than 20 years in India before she returned to South Africa in the 1990s (Ayesha (Bibi) Dawood's 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Fatima Meer (1928-2010) was an apartheid and human rights activist, educator, and author. From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she was one of the most prominent female political leaders in South Africa. In 1952, she organised and spoke at the Defiance Campaign, a multi-racial disobedience protest against apartheid laws. Meer was the first woman in South Africa to be banned. Despite this, she was a founding member of FEDSAW in 1954 (Fatima Meer 2011).

They were arrested and banned due to their role in the protests. Lilian Ngoyi<sup>61</sup> was one of the most popular women to come to the fore during the Defiance Campaign; she later became the president of the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) and Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW). In April 1953, Florence Matomela, Frances Baard<sup>62</sup> (a leading local figure in the Food and Canning Worker's Union (FCWU), and Ray Alexander<sup>63</sup> (the general secretary of the FCWU) decided that the time was right to form a national women's organisation. The meeting to discuss the formation of a women's organisation was attended by about 40 women but unfortunately there is no formal record of this meeting. The meeting was also *inter alia* attended by Mrs Pillay, Miss Damons, and Ms Gus Coe; most of the attendees were Africans. Ray Alexander noted that it would have been to the movement's advantage to have an umbrella body that could fight against the issues of importance to women. These issues were every day matters such as rising food and transport costs, passes, and influx control (Gasa 2007:212; Frates 1993:27; The turbulent 1950's – women as deviant activists 2011).

---

<sup>61</sup> Lilian Masediba Ngoyi (1911-1980) was known as the "mother of the black resistance". On 9 August 1956, she led the women's anti-pass march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. She held thousands of petitions in her hand and knocked on the door of Prime Minister Strijdom in order to hand over the petitions. In December 1956, she was arrested for high treason with 156 other leading people and stood trial until 1961. She was affectionately known as "Ma Ngoyi" and died of a heart attack at the age of 69 (Lillian Masediba Ngoyi 2011; Möller 2010:70-72).

<sup>62</sup> Frances Baard (1909-1997) was recruited by the African FCWU in 1948 and was later employed as the union secretary. There she came into contact with the African National Congress (ANC) and met Florence Matomela. In 1950, in Port Elizabeth, Baard and Matomela formed the ANC Women's League. In 1954, both Baard and Matomela was active in building up the FEDSAW. In 1955, Baard became one of only a few female members of the national executive of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). Baard was one of 156 people charged with treason in December 1956 but in January 1958 the charges had been dropped (Frances Baard 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Ray Alexander (1914-2004) was originally from Latvia. On 6 November 1929, she arrived in South Africa and began to organise black workers' unions. She joined the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) at the age of 16. Ray was secretary of the South African Communist Party, general secretary of the Food and Canning Workers Union, and a founding member of FEDSAW. Ray also participated in drafting the pioneering Women's Charter (Ray Alexander 2011).

Ray Alexander was based in Cape Town. Therefore the initial planning of the conference took place in the mother city. Hilda Watts Bernstein<sup>64</sup>, a communist and political campaigner, headed the Johannesburg branch of the committee. Johannesburg and Cape Town became the main hubs of FEDSAW. Ray Alexander involved a number of influential women throughout the country, her individual contribution was, however, very important. All the main organisations were represented in her “women’s committee”, including the ANC’s Women’s League, trade unionists, members of the SAIC, the Transvaal All-Women’s Union (TAWU), and the Congress of Democrats (COD). Other prominent women who were involved in the planning of the conference were Ida Mtwana<sup>65</sup> (ANC Women’s League), Josie Palmer<sup>66</sup> (TAWU), Helen Joseph<sup>67</sup> (COD), Amina Cachalia<sup>68</sup>, Mrs M Naidoo (South African Indian Council [SAIC]), and three women from the trade union, namely: Bettie du Toit<sup>69</sup>, Lucy Mvubelo<sup>70</sup>, and Hetty du Preez<sup>71</sup>. Ray Alexander took it upon herself to go to Durban to coordinate plans with women in Natal (KwaZulu-Natal).

---

<sup>64</sup> Hilda Bernstein (1915-2006) was a member of the South African Labour Party League of Youth and the South African Communist Party. She was a founding member of FEDSAW and one of the main organisers of the Women’s March to the Union Buildings (Hilda Bernstein n.d.).

<sup>65</sup> Ida Fiyo Mtwana (1903-1960) was the first president of the ANCWL and elected to the African National Congress Executive Committee. Mtwana was also the National president of FEDSAW and one of the defendants in the Treason Trial (Ida Fiyo Mntwana. 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Josie Palmer (1903-1979) was a leading figure in the CPSA and an activist against apartheid in aid of women and workers (Josie Mpama Palmers 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Helen Joseph (1905-1992) was a founding member of the ANC’s white associates. She was also part of the COD and National Secretary of the FEDSAW in the 1950s (Helen Joseph 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Amina Cachalia (1930-2013) was a Member of the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC), treasury of FEDSAW, and patron of the Federation of Transvaal Women. She was arrested in 1952 during the Defiance Campaign and participated in the 1956 Women’s March against pass laws (Amina Cachalia 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Bettie du Toit (1910-2002) was a Trade Unionist and a volunteer in the Defiance Campaign. She was also banned (Bettie du Toit 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Lucy Mvubelo (1920-2000) was a Trade Unionist and became the General Secretary of the National Union of Clothing Workers in 1962 (Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo 2013).

<sup>71</sup> Hetty du Preez (no date of birth or death date available) was a no. 2 branch organiser and worked on launching a left-wing non-racial women’s organisation. Du Preez was a veteran trade unionist and part of the first National Executive Committee of FEDSAW (Address by President Nelson Mandela ... n.d; Berger 2007:195).

The women who were consulted included Dr K. Goonam<sup>72</sup>, Fatima Meer, Fatima Seedat<sup>73</sup> (SAIC), Bertha Mkize<sup>74</sup>, and Henrietta Ostrich<sup>75</sup> of the ANC (Hiralal 2018:134; Magubane 2010:987; *The turbulent 1950's – women as deviant activists* 2011).

#### 4.6.3.2 Women's rights in South Africa: the Women's Charter

The Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) was launched on 17 April 1954 in the Trades Hall, Johannesburg. It was the first endeavour to institute a broad-based women's organisation. One hundred and forty-six delegates representing 230 000 women from all over South Africa attended the conference and pledged their support to the aims of the Congress Alliance. FEDSAW's specific aims were to bring the South African women together to secure full equality of opportunity for all women, irrespective of their race or doctrine. Their second aim was to remove all social, legal, and economic disabilities (Hiralal 2018:135; *The turbulent 1950's – women as deviant activists* 2011).

Hilda Bernstein presented a draft Women's Charter. This Women's Charter called for the empowerment of men and women of all races, for equality of opportunity in employment; equal pay for equal work; equal rights in relation to property, marriage and children; and the removal of all laws and customs that denied women such equality. The Women's Charter further insisted on paid maternity leave, childcare for working mothers, and free and compulsory education for all South African children. The demands stated in the Women's Charter were later integrated into the Freedom Charter that was approved by the Congress of the People (COPE), held at Kliptown near Johannesburg from the 25-26<sup>th</sup> of June 1955 (Hiralal 2018:135; *The turbulent 1950's – women as deviant activists* 2011).

---

<sup>72</sup> Dr K. Goonam (1906-1999) was a South African doctor and anti-apartheid activist (Dr Kesaveloo Goonaruthmunm Naidoo Dr Goonam 2011).

<sup>73</sup> Fatima Seedat (1922-2003) was a member of the Communist Party in Cape Town. She was also a member of the Natal Indian Congress and the African Nation Congress. In 1946, she was jailed for passive resistance in Durban (Fatima Seedat 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Nhlumba Bertha Mkize (1889-1981) was a political activist. She attended the Founding Conference of FEDSAW and was chosen as one of four National Vice-Presidents (Nhlumba Bertha Mkize. 2011.).

<sup>75</sup> Henriette Ostrich was a member of the ANC (no other information is available).

#### 4.6.3.3 Women's rights in South Africa: The Freedom Charter

Walker (1991:183) states that although FEDSAW was involved in the planning of COPE, women did not play a significant role in the actual meeting. On the 25-26<sup>th</sup> of June 1955, nearly 3 000 representatives gathered in Kliptown. Only about a quarter of the delegates at COPE were women. A few women, including Sonia Bunting<sup>76</sup>, spoke from the floor. Helen Joseph, who at the time was FEDSAW's Transvaal secretary, was the only female platform speaker. She proposed a clause on behalf of women for the need of houses, security, and comfort, including free medical treatment for mothers and young children. This clause was included in the Freedom Charter. Frances Baard, a leading trade unionist and fellow of the executive committee of FEDSAW, took part in the compilation of the Freedom Charter (Musiiwa 2012:77; *The turbulent 1950's – women as deviant activists* 2011).

#### 4.6.3.4 Women's rights in South Africa: the anti-pass campaign

In September 1955, the protest against the imposition of passes for women became the main concern for the ANCWL and FEDSAW. The South African government announced that they would start issuing reference books to black women from January 1956. Women were now politicised and well-organised into a resistance movement. They immediately rose to the challenge; they were no longer viewed as mothers constrained to their homes but they were independent and assertive South Africans. Passes endangered their basic right to freedom and family life and they were going to oppose it with vigour. They were explicit in their message to the government, namely that they will not stop until all pass laws, permits, and other forms of restrictions placed on them, were eliminated. They also demanded the fundamental rights of freedom, justice, and security for their children (Gasa 2007:215-217; *The turbulent 1950's – women as deviant activists* 2011).

---

<sup>76</sup> Sonia Beryl Bunting (1922-2001) was a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and a founding member of the Cape Town friends of Cuba group. She was acquitted in the Treason Trial (Sonia Beryl Bunting 2018).

Walker (1991:183-184) opines that the protests by women in the 1950s were indicative and that they had thrown off the proverbial chains of the past.

The demonstrations launched by these women were “probably the most successful and militant of any resistance campaign mounted at the time” (Walker 1991:183-184). The 1956 protest was the political climax, not only for the women who took part in the campaign, but also for the entire Congress Alliance (Walker 1991:183-184).

FEDSAW, which formed in 1954, began to assert itself during 1955. FEDSAW was now an accredited organisation within the Congress Alliance and had connections with other key women’s organisations including, the ANC Women’s League. A march to take place in Pretoria to present the women’s grievances was proposed for August 1955. The pass issue came to the fore in September 1955 and led to an increased urgency for the protest to materialise. This protest finally took place on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1955. Despite the protest being a huge success, the FEDSAW faced great difficulties such as police intimidation, and the banning of Josie Palmer a week before the protest. She was one of the main organisers. HF Verwoerd<sup>77</sup> refused to receive a multi-racial delegation. The City Council of Pretoria refused the meeting and held up public transport to make it nearly impossible for the women to get to Pretoria, leading to them having women to arrange private transport (Hiralal 2018:135; Gasa 2007:220; Meintjies 1996:54).

In spite of the circumstances, a crowd of between 1 000 and 2 000 women gathered at the grounds of the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The majority of women were African but white, Indian, and coloured women also attended. The bundles of signed petitions were handed to Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa<sup>78</sup>, and Sophia Williams – the main organisers who left the bundles of petitions at the office door of the minister.

---

<sup>77</sup> Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd (1901-1966) was the apartheid-era Minister of Native Affairs under whose authority the pass laws fell. As the prime minister of South Africa (1958-1966), he carefully developed and utilised the policy of apartheid (Hendrik Verwoerd 2018).

<sup>78</sup> Rahima Moosa (1922-1993) was a member of the Transvaal Indian Congress. Moosa helped to organise the 1956 Federation of Women’s March and was a member of the ANC (Rahima Moosa 2011).

After the demonstration, the then-government tried to downplay their influence by claiming (inaccurately) that the demonstration was successful because it was organised by white women. The central role played by women of the FEDSAW and the ANCWL, was evident in the election of Lilian Ngoyi to the executive committee of the ANC (Walker 1991:184).

#### 4.6.3.5 Women's rights in South Africa: the 1956 Women's March

The success of the October 1955 demonstration motivated women to continue with their focus on putting an end to the discriminative pass laws. The abolishment of the pass law became their single most important focus. The ANC identified itself with the women's campaign, stating that the pass struggle was not one for women alone, but for all African people. Huge crowds attended the anti-pass ticket meetings. The apartheid-era government started issuing reference books in white agricultural areas and smaller towns. Unfortunately, FEDSAW was not as present in these areas and the women were not well-informed. On 22 March 1956, the government issued 1 429 black women with reference books. Lilian Ngoyi and several men arrived in the town of Winburg in the Free State the following week. Ngoyi's presence inspired the women to march to town and publicly burn their reference books outside the magistrate's office. These women were arrested, charged, and told that they would not receive their monthly pensions without a reference book. This again sparked protests in all parts of the country. It became clear to FEDSAW that radical action needed to be taken. They decided to organise a massive march to Pretoria (Gasa 2007:218-219; The turbulent 1950's – women as deviant activists 2011).

#### 4.6.3.6 Women's rights in South Africa: Thursday, 9 August 1956

In one of the largest demonstrations held in South African history, 20 000 women of all races marched to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956. They wanted to present the then prime minister, J.G. Strijdom<sup>79</sup>, with a petition against the carrying of passes by women.

---

<sup>79</sup> Prime Minister Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom (1893-1958) campaigned for South Africa to become a republic. He supported and enhanced the government's apartheid policy (Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom n.d.).

Women, who led the march, included Helen Joseph, Albertina Sisulu<sup>80</sup>, Rahima Moosa, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Suzman<sup>81</sup>, Ruth First<sup>82</sup>, Charlotte Maxeke<sup>83</sup>, Sophie Williams-De Bruyn<sup>84</sup>, Florence Matomela, and Bertha Gxowa Mashaba<sup>85</sup> (Musiiwa 2012:76-77; Gasa 2007:220-223; 20 000 Women march to the Union Buildings in protest of pass laws 2011).

In South Africa, this famous march is remembered, celebrated, and honoured through a national public holiday on 9 August each year. This public holiday is known as National Women's Day and was first celebrated in 1995. The march was organised by FEDSAW. The federation challenged the notion that a woman's place was in the kitchen; they declared that a woman's place was everywhere. Prime Minister Strijdom was not at the Union Buildings to accept the petition, but that did not prevent the women of South Africa to send a clear public message that they would not be silenced and intimidated by prejudiced laws. The petition was handed to the prime minister's secretary. After the secretary received the petition, the women sang a freedom song, "Whathint abafazi, wathin' imbokodo, Strijdom!" ("You strike a woman, you strike a rock" see Hiralal 2018:135-136; Gasa 2007:221; South Africa celebrates the first National Women's Day 2012).

---

<sup>80</sup> Albertina Sisulu (1918-2011) was also known as "the mother of the nation". She was an anti-apartheid activist and devoted her life to human rights and human dignity (Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu 2011).

<sup>81</sup> Helen Suzman (1917-2009) was South Africa's most famous white parliamentarian and human rights activist. Suzman was the sole representative of the opposition party (Progressive Party) in parliament during apartheid (Helen Suzman 2011).

<sup>82</sup> Ruth First (1925-1982) was a member of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the ANC. She was a founding member of the South African COD (Pinnock 2012: vi, 12-14; Ruth Heloise n.d.).

<sup>83</sup> Charlotte Manye Maxeke (1874-1939) was an anti-apartheid activist. Maxeke was one of the first black women to graduate in South Africa and fight for freedom, for African women, from the exploitative social conditions (Charlotte Nee Manye 2011).

<sup>84</sup> Sophia Williams de Bruyn (1938-) is a founding member of SACTU. She was a full-time organiser of the Coloured People's Congress in Johannesburg and a leader in the 1956 Women's March (Sophia Theresa Williams de Bruyn 2011).

<sup>85</sup> Bertha Gxowa Mashaba (1934-2010) was one of the leaders and organisers of the 1956 Women's Anti-pass March. She was never discouraged by her gender in spite of patriarchy and racial oppression (Bertha Gxowa (Mashaba) 2011).



Since 1956, the isiZulu phrase “whathint abafazi, wathin’ imbokodo” (you strike a woman, you strike a rock”) has become the phrase that represents the strength and courage of South African women. They were a group of women that was marginalised by the society they lived in, yet they did not allow the oppressive barriers that governed their lives to withhold them from fighting for their freedom as well as the freedom of their families (Hiralal 2018:136; Gasa 207:221; South Africa celebrates the first National Women’s Day 2012).

#### 4.6.4 Third wave of feminism

A third wave of feminism was developed towards the end of the 1970s. Feminists started to draw attention to the differences that class and race make in the experiences of women (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:796), thus exposing the “whiteness” of the first two waves (Clifford 2001:12).

Women of colour started to articulate their own experiences and theological understandings. Womanist (African American) and mujerista/Latin feminist (Latin American and Hispanic) theologies developed in relation to the specific experiences and stories of African Americans and Latinas contributing their individual insights to the field. They held white feminists accountable and enabled the identification of mutual themes among the racially categorised feminist theologies (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:796).

Asian and African women (representing broader continental thought and experiences as well as specific cultures within these continents) started to give a voice to their experiences and theological understandings. It led to an enrichment of the discourses and themes in the field of feminism. Sexuality and the difference it makes in the experiences of women were addressed as critique of heterosexism within Christian theology as well as the emergence of structures of domination and marginalisation. The scope of feminist theologies was extended, again, to include non-human ecology. Theologians realised that human injustice is connected to ecological injustice and that women, across the world, bear the weight of the consequences of ecological destruction. Third wave feminists started to follow Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in urging feminists to recognise the linguistic foundation of power and gender.

The issue was no longer about making women equal to men but rather to recognise the problematic gender dualism and its termination of differences, specifically differences between women (Schneider & Trentaz 2008:796; Rakoczy 2004:13).

#### 4.6.4.1 Third wave of feminism and its language

The word “womanist”<sup>86</sup> is used by many African American women in the US to describe themselves. The term “womanist” (feminist of colour) was devised by the writer and activist, Alice Walker<sup>87</sup>, who opines that a womanist is “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people male or female” (1983:xi). Dolores Williams (1993:202) was critical of feminism, stating that feminism only meets the needs of white women who concentrated on gender. Williams was convinced that black women had different experiences of oppression because men of all races together with the contribution of white women were oppressing black women (Mitchem 2002:4).

Mitchem’s research disclosed how complicated the oppression of black women are as well as the naïve way in which their experiences had been diminished to race, gender, or class categories. It became clear to Mitchem that the bodies of black women had been exploited to such a degree that it could not be matched by any other group in society (Williams 1993:202). Mitchem stresses that “womanist” theology is especially concerned with the faith, survival, and freedom struggle of African American women. The term “womanist” differentiates African American women and their encounters of oppressive behaviour as much more multi-faceted than that of their white counterparts, because it also involves race and class (Rakoczy 2004:14). Theologically, “womanist theology is for and about black women” (Mitchem 2002:5).

---

<sup>86</sup> “Womanist” from “womanish”. A black feminist or feminist of colour. Womanist is derived from the black folk expression of mother’s to their female children: “You acting womanish”, in other words, like a woman. This usually referred to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or wilful behaviour, or wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered to be good for the person (Walker 1983:xi).

<sup>87</sup> Internationally celebrated writer, poet, and activist. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction (1983) and the National Book Award (About n.d.).

Latin American feminist theologians explained how they see the theological undertaking as follows: “the theological task is understood not as an activity extrinsic to one’s journey in faith but as a privileged way of co-responding to God’s first action in our lives”. The principal factor and predominant analytical category for women in Latin America are their daily lives because “our theological discourse reflects the conviction that daily life can and should be liberating” (Aquino 1998:104).

The term *mujerista* is used by Hispanic women to name the theological images of women in Central and South American countries, but who reside in North America. Other women use Latin terms to describe their theology. Asian, African and women of indigenous cultures all state their approaches to the work of theology. International conferences on feminism bears witness to the great diversity of feminisms in the modern era. Racial and ethnic backgrounds, experiences of poverty and wealth, different and unique cultural experiences, and the way in which the world’s religions dominate women, all form a complicated matrix of feminist concern. Linking oppressions, such as sexism, racism, sexual orientation, economic injustice, exploitation of non-human nature, makes the agenda proposed by feminists inclusive of all human concerns. The most important aspects of these theological attempts are to contribute effectively to the liberation of women. The liberation of women is a central principal of *mujerista* theology and its exploration of *lo cotidiano*<sup>88</sup> has been prompted by this obligation, a requirement imposed by the dangers women are exposed to all around the world. The *mujerista* is motivated by the need to contribute effectively to the liberation of women (Isasi-Diaz 2002:6; Rakoczy 2004:14-15).

It took 160 years, a few generations, and a step-by-step process for feminism to move from a focus on political rights to a concern with the full participatory rights of women in society and culture, to “an ideal of recreating humanity itself according to patterns of eco-justice, that is, of right relations at every level and in relation to all of reality” (Schneiders 2000:8).

Rosemary Ruether (1983:41-45, 216-232) identified three major paths in modern-day feminism, namely: liberal, socialist (Marxist), and romantic (radical).

---

<sup>88</sup> *lo cotidiano* translates to “everyday” in English (English Translator n.d.).

Liberal feminism focuses on the paradigm of development within a capitalist society and works towards political reform, equal rights, and improved working conditions, with the hypothesis that the current economic and social system of Western countries is still valid and can be transformed. Liberal feminism carries within it an affinity towards classism. It tends to identify the rights of upper-middle class white women with “women’s rights”. This view neglects the plight, interests, and needs of women who are caught in the economically oppressive web of the working classes, minorities, and poverty. The critique against feminism by minority women and working-class women identified feminism as part of liberal feminism (Osiek 1997:957).

Socialist or Marxist feminism follows the Marxist assumption that full equality can only be achieved by the incorporation of both labour and ownership (Ruether 1983:41-45). According to this assumption, full equality is only possible through the complete integration of women in the workforce, where they are in control of the means of production, and the exploitation of women is stopped. In the socialist experiences that have thus far been attempted, this has not been the case, due to the patriarchal family structure that has not given way to equality proportionate to the philosophy on which the public domain is based. Women in socialist societies carry a double burden: they are expected to fully contribute to the work force, while continuing to be the main source of domestic labour. The only clear way of moving away from this problem is to completely rearrange the reproductive and preservative functions of society in other ways than the traditional family systems. This is, however, an extreme to which very few societies are willing to go (Osiek 1997:958).

While liberal and socialist feminism are under the impression that equality between men and women can be reached through full participation of women in the public sphere, which was traditionally viewed as a male-dominated world, romantic feminism assumes the opposite. Romantic feminism celebrates the differences between men and women. They uphold the assumption that femininity is innately superior to masculinity by elevating feminine qualities such as sensitivity, creativity, intuition, and bodylines as opposed to the true female self which the main, rational, hierarchical, exploitative, masculine society continuously tries to inhibit through patriarchal dominance (Osiek 1997:958).

The mission of the reformist branch of romantic feminism is to transform the ethically and artistically inferior masculine world with a mixture of exceptional feminine principles. The radical division of romantic feminism asserts that its task is to withdraw completely from the male-dominated world with a pro-autonomy stance; this is the only way in which women can be saved from themselves (Osiek 1997:958).

The end result will, however, be a reversal of dominance and alienation, which are the major problems in the patriarchal structure. The result would be reversed oppression as the oppressed become the oppressor. The reversal of dominance, as proposed by romantic feminism, will hinder the advancement of mutuality (Osiek 1997:958).

Ruether (1983:216-232) introduces liberation-hermeneutical feminism as a fourth approach to feminism. The liberation-hermeneutical feminism attempts to incorporate the best features of the other three, such as the trepidation for human development and societal equality of the liberal feminists, the social criticism and devotion to the building of a just society by the socialist feminists, and the compassion for profound human values of the romantic feminists. It is thus important that liberation feminism transcend the limits of the other three types of feminism (Osiek 1997:958).

Liberation feminism focuses on the experiences of the oppressed, which will allow them to be free from the conventional contentment to which liberal feminism is prone. Their idea of a new society would eliminate patriarchalism, which socialist feminism could not abolish. True liberation feminisms struggle will not only be for the emancipation of women, but for all human beings in a community of affinity in which neither “masculine” nor the “feminine” dominates (Osiek 1997:958-959).

Ruether’s (1983:41-45) critique of liberal feminism, socialist (Marxist), and romantic feminism may be linked with third wave feminism which critiques not only male dominance and the patriarchal structure of society, but also in some instances white middle-class women’s oppressive behaviour towards black women. Ruether’s suggestion of a liberal-hermeneutical feminism supports third wave feminism in recognising that patriarchal structures should be abolished and that the focus should be on the humanity of all people and not on the domination by either males or females. The human dignity of all people should be the focus in societies around the world.

#### 4.6.4.2 Womanist or African womanist: A South African perspective

Madipoane Masenya (1995:149) uses the term “African Womanist Hermeneutics” to describe herself as a suppressed voice from South Africa, who speaks for all women, especially black women. “Women are the Blacks of the human race. Can they tell us then what or who are Black Women? Blacks of the blacks of the human race?” (Thiam 1993:1). Awa Thiam<sup>89</sup> echoes the feelings and thoughts of her black counterparts in South Africa (Masenya 1995:149). African women, despite being the majority, suffer exploitation. Despite the adverse socio-economic conditions and extensive oppression caused by kyriarchal structures<sup>90</sup>, they are not defeated. “My offspring are stronger than me for they have sucked the fertile milk from the bravest of the brave women. In poverty and in richness and in war I am still a woman. And I will remain a brave woman” (Jacqueline Williams 1990:24). The majority of these “brave” women come from Church or worshipping communities. In most cases, however, it is taboo for them to lead Church services and interpret scriptures through their own experiences. In South Africa, as in many countries all over the world, normative humanity remains male-dominated (Masenya 1995:149-150).

During the apartheid era in South Africa, black theology challenged the white man’s biased interpretations of the Christian Bible. Black male theologians<sup>91</sup> unfortunately failed to advance the interests of black women. After South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994, there was still a need for women to speak out. Masenya (1995:150) contends that most of these women identify, in one way or another, with the Christian Bible. Their survival is based on finding a message of hope and liberation in these texts. African women experience an ambiguity between male-biased interpretations of biblical texts and their lived experiences. Despite this, African women still hold onto these texts and to their God.

---

<sup>89</sup> Senegalese politician and activist born in Bamako, Mali (1936). Her first book *La Parole aux négresses* (1978), translated by Dorothy S. Blair as *Black Sisters, Speak Out: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa* (1986), dealt with some of the practices – such as polygamy, clitoridectomy and infibulation – by which millions of women are controlled (Busby 1992:32).

<sup>90</sup> See 4.5 Kyriarchy.

<sup>91</sup> See 4.4 Black theology.

The demands imposed on women by a highly industrialised society as well as the fact that women in oppressed communities are much more deprived than men, cause a situation in which people rely heavily on different crutches for their survival. Religious symbols and texts, thus, assume a very important social function among the oppressed (Sampson 1991:56).

Masenya (1995:150) intends to speak on behalf of these suppressed women as referred to by Sampson (1991:56). Masenya's intention is to propose ways of reading biblical texts that will help African women achieve complete liberation (Masenya 1995:150). Most of these women's voices were suppressed by unjust kyriarchal structures in South Africa. Under these kyriarchal structures persons are subjected to almost permanent positions of inferiority by others via racism, sexism, and classism. In South Africa, these constructs are rooted in the remains of colonialism, an unequal and segregated educational system, a racist political economy and patriarchal cultural traditions. Missionaries, who brought the Bible to South Africa, labelled almost everything "African" as heathen. African customs and names were labelled as "un-Christian". Kwok (1993:102) states that the missionary activities were seen as "the white man's burden for the [uncivilised heathens]." Kwok (1993:102) is also of the opinion that the Christian Bible is especially problematic for Third World women, because it was not only used against them, but also against their culture.

The new democratic South Africa calls on everyone to reaffirm and redefine herself/himself. Previously, the African culture was viewed as heathen and inferior. Masenya (1995:151) states that, as she was growing up, she was socialised to believe that she was inferior by virtue of the fact that she was an African. Africans, in democratic South Africa, have to redefine and reaffirm themselves as Africans. Africans need to know that God recognises them as complete human beings without the attachment of 'Christian', 'westernised', or 'civilized' (Masenya 1995:151).

Due to socioeconomic oppression and the culture of sexism, which discouraged education for young girls (it was only expected of them to get married), African women have been deprived of opportunities to become educated. African women's lack of basic education, such as literacy, resulted in them not being able to read biblical texts and therefore they are not able to critically read these texts.

Most churches are still male-dominated, even in post-apartheid South Africa. Women are not allowed to speak in these churches, purely because they are women (Masenya 1995:152). Due to the economic, political, and social hardships, the current situation of black women in South Africa is not the same as that of white women. Black and white women's reading of biblical texts will still differ (Masenya 1995:152).

It is important to acknowledge that black and white South African women interpret the Bible differently due to their experiences. This does not make one group's reading of the texts superior to the other. Different interpretations of the Bible can enrich women's lives and empower them. The different interpretations should enrich and empower South African women to stand together and focus on liberating each other, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Masenya (1995:152) identifies a link between the differences between black and white women and Hudson-Weems' (1981:3) comparison of feminism from an African womanist perspective. She concludes that an African womanist is not self-centred or female-centred, but rather family-centred; the African womanist is concerned with her entire family and not just with herself and her sisters. Masenya (1995:152) prefers to call black women who are involved in liberation issues "womanists" instead of "feminists". Hudson-Weems (1981:3) asserts that the term "womanist" recalls the improvised speech of Sojourner Truth. In the speech, Truth (1972:95) struggled with the dominant alienating forces in her life as a struggling African<sup>92</sup> in order to focus the attention on the "unknown" woman.

Hudson-Weems (1981:3) indicates that Truth was an associate in the struggle for her people. She was also a woman, who in contrast to her white counterparts did not receive any special rights in American society. This is reminiscent of the reality for black South African women as well. The author further argues that she prefers "womanism" over "feminism", due to the specificity of the term "womanism". The term "feminist" stems from the term "female", which includes plant and animal species. The female or human species is not merely female, but it is also a woman.

---

<sup>92</sup> African women in the mother continent and those in the movement (Hudson-Weems 1981:3).



Based on the reasons provided by Hudson-Weems (1981:3), the politics surrounding the origin of the term “feminism” makes “womanism” a term that she can relate to (Masenya 1995:152).

Furthermore, Masenya (1995:152) opines that feminism is racist in its origin, therefore she does not regard feminism as a suitable term for black women in their unique situation. The purpose of Masenya (1995:152), in highlighting the differences between black and white women, is not to widen the existing gap that has been created by history. In post-apartheid South Africa, black and white women cannot afford to widen the gap that has already separated them, as there is still much to be done towards the liberation of all women.

In order to advance the common goal of liberation, the two groups of women will have to be open towards each other and participate in cross-cultural communication. White women must be open to learn and adopt the liberative elements of the black African culture. Black African women must acquire a strong self-image knowing that they are full human beings as African women. There is no need for black African women to be Western in order for them to be complete (Masenya 1995:153).

Women of all races should learn to stand together and work towards the greater good of all women, despite cultural differences. It is these differences that will allow women to enrich each other’s lives and help them to stand together in matters that concern and influence all women, irrespective of race and colour. Women will not only be doing it for themselves, but for their daughters who can learn from their example. Women’s strength lies in their differences and the ability to work together despite their differences.

#### **4.7 Moving from feminism to feminist theology**

The crucial notion of feminism and feminist theology “is the promotion of the full humanity of women” (Ruether 1993:18). This “new” notion of women’s humanity did not exist in history, making the revolution in which women’s human dignity is proclaimed vital for the history of humanity.

The standard for determining the action of the Spirit of God in feminism is articulated by Elizabeth Johnson: "Whatever enables this (women's full humanity) to flourish is redemptive and of God; whatever damages this is non-redemptive and contrary to God's intent" (Johnson & Rakoczy 1997: 53-54).

As part of the group of liberation theologies, feminist theology begins with the experience of oppression. In the case of feminism/feminist theology, this extends to the oppression of women and the manner in which gender has been constructed by society (Rackoczy 2004:15). The hermeneutical circle of feminist theology is described by Rosemary Ruether as follows:

Human experience is the starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle. Codified tradition both reaches back to roots in experience and is constantly renewed or discarded through the test of experience. 'Experience' includes experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic (Ruether 1993:12).

Emancipatory praxis is the beginning and the objective of feminist theological contemplation. Women's experience as a standard for theology is paramount as it shows "how certain claims to universality in theology are really only claims for half the human race because the experience of women has never even been considered" (Young 1990:65).

Classical theology is logical; it begins with Scripture and the classical texts of Christian theology. Feminist theology, in contrast, acknowledges the perspective character of human knowledge. Where one "stands" makes a big difference in the process of knowing and articulating one's understanding. To be in the middle of male power is a different experience than being on the fringes of dominance. Experience is neither neutral nor universal. Experience is specific and therefore women's experiences differ according to country of birth, class, race, education, and religion. Feminist theologies' main focus is on diversity and the difference in women's experiences.

Jacquelyn Grant (1989) and Delores Williams were two womanist theologians who were the first to confront the use of white middle-class women's experiences as the point of departure for feminist theological thinking. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African women theologian, continued this challenge in proclaiming that while the experience of women being oppressed is a world-wide phenomenon, it is clothed differently and is voiced in different languages in Africa and on other continents in the southern hemisphere (Rakoczy 2004:16).

#### **4.8 Forms of feminist theology**

Clifford (2001:32-34) differentiates between three types of feminist theologies, namely: 1) revolutionary feminist theology; 2) reformist Christian feminist theology; and 3) reconstructionist Christian feminist theology.

Firstly, the revolutionary feminist theology is a post-Christian reply to patriarchy as displayed in the Christian tradition (Nunes & Van Deventer 2009:740). These women turn their backs on the Christian community because they are convinced that the dominating persona of God is male. The main tenet is that Christians continue to subordinate women in marriage and the Church. Christianity is viewed as inherently patriarchal and domineering to women. Mary Daly is an important theologian that supports this perspective (Keane 1998:123; Rakoczy 2004:16). Revolutionary feminist theologians opine that Christianity oppresses women and should therefore be abandoned (Clifford 2001:32-34). Furthermore, the Judaeo-Christian tradition is viewed as biased towards women and so profoundly patriarchal that it has to be rejected completely (Keane 1998:123; Osiek 1997:960-961).

Secondly, reformist Christian feminist theology shares almost no commonalities with revolutionary feminist theologians. They do not want to revolutionise Christianity or to replace God as he was revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Reformists campaign for minor changes within the existing structure of the Church (Nunes & Van Deventer 2009:740). This feminist theological view therefore seeks a middle ground between Protestantism and Catholicism.

These theologians desire some change and greater incorporation of women within Church structures and policy-making, but they are satisfied with their theological conventions (Rakoczy 2004:16-17). Followers of this form of feminist theology opine that they can solve the problem of women's subordinate status with methods such as inclusive translations of the Bible and a larger emphasis on egalitarian Bible passages (Nunes & Van Deventer 2009:740-741). They believe that allowing women to hold offices in Church and practice Church-related ministries will help to reinstate the place of women in the Church (Clifford 2001:33).

Thirdly, reconstructionist Christian feminist theology shares with reformist feminism a commitment to Christianity. Reconstructionists see the Bible as the means to reconstruct a positive Christian theology for women. They do, however, criticise the tradition of the role of women in and outside of the Church (Sawyer 1990:232). Reconstructionist feminist theologians seek a liberating theological core for women in the Christian tradition. They want to work towards a reconstruction or deeper transformation, not only of Church structures, but also civil society (Clifford 2001:33). Noteworthy reconstructionist Biblical scholars include Rosemary Radford Ruether, Phyllis Trible, and Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza. Ruether envisions feminism as part of a liberation movement for both males and females who are subjected to oppression (Sawyer 1990:232). Women's experiences are of the utmost importance because it is women's experiences that have been excluded from hermeneutics. This approach to feminist interpretation recedes on the assumption that not just women, but every human being, stands to benefit from this movement (Loades 1998:82).

#### **4.9 Feminist biblical hermeneutics**

Feminist biblical hermeneutics originated in the US at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The socio-cultural setting of the struggle for the rights of women charged an editorial committee with the revision of the Bible. They produced "The Woman's Bible" in two volumes. In the 1970s, the movement gained new momentum and has since developed enormously in connection with the movement for the liberation of women. There are several forms of feminist biblical hermeneutics and each one takes on a different and very diverse approach.

They do, however, all unite around a common theme: the liberation of women and achieving rights that are equal to those enjoyed by men (Paul 1993:69).

Three primary forms of feminist biblical hermeneutics include: the radical form, the neo-orthodox form, and the critical form. First, the radical form rejects the authority of the Bible. Radical feminist biblical hermeneutics upholds the view that the Bible has been produced by men merely to conform to man's age-old domination of women (androcentrism) (Paul 1993:69).

Second, the neo-orthodox form acknowledges the Bible as prophetic and possibly to the benefit of the oppressed and therefore women. This orientation is adopted as a "canon in a canon" in order to highlight whatever in the Bible favours the liberation of women and the attainment of their rights (Paul 1993:69-70).

Third, the critical form employs a more subtle methodology. It seeks to rediscover the role and status of women disciples within the life of Jesus and in the Pauline Churches. The critical form maintains that certain equality existed, however, equality has mostly been concealed in New Testament writings. The concealed equality in the New Testament became more apparent as a propensity towards patriarchy and androcentrism became progressively dominant (Paul 1993:70).

Feminist Biblical interpreters recognise that readers bring their own interests to the text in the process of interpretation. They do, however, go further by advocating and embracing feminist interests. Feminist interpreters commit themselves to actively developing a relationship between their work and social change (Sakenfeld 1989:163). A feminist reading of biblical texts or any other texts begin with a hermeneutics of suspicion (Paul 1993:70; West 1991:76).

The starting point for feminist interpreters of the Bible, however:

...is appropriately a stance of radical suspicion [...]. Feminists recognise in common that patriarchy was one of the most stable features of ancient biblical society over the thousand-plus years of the Bible's composition and redaction. Thus, in studying any biblical texts, feminists need to be alert not only for explicit patriarchal bias but also for evidence of more subtle androcentrism in the worldview of the biblical authors. Only such a frank and often painful assessment of the depth of patriarchal perception in the text provides an honest starting point (Sakenfeld 1985:55-56).

Feminist interpreters of the Bible are in agreement with regard to the two aspects of the interpretative process. Feminist interpreters do, however, differ as to the modes of reading of the biblical text (West 1991:77). West (1991:77) identified three modes employed by feminist interpreters, namely: 1) behind the text; 2) reading the text; and 3) in front of the text.

First, a "behind the text" reading attempts to recreate a clearer, more reliable picture of the life of women in ancient Israel. Biblical sources contribute to this picture and are themselves lit up by it (Sakenfeld 1989:62). The "behind the text" reading makes it possible to identify two related emphases. The first approach places an emphasis on a social and historical reconstruction of the text. The second emphasises the historical and sociological reconstructions themselves (West 1991:77). Carol Meyers, a feminist interpreter places the emphasis on a detailed historical and sociological reconstruction of the society behind the text as well as the life of the women in that specific society. She makes use of an interdisciplinary approach which includes feminist scholarship and social scientific research such as sociology, anthropology, and archaeology (West 1991:77).

The second approach of "behind the text" reading would endeavour to reveal the patriarchal structures and values as well as the male-centred concerns underlying biblical texts (Sakenfeld 1989:161). This approach will rely on the social and cultural reconstructions of feminist interpreters such as Meyers but their focus would be on the text as an ideological androcentric product.

Meyers' (1988:93,120) approach attempts to reconstruct the social situation of the women behind the text. Sakenfeld (1989:161) attempts to reveal the male agenda in and of the text against the reconstructed background of the text. A reading behind the texts, as proposed by Meyers and Sakenfeld, makes it possible to uncover androcentric processes and their products, namely the text and to recover the place of women in the world of the biblical text (Meyers 1988:23).

Second, the work of Phyllis Trible (1978:8) best explains "reading the text." According to Trible (1978:8), the best clue to the interpretation of the text is the text itself. This "literary approach concentrates primarily on the text rather than on extrinsic factors such as historical background, archaeological data, composition, history, authorial intention, sociological setting, or theological motivation and result" (Trible 1978:8). Trible (1978:8-9) opines that the "stress falls upon interpreting the literature in terms itself." Trible's mode of reading is committed to feminism "as a critique of culture in the light of misogyny" (Trible 1978:8-9; West 1991:80). It is a perspective from which Trible is prepared to read a selection of biblical texts (Trible 1978:8-9; West 1991:80). By employing a feminist literary mode of reading, Trible tries "to recover old treasures and discover new ones in the household of faith. Though some of these treasures are small they are nonetheless valuable in the tradition that is often compelled to live by the remnant" (Trible 1978:xvi).

Third, "in front of the text" is most notably advocated by feminist biblical scholar Sandra Schneiders. The scholar attempts to answer the following important feminist question: "How can a text which is not just accidentally but intrinsically oppressive of women open a world of liberating possibilities to the very people whose oppression it has legitimated?" (Schneiders 1989:3-4). Schneiders starts with an understanding of "the text as a mediation of meaning which takes place as an event in the reader" (Schneiders 1989:5). The text is a "dynamic medium" as opposed to a static object (Schneiders 1989:5); a text does not have only one meaning but has the potential to have a variety of meanings (West 1991:84). The meaning of a text is therefore not limited to its meaning in the past but includes what it can mean in the future. A text, specifically a biblical text, can project a possible future world. This can be the world "in front of the text"; a world that is proposed by the text as an actual possibility for the reader (Schneiders 1989:8).

The hermeneutics of transformation developing from such a reading “in front of the text” makes it possible to engage with the text, “which is neither surrender to nor mastery of the text. It is, rather, an ongoing engagement of the text in the process of liberation, a liberation of ourselves but also of the text from the ideology of patriarchy” (Schneiders 1989:9).

#### **4.10 Feminist theology and the voices of African women**

A burning question for feminist theologians is then how do or how can African women participate in the continuing work of feminist theology? During a public lecture at the University of Toronto in 1988, Mercy Amba Oduyoye was asked (in an aggressive tone) by one of the male attendees where the writings of female African theologians were. Her reply was that African women practice their theologies with their bodies. African women fetch water over long distances, they chop firewood in order to prepare food for their families, and they work in fields and in the homes of middle and upper class people, among many other laborious tasks. These activities of care and concern are the earliest theological decelerations of African women. Although these activities are extremely noteworthy, they are not adequate as contributions to the continued universal feminist theological dialogue. In 1975, The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) was founded in Accra, Ghana. At that time, only one woman was present as an observer. By 2000, however, Oduyoye was elected as the president of EATWOT (Rakoczy 2004:19-20).

#### **4.11 History of feminist theology in South Africa**

In September 1984, the Institute for Theological Research at the University of South Africa (UNISA) held a conference on feminist theology. It was the first time that feminist theology received any attention in South Africa. None of the women who spoke at the conference were feminists or multi-racial and were not representative of religious women in South Africa (Landman 1995:143).

The women who were invited to speak at the conference were surprised to learn that they were labelled “feminists.”



The newly coined “feminists” criticised the traditional theological language and voiced their opinion on the ordination of women in ministry. Some of these women theologians were, however, reluctant to get involved in feminist studies. A few of the women adopted the term “common-sense feminism”, which acknowledges the presence of women in academic theology. The presence of these women and their acknowledgement of women in theology were considered common sense. Common-sense feminism is, however, not considered a specific feminist contribution to academic theology (Landman 1995:143).

Common-sense feminism was still beneficial as it led to studies on women in the Church. In 1985, Denise Ackermann finished a Master’s thesis on women in various ministries. Lesley F. Massey (1989) wrote a book on female office bearers and leadership in the early Christian Church of South Africa. During the 1990s, most churches in South Africa decided to ordain women to ministry. This was unfortunately not achieved by the women themselves. The decision to ordain women was made by the male hierarchy of the Church, due to international pressure from their respective denominations. This was unfortunately an empty victory as most churches were unable to ordain women due to the economic recession. The decision to ordain women therefore did not contribute to the development of feminist theology in South Africa. Due to the absence of a real women’s ordination movement in South Africa, many women who were trained in ministry, but not ordained, were used as cheap labour in churches. Unfortunately these women did not have any institutional or strategic networks of support. The issue of whether women should be ordained at all is still debated among some Church institutions. The lack of support for the ordination of women in churches in South Africa leads to a participation in and support of Church structures that are hierarchical, sexist, discriminatory, and very often racist (Landman 1995:144).

In 1921, Marie du Toit, an Afrikaans woman, wrote a book entitled *Vrou en feminist* (Woman and feminist). It was the first and last time the word “feminis(t)” was used in the title of an Afrikaans book. Du Toit was the only Afrikaans woman of her time to plead for the suffering women faced at that time in history. Unfortunately, her book along with her plight for women was forgotten and her book is known to very few Afrikaans women today (Landman 1994:111).

Central to Du Toit's thinking was the following question: What is a natural lifestyle for women? Du Toit saw the socio-political restrictions, laid on womanhood as far as clothing, the right to vote, and other forms of self-expression as unnatural and unbiblical, since she opined that Jesus wanted women to be free human beings (Landman 1994:111).

The question as to what is "natural" to women is important within South African Calvinism because, on the one hand, it encourages people to liberate themselves from their natural tendency to sin and, on the other hand, local Calvinism urges women to remain within the natural boundaries of womanhood, which restricts them to the personal spheres of their homes (Landman 1994:111).

According to Landman (1994:113), Du Toit reveals an important difference between the male and female religious thinking of her time. Male theology centred on principles, while women's arguments centred on their experiences. People – not dogmas – and abstractions formed the bases of women's interpretations of the will of God. Du Toit viewed women's worldwide struggle to vote not as a seduction into individualism or an unchristian thirst for power. These women simply wanted to address the needs (and not yet recognised rights) of black and white women.

An important aspect of the early work of Marie du Toit was that she noticed as early as 1921, that both black and white women's needs were not being met and had to be and given the necessary attention. Du Toit was convinced that feminism should have a social agenda, which should be addressed on a political level (Landman 1994:115). Du Toit (1921:43) opined that political feminism should put the following social issues on the political agenda:

- Equal education possibilities for boys and girls;
- Laws which allow married women to have a say over their children;
- The abolishment of what Du Toit called "female slave trade" (the exploitation of the female workforce);
- State subsidies for needy mothers;
- Equal pay for equal work.

The concerns, as stated by Du Toit, are still matters of concern for modern women. South African women (as is the case in the US and other parts of the world) are still waging a battle for women to receive equal compensation for equal work (Van Zyl 2017:40-44 & Ebrahim 2016:1-28).

#### **4.12 History of black feminist theologians in South Africa**

During the time when white women were concerned with their positions in male-dominated Church structures, black women were working on the creation of their own space within black theology. In 1989, Bernadette Mosala criticised the silence of black male theologians on the issue of the oppression of black women. Mosala urged black women to stand up and liberate themselves (Landman 1995:144). A commentator on Mosala's work stated that "neither the church, nor black male theologians, nor white women can be expected to be sensitive to the human needs of black women" (Mosala & Tlagale 1986:129). Bonita Bennett and Roxanne Jordaan joined Mosala in launching the struggle to change ecclesiastical structures, instead of simply gaining access to Church structures as white feminists fought to do. Masenya, for example, has gone beyond the confines of black theology with her introduction of the term "womanist theology" (Landman 1995:145) as discussed previously.

Ackermann<sup>93</sup> (1997:63) declares that the future of feminist theology "is crucial to the future of the entire theological project in Southern Africa." That which is true for this part of the country, is relevant for the whole of Africa. If we do not include the voices and contributions of women in the development of an African theology, such a theology will be deficient and biased (Rackoczy 2004:20).

All women need to become involved in the development of an African theology that will be free from bias and that will benefit all women and men.

---

<sup>93</sup> Denise Ackermann is a South African Feminist theologian.

#### **4.13 African women and their relationship with Christianity**

Feminist theologians Rosemary Edet and Betty Ekeya<sup>94</sup> view Christianity as a “mixed blessing for the African women. It promised an elevated personal dignity and equality with the menfolk but never quite brought about the fullest enjoyment of this promise” (Edet & Ekeya 1988:7). Oduyoye’s (1995:183) discernment of Christianity’s role is even more explicit:

In my opinion, it is still debatable whether or not the influence of Christianity has been beneficial to the socio-cultural transformation of Africa – and I am most concerned with its effects on women. It seems that the sexist elements of Western culture have simply fuelled the cultural sexism of traditional African society (Oduyoye’s 1995:183).

Male African theologians who have used the liberation paradigm to criticise the discrimination of African societies are usually ignorant of gender (Oduyoye 1995:180-181). African men and women have diverse experiences of culture and religion. As liberation theology always begins with experience, it is of the utmost importance that they start with the experiences of African women when they practice theology. It is the goal of African women that their voices be heard on a wide variety of theological themes such as God, Christ, Scripture, spirituality, Church ministry, and other theological themes. Any theme that is important to women has profound consequences for the Church as a whole (Rakoczy 2004:20).

Women’s insight and alternative perspective of theological themes can have a profound influence on how these theological themes are viewed and interpreted. Women can contribute a renewed understanding of themes on God, Scripture, and Spirituality, which may ultimately lead to a different understanding within the Church.

---

<sup>94</sup> From Nigeria.

#### **4.14 Framework of African women's theology**

Oduyoye sketches a few important contexts, which has an impact on the methodology and ideas of African women's theology. "The primary context of women's theology, therefore, is that of an effort to make a contribution so that Christian theology in Africa will be word of both women and men, lay and ordained, teachers and preachers, poets and sculptors" (Oduyoye 2001:23). Life in its entirety forms the setting of this specific theological undertaking. Since the struggle to survive is so critical for the majority of African people, the theology of African women is a liberating theology that "bears the marks of the creation of people whose human rights are trampled over" (Oduyoye 2001:24).

Oduyoye (2001:25) postulates that "Africans live in a spiritual universe" and therefore the religious-cultural context is vital to the enterprise of theology. This forms a holistic view of all of reality whose foundation is African traditional religion and who lives with African women and their faith as Christians. The religious cultural context forms the basis of all aspects of life and includes their social, moral, political, and economic life. The feeling of unity is articulated in harmony with nature, other human beings, and the Divine. The context is intensely communal and the expression "I am because we are" is one of numerous ways in which African people convey their belief that the group is more important than the single person. Oduyoye (2001: 26) asserts that in the middle of anguish and persecution, Africans still know how to celebrate life and that "the spirituality of Africans is rooted in the fullness of life." Through celebrations and feasts, African's are sharing lives and making hospitality a main African religio-cultural attribute. The African cultures' inter-relatedness signifies that "God, the Source Being, other spirit beings (such as the ancestors), and human beings are in constant communication and inter-relationships" (Oduyoye 2001:35).

The importance of the role of God and the spirit beings as well as their interrelatedness within the African culture should be accepted, studied, and understood.

This will give theologians and laymen a better understanding of how God and the spirit beings are interrelated as well as their significance in the African culture, which in turn may provide people from other cultures with a better understanding of how the African culture views, interprets, and understands the Bible.

#### **4.15 Oeuvre of female African theologians**

Oduyoye (2001: 37) stresses the collective nature of African women's theology. The diverse women's groups in Church communities "gives them both a community of accountability and a locus of resource for theologising". The theological aspects of concern, include: Christology, the Church (with an emphasis on righteousness and involvement), culture as an overall standpoint, religious anthropology and a triad of spirituality, sacrifice, and suffering. Female African theologians place a strong focus on marriage, family life, and children (Rakoczy 2004:22).

Anne Nasimuyu<sup>95</sup> (1993:26-27) delineates five tasks that are important for women's theology. Female theologians should conscientise the community so that people may realise their own dignity and that of others. They should expose the cultural prejudice against women and focus on "recover (ing) the basic, communal, liberative thrust of the scriptures"; focusing people's attention on critical reflection so that they do not accept tradition as a given. Women's theology should critically undermine the "established sinful order" and reject everything that dehumanises people in the African culture. Furthermore, the Gospel needs to be "a sharp cutting edge to our culture in order to transform and restore it to wholeness" (Nasimuyu 1993:26-27).

The establishment of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the 'Circle') at Trinity College in Accra, Ghana (1989) is particularly important to the development of African women's theology. Oduyoye had for years been worried about the absence of published writings by African women. Many of the women at the inaugural meeting of the 'Circle' were members of EATWOT (Rakoczy 2004:22). They recognised "religion and culture as the crucial foci for creating a liberative theology that would respond to the needs of women in Africa" (Kanyoro 2002:17).

---

<sup>95</sup> A Kenyan woman.

There had been some attempt, before the inauguration of the 'Circle', to publish collaborative works which included some writings by African women theologians such as *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*<sup>96</sup>. The Circle is dispersed with little organisation. In 2007, the Circle already had 500 African women who were members of their native Circle. The Circle "includes African women representing all the major religions of Africa; it also embraces all women of Africa, regardless of colour" (Phiri 1997:69).

In South Africa, there are active Circles in Cape Town and Pietermaritzburg and meetings and conferences were held regularly, especially in 2016. Masenya took the initiative to organise a meeting in Pretoria for this Circle with funding provided by the College of Human Science and the Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies at UNISA. A conference was held on 26 March 2016 at UNISA on 'The Legacy of African Women Circle Theologians'<sup>97</sup> (The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians n.d.).

The Circle's work focuses on the following four areas: cultural and biblical hermeneutics; women in culture and religion; history of women and ministry; and theological education and formation (Kanyoro 2001b:170). Over 100 books have been published on the topic due to the Circle's collaborative approach. The Circle also has a newsletter, titled AMKA<sup>98</sup>. The motivation and support of the members of the Circle has inspired a number of women to receive master's and doctoral degrees, and has resulted in the intensification of the body of female African academic theologians (Rakoczy 2004:23).

Mary-Ann Plaatjies van Huffel, a woman of colour, became the first woman to be ordained in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa (URCSA). Plaatjies van Huffel also holds a position as a senior lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch.

---

<sup>96</sup> *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* was edited by Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye.

<sup>97</sup> The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians Newsletter.

<sup>98</sup> *Amka* is a Swahili word that translates to "arise" in English.

Masenya (a lecturer at UNISA), Yolanda Dreyer (a professor in Practical Theology at the University of Pretoria), Christina Landman (a professor at UNISA), Denise Ackermann (a retired professor of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch), and many other women in the South African academic environment have made it possible for women to study under the guidance of other women. Women who thus wish to study within the field of theology can do so under the guidance of acclaimed female theologians as this academic sphere is no longer exclusive to male academics.

Women now hold full ministerial positions. They are no longer given mediocre work in Churches as was previously the case (Landman 1995:144). Although the academic field is accepting and promoting women in the field of theology, black women are still underrepresented in positions of power. Their views, cultures, and especially the reading of the Bible from their perspectives, are of the utmost importance for adequate growth and development within the discipline of theology.

## **4.16 Proverbs 31:10-31: a feminist reading**

### 4.16.1 Introduction

Historically, white male scholars had the power to control and manipulate knowledge about biblical texts, including Proverbs 31:10-31. Much of what has been written about Proverbs 31:10-31 has therefore been written from the male (in most instances, white males) point of view. Traditional commentaries and interpretations of Proverbs 31:10-31 were discussed in chapter 3. It is, however, important to also provide a feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 as the goal of the research is to empower women. The following questions will receive particular attention: How was this text read by women in the past? How is the “woman of worth” portrayed in the poem? What type of woman is she from a feminist point of view? Is the woman in the poem liberated, independent, or subordinate? (Masenya 1996:127).



Furthermore, most feminist readings of Proverbs 31:10-31 have been conducted by white women (Masenya 1996:127). Prior to 1996, when Masenya completed her PhD on *A Bosadi (Womanhood) Perspective of Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African context*, no Black/African feminist had ever published anything on Proverbs 31:10-31 (Masenya 1996:127). Masenya (1996:127) opines that nothing had been written on the poem from a women's perspective before that time due to the novelty of women in theology. Another possibility is that in Western (specifically the US) biblical scholarship, books on the Writings (specifically the Book of Proverbs) have not enjoyed the same popularity as the other books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Masenya 1996:127-128).

#### 4.16.2 Proverbs 31:10-31: a feminist perspective

The focus will now be on a feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 with specific reference to Masenya's feminist reading of the text as a Bosadi woman within the South African context. To date, no other feminist interpretation of Proverbs 31:10-31 by a black woman in South Africa exists.

The "woman of wisdom" in the poem is the manager of her household. She is competently and virtuously managing all aspects of an intricate household and directing all the members of the household in their numerous responsibilities. The woman takes part in the physical labour which involves the different household tasks, specifically that of textile production. She is responsible for the household's purchase of property and takes part in the market economy of the day. Through all these duties, she provides moral governance to the members of her realm (Meyers 1991:48). Camp (1985:92) notes that "the woman is not simply the maintainer of a household but the source of its identity". Although the household is identified and defined as the woman's, it does not mean that the house (property) no longer belongs to her husband/father. Her position and behaviour does, however, indicate the power she has over all the household activities (Masenya 1996:128).

The household can be seen as a metaphor for all spheres of life in which women can hold power to not only liberate themselves, but also their community and country.

In South Africa, women, regardless of their race or ethnicity, encapsulate the identity of their households. The household can be a metaphor for women's movements of power such as Women's Day celebrated in South Africa or the #MeToo movement on a global scale, to abolish all forms of (sexual) abuse against women that still exist today.

#### 4.16.3 Proverbs 31:10-31 – an outline

##### 4.16.3.1 Proverbs 31:10-12

In verse 10, the signature phrase “noble wife” has become the phrase with which the poem is identified. Terms which are usually translated as a “capable”, “good” or “perfect” wife literally means “a woman of worth” as the terms “woman” and “wife” are the same in Hebrew.

“Noble” (worth) is a term often applied to men. The phrase is usually translated as “mighty man” and symbolises men at the height of their power and capacity in society. According to Toy (1977:243), the word “noble” is only used four times in the Old Testament in reference to women (Ruth 3:11; Proverbs 12:4; 31:10-27). In the relatively comfortable and monogamous setting assumed by the Book of Proverbs, a man's success depended on heeding his parents' advice when deciding on a good woman to marry (Bird 1974:59).

The author(s) of Proverbs 31:10-31 carefully chose the wording of the poem; the poem “wife of noble character” may be interpreted as an indication that women are worthy and valuable. Women are all worthy of being considered noble, worthy, and equal to men. Why else would the poem instruct the male reader of the poem to find a “noble” wife?

It is important to note that the rhetorical question on how difficult it is to find a good wife introduces the paean of Proverbs 31:10-31: “A woman of worth, who can find her?” Fontaine (1988:516) finds it unsurprising that the sages thought it difficult to find a woman of “worth” as their view of women was generally negative (Proverbs 11:22; 21:9; 19; 22:14).

The “woman of worth” is perceived as being more precious than jewels (RSV) and rubies (NLT); language which directly recalls “Woman Wisdom” in Proverbs 3:15 and 8:11 (Fontaine 1988:51; Camp 1985:188).

The conclusion of the poem, about the women of worth in this chapter, permits for the material benefits that flow from one’s love of and success in seeking wisdom. It can be interpreted in terms of the benefits of a marital relationship and the love between two human beings. The man who thus finds a virtuous woman does not lack any material goods and serves as a reminder to the reader of the poem that those who find “Woman Wisdom” are therefore materially rewarded (Camp 1985:188; Fontaine 1988:516; Proverbs 3:13-14; 8:17).

The husband is very enthusiastic and appreciative of his wife as he “will derive no little profit from her. Advantage and not hurt will she bring him all the days of her life” (Proverbs 31:11-12; Swidler 1979:125-126). “This wife is not property, but she is a good investment. With her as a helpmate, a husband will get a good return” (Carmody 1988:73).

Masenya (1996:130) opines that verse 11 casts light on the selfish nature of human beings as they almost always want to benefit from others. They hardly ask how they can be of benefit to others, even if they are in a position to benefit the other person. The poem indicates that the man is part of the elite of society and that he is from an affluent background. He wants to enrich himself even more by finding a Women of Worth. This man is not interested in a poor or ordinary woman, but rather an unobtainable ideal woman such as the one depicted in the text. She is a “good” gift to her husband. Proverbs 18:22 indicates that the one who finds a wife, finds good and will receive favour from Yahweh (Masenya 1996:130). It is no wonder that the “woman of worth” is appreciated, because she seems to be a model for the “perfect servant” (Swidler 1979:126).

The woman serves her family and specifically her husband, not because she is the “perfect servant”, but because she wants to please Yahweh, as He entrusted her with a husband and family. Her unobtainability lies in the fact that her qualities were given to her by the Lord. In serving her family, she directly serves the Lord.

A man who finds a “woman of worth” finds a woman who serves the Lord and wishes to honour the Lord.

#### 4.16.3.2 Proverbs 31:13-19

The “woman of worth” is not lazy; although her house is filled with servants, she also works hard (Proverbs 14-14; 17-18). She manages her household and directs the servants to the work that must be done. She sees to it that her family is well fed and clothed (Bird 1974:47-48; Fontaine 1988:516; Harris 1993:3). “The ideal wife is busy, efficient and productive. She probably would be a demon of energy, and the implication is that she cares for her family’s every need” (Carmody 1988:73).

It is important to note that the servants of the “noble” (virtuous) wife are not ordinary. The Hebrew word for “servant” refers to a young male of a high birth order. The servant is a young male in domestic service but is not unskilled and had definite responsibilities. His sister was most probably the head of the household’s domestic servants or a lady in waiting. The “woman of worth” is thus no ordinary lady. She engages in assignments such as spinning, weaving, and sowing – a woman’s work that was of vital importance in the ancient world (Fontaine 1988:512; Carmody 1988:72; Proverbs 13, 19).

Proverbs 31:16 indicates that the “woman of worth” engages in activities that are usually reserved for men, for example the purchase of land. The outward movement of the “woman of worth” into the public domain therefore does not come as a surprise (Fontaine 1988:516). Fontaine (1988:516) further argues that there is historical evidence suggesting that both women of extremely high but also extremely low status had the freedom to participate in the public domain. The situation described in the text is that of a pre-industrial society in which the household economy was part of the household (Masenya 1996:131)<sup>99</sup>. Waegeman (1989:103) consequently states that women as the managers of the household participated in its economy.

---

<sup>99</sup> Telephone conversation between Masenya and Ruether 1995-05-03

The woman portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31 is thus in a better position than her modern counterpart, as some modern(African) women still have limitations to their participation in the productive sphere. The economic domain has now moved into the public domain and since, the Industrial Revolution has been in the hands of the people of power in society (Masenya 1996:131).

Camp (1987:54) remarks that the woman's terrains, as portrayed in the poems on the "woman of wisdom" and of the "women of worth" are not confined to the home. The "woman of worth" executes duties necessary for the maintenance and *shalom* of her household. She goes forth into the world to consciously engage in investments and commerce. According to Camp (1987:55), "Woman Wisdom" as a root metaphor finds its source in the traditional place of women's power – "the house". It is not to keep women in the house, but it holds that the woman-identified house as the source of society's identity and power.

Reframing the meaning of the "house" from the existing tendency to loath it – by making it private and parting it from the public domain, is important for the following reasons (Masenya 996:131):

- a. It supports women, specifically Northern Sotho women, and increasingly those men who prefer the house as the primary setting for creating and realising their human potential (Masenya 996:131). This may hold true for many white South African women as well. Many women still choose their house as the place where they can develop and realise their creativity and human potential. It is thus not limited to Northern Sotho women and men, who prefer the home as private domain. Many women and men in Africa prefer to make their household their primary place of business.
- b. Of equal importance, is the reminder to those who choose the public arena in which to employ their power, of the private arena's reason for being. The private arena's goal is the protection and support of love and the *shalom* – known first or sometimes not at all – in the household of the noble woman (Camp 1987:55).

An effective protection of love and *shalom* in the private arena can lead to more successful participation in the public domain. A loved and supported individual or family can perform more effectively in the public sphere (Camp 1987:55).

#### 4.16.3.3 Proverbs 31:20-27

The “provider” theme continues (Proverbs 21-22, 24-25), combined with a depiction of her wise, righteous, and compassionate deeds. The plight of the poor is one of the themes that are addressed by the sages in the Book of Proverbs (Masenya 1996:132). Fontaine (1990:106) notes that in Proverbs, the plight of the poor and the wealth of the rich often reveal the cruelty and greed of the exact class to which one presumes the sages belonged. One can then assume that the sages had some sense of justice, leading to their depiction of a woman who, although she was rich, mingles with and cares for the poor.

The text provides the reader with several clues as to the richness of the “woman of worth”:

- She has quality servants.
- Her household is clothed in scarlet (Proverbs 31:21). McKane (1970:669) notes that the word “scarlet” designates only the very best; the clothing of kings. The quality of the clothes is the reason that they are able to keep warm in winter. The “woman of worth” also has an outstanding wardrobe made up of fine linen and the colour purple (Proverbs 31:22).
- This woman is able to buy a field after some consideration. It is important to note that not all women in Israel, especially during the difficult early post-exilic conditions, could afford to buy a field.

- This woman is empowering, specifically for marginalised people, because this upper class woman does not sit in her ivory tower. She is able to engage with ordinary people on their level. In the South African black rhetoric, the “woman of worth” would have been called “the people’s woman of worth” (Masenya 1996:133).

There are many stellar examples of South African women who have started feeding schemes, plant vegetable gardens, and start crèches for small children in rural and poverty-stricken communities. In these cases, the race of the woman does not matter, but rather the fact that she reaches out to the poor just like the “woman of worth” in Proverbs 31:20.

The good character of the “woman of worth” and her provision for her household leads to her husband being “known in the gates”. McKane (1970:669) remarks that the town was the place of gathering where the deliberations with concern to the public took place. Legal and political matters were also settled in the public sphere.

The “woman of worth’s” industriousness improves the status of her husband to such an extent that he is respected at the city gates. Masenya (1996:133) notes that many feminists seem to be dissatisfied with this state of affairs, criticising the “woman of worth” for living to improve the significance of the male (Brenner 1993:129; Carmody 1988:72; Swidler 1979:126). The issue here is that the woman is confined to the “hated” sphere (the home) and she works very hard to improve the interests of her husband, who is the only one that had the right, purely due to his masculinity, to “sit at the gates”, where he contributes to the activities in the public sphere (Brenner 1993:129; Carmody 1988:72). The status of the “woman of worth” seems to be secondary to that of her husband as the text states that her hard work is done in support of her husband’s more public dealings (Carmody 1988:72).

Masenya (1996:134) has some reservations regarding Carmody's (1988) interpretation:

a. The "woman of worth" is not constrained to the household as she buys a field, engages in business transactions, and also engages in public affairs. This woman is not bound or limited to her household. She interacts and contributes to the economic well-being of her family and the community (public sphere). Therefore women cannot allow patriarchal structures, rules, and laws to prevent them from claiming their power, not only within the household, but also in the public sphere. This clearly indicates that women can hold power and empower each other in both the public and private spheres of life.

b. The "sitting at the gates" does not imply that the husband did not work hard to earn his position among the elders at the gate. The husband is not judged purely according to his sex. The poem does not indicate that the wife contributed to her husband's "sitting at the gates". It only indicates that through her hard work and diligent management of her household, she earns him respect at the gates where he already holds a position. The "woman of worth" is also a wise woman and she would most probably not have married an idle husband. She would have chosen someone equally hardworking. They thus empower each other and work towards a mutual goal, namely: success at home and success in the public sphere.

c. Lastly, it is clear as stated that the household from which Women Wisdom and the "woman of worth" function, is essentially a source of power. The wisdom and power of the women that operate from the house, supports the public sphere, "the gate" to flourish. Brenner (1993:129) states that:

Her voice might indeed be muted within the public culture she shares, a predominantly male culture. This is partly explained by her sitting at home while her menfolk pass their time in public places (at the gates). She lives to advance male interests and male well-being. In so doing, however, she ultimately subverts the male order by becoming its focal point and essential requisite.



In verse 26, the “woman of worth” is portrayed as a wise teacher. The “woman of worth” does not speak without thought. Her wisdom allows for her to play the role of counsellor to her husband. The faithful instruction on her tongue can suggest that, like the mother figure in Proverbs, the “woman of worth” takes part in the education of her children (Masenya 1996:135).

According to Camp (1985:92), Proverbs 31:10-31 is part of an intellectual process where the Israelite thinkers distinguish between a type of real person<sup>100</sup> to a distinctive narrative persona of the counsellor wife<sup>101</sup>. “She represents a brand of wisdom that is associated with good family life which, in the eyes of the poet, is unmistakably and eternally good” Camp (1985:92). The “woman of worth”’s wisdom can therefore also be interpreted as the medium she uses to empower her family, household, the poor, and the public sphere (her husband at “the gate”).

#### 4.16.3.4 Proverbs 31:28-31

The devotion of the “woman of worth” to the needs of others in Proverbs 31:28-30 earns her the praise of the people she lives for (Masenya 1996:135). Swidler (1979:126) concurs that the people who praise the “woman of worth” are men. In return for her complete sacrifice, she is praised by men: “Her sons stand up and proclaim her blessed, her husband too sings her praises” (Proverbs 31:28), and those men gathered at the city gates – “let the works tell her praises at the city gates” (Proverbs 31:31; Swidler 1979:126).

“Children” (son) may not necessarily mean “son” as it relates to the children of Israel. Masenya (1996:135) opines that Swidler appears to be overreacting when she asserts that the “woman of worth” is praised by men only. The meaning of these praise words and by whom they are given, does not matter as much as the fact that it indicates that the “woman of worth”’s husband and children portray a spirit of gratefulness – a quality that seems to be absent specifically in people who hold positions of power (Masenya 1996:135).

---

<sup>100</sup> A thinking person and valid counsellor to her husband (Camp 1985:92)

<sup>101</sup> Some with good and some with bad instruction, just like human wisdom is in general as well as to an unrealistic portrait of a wise wife in an ideal household and in an ideal society (Camp 1985:92).

The husband and children do not take her “domestic” activities and services for granted but politely express their gratitude for her unselfish devotion (Masenya 1996:135).

These verses (Proverbs 31:28-31) indicate that it is good and right for men (husbands, fathers, and sons) to praise the works of a woman. The father (and indirectly the mother) is teaching his sons and other men (who will be reading the poem) that it is good to praise and appreciate a woman’s contribution to the household (“private sphere”) and society (“public sphere”).

Fontaine (1988:516) contends that the “women who fear YHWH” (Proverbs 31:30), may originally have read “a woman of understanding”, as it is stated in the LXX. The change might have been made by the final redactors to distinguish the “woman of worth” from “Woman Wisdom”, which portrays qualities of an understanding woman (Camp 1985:97).

Fontaine (1988:516) observes that within the context of the poem, the effect of the statement is to propose that the women from a community, for whom the text is “Scripture”, most probably worship God through the fulfilment of their domestic roles, instead of observance such as public (religious) leadership which is assigned to men or women. Masenya (1996:136) reports that the “confinement” of Jewish women<sup>102</sup> to their homes and the participation in the domestic activities such as motherhood and activities of hospitality was a form of involvement in the sacred and not subservience to men.

Some commentators (Crook 1954:137) hold that the phrase “fear of the Lord” (Proverbs 31:30) is a later emendation by the redactors in a bid to give the poem a sacred tone. The sacred tone would then overshadow the secular tone of the deeds of the “woman of worth”. In the context of a culture whose outlook in life recognises dichotomies in life, such as soul and body, and sacred and secular, such an argument might be valid.

---

<sup>102</sup> Rabbi H.E. Schaalman in a telephone conversation with Masenya.

The Israelite and African outlook is, however, a holistic one; there is no dichotomy between the secular and sacred life. Israelites and Africans are convinced that there is a religious order, set by God for Israel, and the ancestors for Africa to which their people must adhere to. If one fails to submit to their demands, it leads to punishment, but obedience to it leads to compensation (Masenya 1989:6-7; 1996:136). The consequences of the previous statement is that for an Israelite or an African, when something goes wrong in any sphere of their life, the individual has not satisfied the requirements of the order, therefore God and the ancestors are not happy. For example, when the Israelites do not fare well in warfare, they ascribe their failure to their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. If children in the Northern Sotho community do not progress well academically, they directly assume that the ancestors are not happy. This is how all the spheres of life are integrated as a unified whole (Masenya 1996:136-137).

In the Afrikaans-speaking community, Christian women (including men) also incorporate God in all spheres of their lives and do not make a distinction between the public and private spheres of life. Their power and success at home and in the public sphere lay within their reliance on God for strength and the ability to participate in both the public and private spheres. Their encouragement of each other as women of God's Word allows them to interact with one another by the grace and love of God. They do, however, acknowledge that they are human beings that can make mistakes and disappoint God.

Whybray (1994:156) argues that it is a mistake to view Proverbs 31:30 as inappropriate in a poem that primarily focuses on practical activities. The sacred and secular spheres were not two separate entities in the ancient world. The poem primarily focuses on the "ideal wife's" practical achievements but "wisdom" and the "fear of Yahweh" are constantly presented in the Book of Proverbs as closely associated: in fact, true wisdom is the "fear of Yahweh" (Whybray 1994:156). Kings reign by wisdom (Proverbs 8:15) and it leads to prosperity and riches (Proverbs 8:18). In Proverbs 31:10-31, the ideal wife is presented as a "wise woman" whose practical ability is derived from her religious commitment (Whybray 1994:156).

Whybray (1994:156) and Fontaine (1988:516) agree that in Jewish society<sup>103</sup>, women's household activities such as caring for children and the elderly as well as participating in acts of hospitality, were considered sacred. Wolters (1988:451) postulates that in the first part of Proverbs 31:30, an unexpected image of a woman is presented. The erotic was usually included in songs about women in the Ancient Near East and might even play an important role in them. The erotic is, however, not included in this poem (Brenner 1993:129).

Carmody (1988:73) considers the portrayal of the beauty of the women in this text problematic. The author creates a fear of beauty, yet it is unnecessary to be fearful of beauty since it is a gift from God that should be admired (Carmody 1988:73). Masenya (1996:138) argues that it raises the question as to whether the author is alleging that beauty should be feared or whether the author is rather addressing priorities such as the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord will be given priority as it is in line with the spirit of the rest of Proverbs, namely that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:17; Masenya 1996:138).

Another factor that contributes to the unexpected image of the "woman of worth" is that she is characterised in non-sexual terms. The sexual attributes of the wife is not described (Bird 1974:58; Brenner 1993:129), probably because the poem is about her hard work, diligence in ensuring the prosperity of her household, and caring for the poor.

Motherhood (in terms of bearing children) is another element that is missing from the poem; children are only mentioned in Proverbs 31:28. In Proverbs 31:26, one can assume that she teaches her children about faithfulness. The poem<sup>104</sup> does not explicitly state that as a traditional nurturer in Israel, she is teaching her children (Masenya 1996:138).

---

<sup>103</sup> Rabbi Schaalman's insight into the life of Jewish women highlights that women's activities in the time of the poem was primarily focused on serving God and not to be subordinate to men. This insight states that women were empowered by their service to honour God. (Schaalman telephone conversation with Masenya in Masenya 1996:137).

<sup>104</sup> See Proverbs 1:8 and Proverbs 4:3-4.

Masenya (1996:138) suggests that she is not a mother according to the Israelite understanding of the word or it might be assumed as natural.

The unexpected images of the “woman of worth” entice one to question her portrait (Masenya 1996:138). Is this a portrait of a real woman or an idealised woman? Is the poem praising a real woman that existed in the time of the original redactors of the poem or is she a metaphor for an ideal woman? The poetic licence does allow for the authors to say what they want in different and, sometimes, in highly ambiguous ways.

Fontaine (1988:516) states that the instruction to provide for the “woman of worth” proposes that, although this woman is the foundation of all good things, she might not have shared in the profit of her hard work. This makes sense in a patriarchal, patrilineal milieu in which the focus was on the masculine figure and the house of the father. Even though the poem presents the “woman of worth” as the manager of the household sphere, the master or head of the household is male (i.e. her husband). Everything is therefore owned by the husband; even her produce would be under her husband’s control (Masenya 1996:138-139).

Proverbs 31:31 confirms that the “woman of worth”s’ work is not only to uphold her household, but for society as a whole, since the works of this woman is “praised at the gates” – the place that represents the just social order in Israel (Masenya 1996:139).

Thus we see that the “proper place” of Woman Wisdom is in the world of human relationships, both public and private. Indeed, the division so apparent in modern society between the private domain of the house and the public domain of work and government is denied, as is the right of a depersonalised external sphere to define the true nature of social organisations under God (Camp 1987:55).

Camp (1987:189) notes that just as Wisdom takes her stand and cries out at the gates (Proverbs 1:21 and 8:3), so the work of the “woman of worth” also praises her at the gates (Fontaine 1988:516; Proverbs 31:31).

#### 4.16.3.5 Proverbs 31:10-31: key issues in a feminist reading

Masenya (1996:139) has identified important issues that affect feminist biblical scholars when reading Proverbs 31:10-31. These issues are: power, authority, and the division between the private and public spheres of life. Masenya's (1996:139) investigation into how these ideas affect the feminist reading of Proverb 31:10-31 is limited, as the feminists who have re-read Proverbs 31:10-31 do not necessarily focus on these issues in relation to the text.

Power, authority and influence refer to human relationship styles. These phenomena need a plural setting, where two or more people interact with each other in order to exist. Power is specifically viewed as something concrete or something that an individual can own, for example a car, a house, or money (Bell 1975:17). Masenya (1996:140) opines that power does not have a verb form, which partially accounts for the reason why people frequently view power as a mysterious property or agency residing within a person. Fewell and Gunn (1993:15) state that the term "power" depicts the social relationships of structures through which people either individually or in groups dominate or control, or inspire and maintain. The individual possessing such power then has a choice to either use the power in a positive and productive manner as opposed to a negative and authoritarian manner. The 'women of worth' had power within her household and community, however, she used this power to inspire and maintain and not to dominate and control (Masenya 1996:140).

Authority, much like power, is intangible. The symbols of authority are, however, quite evident (Masenya 1996:140). "Authority is a relationship between a superordinate and one or more subordinates, which, when 'activated' by communication, leads to compliance with 'orders' or 'commands' issued from above" (Bell 1975:18). The "woman of worth" is the authority figure in her household, but works (Proverbs 31:15) and communicates (Proverbs 31:26) with her subordinates (Masenya 1996:138-139).

Rosaldo (1974:21) observes that the division between power and authority that is legitimated (authority made legitimate), between the capacity to gain conformity and the acknowledgement that it is correct, is very important to the study of women.

It is imperative to clarify that, while authority legitimates the use of power, it does not deplete it and definite methods of giving rewards, managing information, applying pressure as well as forming events may be as accessible to men as it is to women. In acknowledging the universal fact of male authority, one does not deny the importance of women (Masenya 1996:141).

Men in positions of power should not use their authority to mistreat or bully women. Men can act with authority without disrespecting women or denying women their human right to be treated equal to their male counterparts. From what Rosaldo (1974) and Bell (1975) indicated about power and authority, Masenya (1996:141) is convinced that women scholars differentiate between the power (and the potential to use that power) that women have, although this power is not legitimated, and the legitimated authority that men have in a patriarchal community or society. "People can have power without having authority that is they may still find ways of effecting change despite oppressive structures that militate against their interest. Power, thus, exist on a continuum" (Collier 1974:96). Women such as Mother Teresa and Corrie Ten Boom and many others used the power they had, without any authority, to initiate change not only in their communities but in the world.

It is clear that women regularly challenge the principles of the male order (Rosaldo 1974:32). The virginal status of women is often praised, yet men need women to reproduce and ensure the regeneration of humankind. Women are often excluded from authority, yet they are expected to take up all kinds of indirect positions of power. Their status in life is often directly related to their male relation, yet they outlive their husbands and fathers. As long as the presence of women introduce contradictions, they will be viewed as strange and perceived as dangerous, dirty, polluting, and as something that should be set apart (Masenya 1996:142).

Women and men are both human beings that need each other in order to adequately fulfil the different roles they play in society. If women are viewed and treated by her male counterparts as equal, women would not find it necessary to challenge the principles of the male order, and in turn, men will not perceive women as dangerous. Men and women regarding each other as equal human beings can lead to an acknowledgement and acceptance of one other.

Masenya (1996:142) has applied the issue of power and authority to the ‘women of worth’ and she reckons that the “woman of worth” has the ability to exercise power. As the manager of her household, she exercises her power so well that it even has influence outside of the household sphere (her husband is known at the city gates). The socio-cultural setting of the patriarchal society the legitimated authority seems to belong to her husband. The words used for “husband” in Proverbs 31:11 and 23, include “master” or “owner”, indicating that one is dealing with an androcentric<sup>105</sup> text. “It is almost ironic that the poet consistently employs the word ‘*ba ‘al*’ for her husband (31:11, 23, 28), rather than ‘*is*’, given the way in which the woman is depicted” (Camp 1985:91).

According to Pedersen (1926:63), the character of the rule of the ‘*ba ‘al*’ (master or owner) is not a unique authoritarian, but the source of power. A patriarchal society gives men valid authority over all spheres of life, including the family. Although the “woman of worth” is highly productive and needs to be rewarded for her hard work, it is not clear from the text whether she is rewarded properly for her hard work (Give her a share in the fruit of her hand, Proverbs 31:31, RSV). Fontaine (1988:517) has noted that the command to provide for the “woman of worth” (Proverbs 31: 31a) implies that in spite of the fact that she is the source of all good she might not automatically have shared in the profits of her hard work. In a patriarchal society, men also had authority and control over their wife’s work (Proverbs 31:28-31; Masenya 1996:142).

#### **4.17 Public and private spheres: a false division**

One of the chief issues in “white feminist” thinking is the clear division between the private and public spheres (Masenya 1996:142). They view it as a division that demotes women to the household or private sphere. A sphere in which society has “...the current tendency to demean it (the house)...” (Camp 1987:55). It is argued that the public sphere is reserved for those who gain from the patriarchal *status quo* in society; only men therefore benefit from a patriarchal society (Masenya 1996:143).

---

<sup>105</sup> See 4.5 Androcentrism.



It is disquieting to note that the value of the productivity does not necessarily depend on what is achieved, but rather on where and by whom it is achieved. Men's work in the public sphere is of more value than the women's work in the household (domestic/private) sphere (Masenya 1996:143).

According to Masenya (1996:143), "domestic" refers to minimal establishments and the kinds of activities arranged immediately around one or more mothers and their children. Conversely, "public" refers to activities, establishments, and forms of involvement that connect, rank, organise, or include specific mother-child groups. This type of establishment provides a universal basis for conceptualising the activities of the genders (Roslado 1974:23). The domestic or private sphere is an informal and less structured environment, while the public sphere is usually more structured for formal activities to take place.

In contrast to the apparent inconsistency between the different spheres of existence – for example, the material versus the spiritual, emotional versus rational and the private versus public – feminism suggests a worldview which places a high value on connection and relationship, instead of contrast and separation (Setel 1985:37).

The feminist worldview of connection and relationship is positive, supports equality, and acknowledges and accepts both males and females as equal human beings. This "connection" may rather be considered as re-connecting to form new and supportive relationships between genders. Contrast and separation will only reinforce androcentrism and not contribute the change needed to close the gap between gender inequality created by inhumane patriarchal structures because it seeks to find the differences (contrast) and therefore must keep the genders apart (separate).

Masenya (1996:143) suggested to Rosaldo (1974:41) that the connection and relationship which Setel (1985) describes can be reciprocal and complimentary between men and women in the private (domestic) sphere. "An egalitarian ethos seems possible to the extent that men take on a domestic role" (Masenya 1996:143).

Ruether (1993:227) supports this view when she claims that the divide between home and work (women's work and men's work) is defeated by reintegrating them in a community where both men and women raise the children, and manage and own the means of production.

A distinction does not have to be made between public and private roles. Men and women can play an equally important role in both these spheres. There does not have to be a distinction between his work (public domain) and her work (private domain); if both partners can work towards the greater good of both spheres it can ultimately lead to the prosperity of the household and the family.

Rosaldo (1974:41) is, however, convinced that women gain a sense of value and power when they have the ability to move beyond the limits of domestic life. Women can do this by either entering the public sphere or by crafting a society for themselves. Women have the potential to achieve far more than managing a household and caring for their children. Women can gain power and self-worth that moves away from the constraints of domestic roles and leap into the public sphere. The public sphere will also gain a fresh perspective brought into the public domain by a woman. The "woman of worth" is by no means constrained to her domestic activities; she is actively involved in activities in the public domain: "She sees that her trading is profitable and her lamp does not go out at night" (Proverbs 31:18).

Masenya (1996:144) poses the following question: how does the division between the public and private sphere relate to a feminist understanding of Proverbs 31:10-31? Feminists react differently to the matter of the division between the public and private spheres in relation to Proverbs 31:10-31. Some feminists opine that there is no division between the spheres in the text, while others affirm the existence of this division (Masenya 1996:144).

Proverbs 31:10-31 depicts a pre-industrial era in which the economy and household was not separated (Waegeman 1989:103). This situation changed with the start of the Industrial Revolution as this revolution brought with it a removal of the economy from the home to the state.

The consequences of these changes were that women could no longer manage the household economy. Ruether<sup>106</sup> is therefore convinced that the situation of the “woman of worth” is far better than her modern counterparts (Masenya 1995:144).

There are, however, scholars who acknowledge that although Proverbs 31:10-31 indicates a division between the household sphere and the public sphere (her husband sits at the gates), the “woman of worth” challenges the patriarchal order by becoming a vital requirement for this order (Brenner 1993:129). Although the “woman of worth” seems to be yielding to the patriarchal order, she is ultimately the one who wins and gains the most (Masenya 1996:144).

Camp (1987: 55-56) noted that the house of the “woman of worth” should not be detested. Her influence is felt even at the gates of the city as her husband is respected due to the labour of his wife. “Indeed, the division so apparent in modern society between the private domain of the house and the public domain of work and government is denied” (Camp 1987: 55-56). Carmody (1988:73) is, however, sure that the sphere consigned to the woman – the home – is secondary to the public sphere. “On the other hand, much of her status seems auxiliary. The text implies that her diligence supports her husband’s more public affairs...” (Carmody 1988:73).

Ann Harris<sup>107</sup> (1993:31) opines that just like the ancient Israelite women, the industry and integrity of Jewish women in safeguarding family and community life are of utmost importance. “The strong home life for which we in the Jewish tradition are universally recognised and admired cannot be allowed to disintegrate among the devastating statistics of divorce” (Harris 1993:31). Harris (1993:31) appeals to the men of the Jewish community to see the necessity in supporting their wives with regard to their devotion to the family.

In the Afrikaans community, Marie du Toit rejected the distinction between the private and public spheres of life which were at the order of the day in 1921.

---

<sup>106</sup> Ruether personal conversation with Masenya 1995-05-03.

<sup>107</sup> Ann Harris is Jewish lawyer and a Rabbi’s wife.

Du Toit claimed that such a distinction is not biblical, but paternalistic (now known as patriarchal). Women's participation in public life in 1921 was viewed in terms of right to vote (Landman 1994:112). Du Toit (1921:12) concurs that women should make their own decisions about their participation in public life.

Landman (1994:115) holds that Du Toit presents a new and challenging view of women to her readers; a view with which she wanted to encourage, energise and inspire Afrikaans Christian women:

- Neither Jesus Christ nor nature confines women to a private life. Men will keep women from public life as long as women allow them to.
- Women are needed in public life, because their insight into social problems can relieve the suffering of people through legislation.
- Women's roles in theology are that they place people and their experiences, and not principles set by people, who claim their divine origin, in the centre.
- History proves women are intelligent and have good decision-making skills, especially in times when society is in need of bold and independent insights from individuals.
- Women are needed in public life, not only as individuals, but as a group. The agenda of political feminism should be the advancement of the plight of those who face oppression, the poor, and those who are muted by society.

History surely made Marie du Toit the first muted feminist among Afrikaans women (Landman 1994:116). Both her Church and the society where she worked in, to improve other people's lives, did not take notice of her insight into women's personal suffering and inequality. It is important to note that although Du Toit was an Afrikaans woman, she addressed the suffering and inequality of all women.

She especially addressed the inequality and a lack of understanding by the people of her time regarding the important role that women can play within the public sphere. In Proverbs 31:10-31, the woman's husband was known "at the gates" due to the "woman of worth's" activities within the public sphere. However, both the public and private spheres may benefit from a woman's involvement in these spheres.

#### **4.18 Conclusion**

It is evident from the above discussion that women have come a long way in their struggle to be accepted in a world that was and to some degree is still ruled by a patriarchal system. Patriarchal systems often lead to gross violations of women's human rights, well-being and self-worth. Women are often dehumanised and marginalised by these structures. Unfortunately, the Church was/is also part of the patriarchal system that often lead to a dehumanisation of women and other marginalised groups, such as the poor and the LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex) community.

Feminist movements play an integral role in the fight against such patriarchal systems. South African women fight relentlessly for their rights to vote and to be acknowledged as equal to their male counterparts. Women's Day celebrations on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August each year signals witness to and serve as a reminder to women of how far they have come in their struggle for equality.

Some women, for example Masenya, do not want to be labelled as feminists, but rather womanists. South African women represent diverse groups from different races and cultures. This should not withhold them from standing together and working together to transform women's lives. A "sisterhood" in which the South African women can form a unique group in which they celebrate and embrace the diversities presented by each woman, is therefore suggested. A sisterhood can work together as a unit in reaching the same goals, instead of working against each other or against men.

The feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 is unique in the fact that it was suggested by Masenya, a black woman, who incorporates some of her culture and understanding in the interpretations of a feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31. It is thus clear that Christian women of all races and cultures can identify with the 'noble woman' portrayed in Proverbs 31: 10-31 and claim the attributes of this for herself.

Chapter 5 will revisit the actuality, problem statement, objectives and methodology of the study as discussed in Chapter 1. The limitations of the study will be addressed as well as recommendations for future research endeavours.

# Chapter 5

## Synthesis

*There is no greater threat to the critics, cynics, and fear mongers than a woman who is willing to fall because she has learned how to rise.*

*- Brené Brown<sup>108</sup> -*

### 5.1 Introduction

Proverbs as part of the Wisdom Literature gives advice on life's challenges pertinent to the human experience. As a literary anthology of Israel's traditional wisdom that was gathered from various spheres of life, Proverbs invites its readers to incorporate wisdom in a godly lifestyle (Van Leeuwen 1997:19). The intent of Proverbs is rather to train a person in character formation and to show what life is really about and how to deal with life's challenges (Murphy 1998:15). It is, therefore, concerned with wisdom as a fundamental option in life and not only wise actions. This gives way to a sense of community, support and an abundant life (Clifford 1999:320). Proverbs portrays life as supremely good, characterised by health and well-being, loyal friends, possibly children, and adequate worldly possessions to sustain oneself (Crenshaw 2010:72).

Since wisdom is viewed as a feminine noun (Perdue 2000:3), Proverbs 31:10-31 can be read as addressing certain life issues pertinent to women's lives. The book's (and more specifically the above pericope's) intention is not to answer the question about the role of women in society. Instead, Proverbs 31:10-31 potentially refers to a variety of characteristics given to women in the Old Testament. These characteristics are strength (1 Samuel 2:4; Psalms 18:32; Hebrews 18:35 and Hebrews 39), wealth (Genesis 34:29), and her ability, especially with regard to moral worth (Ruth 3:11; 1 Kings 1:42, 52; Proverbs 12:4).

---

<sup>108</sup> Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston where she holds the Huffington Endowed Chair. Brown has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy (About Brené n.d.).

The Proverbs 31:10-31 woman's moral worth and ability seems to fit in best with what the poet had in mind when describing a married woman (Perdue 2000:277).

However, the pericope within the larger context of the Book of Proverbs challenges the ancient view and understanding of the stereotypical role of women in a predominantly male-oriented society (Yoder 2001:71). In lieu of this view, the pericope might intrigue modern readers. The female reader is invited to identify with the qualities that every woman should strive for rather than seeing the "noble woman" as a woman that really existed, but rather as a personification of wisdom (Hawkins 1996:12).

## **5.2 Actuality**

Various ideas on the role of women in society are to this day based on biblical texts (Fischer 1978:27). The poetic depiction of the 'virtuous and capable wife' (NLT) at the end of Proverbs represents one of the most striking documentations of women dating from the Ancient Hebrew times (Lang 2004:188). Proverbs 31:10-31 emphasises the important role of a woman within a family, being her priority and calling (Joubert & Smith 2010:17). In lieu of this, the pericope should be viewed within the greater context of the Book of Proverbs and not in isolation.

The relationship between the book of Proverbs and the Wisdom Literature of Ancient Israel as well as the Wisdom Literature of the Ancient Near East should also be taken into account. The portrayal of wisdom as a woman is not seen as abstract but rather as concrete. Wisdom is described as an outstanding woman who knows exactly what is expected of her, especially when it comes to her household (Venter 1999:732). Proverbs 31:13, 15 and 17 describes a woman that enjoys her work (i.e. her assignments in the home). She does not have to feel ashamed or inferior.

Although the position of women in society is changing, women are still responsible for taking care of their families. Proverbs 31:10-31 is therefore relevant regarding wisdom about the challenges faced by women. Modern women might however feel that the woman depicted in Proverbs 31:10-31 is perfect and therefore has unattainable qualities.



Should women then compare themselves to this “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31. Women might feel that they cannot achieve such high standards (Joubert & Smith 2010:17).

It is evident that emphasis is placed on the role of a married woman within her family, as her family should be her priority and calling (Joubert & Smith 2010:17). Although we know very little about the circumstances in which these texts originated, these texts do, however, indicate that the biblical authors did not primarily force rules onto women (Fisher 1978:27). These texts rather attempt to communicate the glory of the image of God (Fisher 1978:27). To be a wife for one’s husband and a mother to one’s children is a God-given vocation. In other words, it is a God-given calling to care for one’s family and home, and to enjoy it. A part of a woman’s calling is to provide for her family’s spiritual, emotional, and material needs (Joubert & Smith 2010:17).

Together with the changing positions of women in modern society, a new generation of women came to the fore. Women such as Masenya (1996) and Odoyoye (2001) demand to be seen as Christian women with dignity and social standing; as equal and not inferior to men (Bowden 2001:94). Feminist theology that grew out of their awareness of their newly found self-worth, played an integral role in how these and other female authors, consulted in this study, interpreted and questioned the text and male-orientated interpretations thereof (Bowden 2001:94).

It was therefore of great importance to pay attention to these previously silent voices and their interpretations of the “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31. The actuality of the study lies therein that the reader, no matter their gender or specific context, can come to new insights and perspectives about the view on and understanding of the value of a “noble wife”. These new understandings can influence their opinion and treatment of women within their own contexts.

### 5.3 Problem statement

The challenge of responsible theological reflection on Proverbs 31:10-31 goes hand in hand with the consideration of different understandings of the role of women in the pericope as well as in the Book of Proverbs itself. These contexts included the broader context of Wisdom Literature; the cultic and socio-historical contexts within the Ancient Near Eastern milieu. Different readings of Proverbs 31:10-31 have caused controversy in that interpreters have different opinions as to how the pericope should be understood.

Patriarchy and its view on and treatment of women persisted as a theme throughout this research study. As was seen in section 4.5 on patriarchy and feminism, culture, society, and religious bodies including the Christian Church were all moulded around the principle of patriarchy. Much of the literature included in the literature review showed that most of these readings of the pericope were written from a predominantly patriarchal worldview (Perdue 2000; Whybray 1995, 1991; Van Leeuwen 1997). Several feminists also argue that Proverbs 31:10-31 is to the benefit of patriarchy (Whybray 1995:143). In male-orientated scripture, the positive and negative positions of women are primarily seen from the perspective of what they give to the men involved (Fontaine 1988:516; 1992:146).

Biblical texts such as Proverbs 31:10-31 was used by the Church to restrict women to abide to socially accepted norms and patriarchal behaviours. The patriarchal view included that women were not allowed to work outside the household; the wife was primarily responsible for childcare; she was not allowed to own property; and she had to submit to her husband. This could lead to women questioning their self-worth in communities where male domination is still rampant.

Concepts that are related to patriarchy or a paternalistic view, include: kyriarchy, androcentrism, and heterarchy. The term “kyriarchy” is of Greek origin and means “master” or “lord”. *Kyrios* means to reign or control, *archein* is a “socio-political system of domination in which elite educated propertied men hold power over wo/men and other men” (Schüssler-Fiorenza 2001:211).

If we were to read Proverbs 31:10-31 from a kyriachal point of view, women are dominated by men in positions of power. According to this view, educated men were able to prevent women from buying and owning land. The woman in the pericope (Proverbs 31:16) did, however, buy and own land.

Androcentrism means “male centeredness” (Ackermann, Draper & Mashinini 1991:xvii). It is based on the antiquated belief that only males are truly human. Androcentrism proclaims that only males are fully human, which leads to the view that females are inferior to men and a divine mistake (Rackczy 2004:11). If we read the pericope from an androcentric viewpoint, women would be seen as a divine mistake, inferior, and regarded as possessions with the purpose of fulfilling the needs of men. The pericope would then have no meaning and will not motivate either men or women as to the divine role women can play in society.

Meyers (2014:27) argues that the concept “heterarchy” is preferable to “patriarchy”, especially when one acknowledges the existence of hierarchies within a patriarchal society. Meyers (2014:27) furthermore recognises “that different power structures can exist simultaneously in any given society, with each structure having its own hierarchical arrangements that may cross-cut each other laterally.” In Proverbs 31:10-31, it seems like a heterarchy did exist in society. The “noble wife” positively influenced her husband’s position in their community as he was respected by the elders at the gate (Proverbs 31:23). This was a direct result of how his wife was seen and respected within the greater community.

Women can be empowered by recognising the ideological power and force of patriarchy, sexism, androcentrism, and kyriarchy for what it represented and how it kept women feeling inferior to men. Women in the Old Testament, however, were not helpless victims but regularly in a position to exercise a measure of control and action in their lives (Claassens 2016:69-70).

Women throughout history struggled to be recognised as equal to their male counterparts. They did not accept this treatment, but through the darkest periods in history such as the ghettos, extermination camps in Nazi Germany, on the plantations of the American South, during the violent civil rights era, and during the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa, women stood up in a quest to be treated equally to men (Claassen 2016:xiii). Throughout this research study, feminism was discussed, as a text such as Proverbs 31:10-31 cannot be adequately studied without listening to the voice of the gender that informs Proverbs 31:10-31.

Through the study it became evident that the contemporary reader's understanding of the role of women in society differs greatly from that of ancient people's understanding. Current perspectives on the role of women are informed from different theological readings thereof, depending on the age, gender, culture, and education of the present-day reader. Several feminists argue that Proverbs 31:10-31 is to the benefit of patriarchy (Whybray 1995:143). Even though Proverbs 31:10-31 did not escape patriarchal ideology, feminists do, however, differ as to the impact of the patriarchal ideology on the text.

Some are of the opinion that the "noble wife" in Proverbs 31:10-31 is not independent. She is seen as a provider for her husband and children (Fontaine 1992:146). Braude<sup>109</sup> (1996:146) opines that the concept of the "noble wife" was fitting for the times in which she lived, although she cannot exist in society in her own right (Masenya 1996:146). Ruether<sup>110</sup> (1996:146) adds that Proverbs 31:10-31 is not liberating in nature.

---

<sup>109</sup> Conversation between Masenya and Braud (1995). The information gathered from the conversation between Braud and Masenya is important for this study. Braud's view on the "noble wife" and her inability to identify with her is important as it highlights the different views women have of the "noble wife" and her influence on their lives, if any. Therefore a part of the conversation from Masenya (1996:146) is cited for the purpose of this study.

<sup>110</sup> The conversation between Masenya and Ruether (1995) is important to this study. Ruether's view, again, shows that women have different opinions as to how the "noble woman" of Proverbs 31:10-31 is viewed. Therefore a part of the conversation from Masenya (1996:146) is cited for the purpose of this study.

Family life is just one aspect of the “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 and therefore it does not have to define her. She portrays the many facets that a woman can choose to enrich and define her life with. She is also described as a business woman; no wonder some scholars are ambivalent about the portrait of the “noble woman” in the pericope. She is portrayed as a powerful and independent woman but she is also defined in terms of her family, specifically her husband and children (Carmody 1988:72). Camp (1985:93) postulates that the poem can either oppress or empower women.

This study has illuminated the idea that the liberation of the “noble woman” lies in the fact that she is powerful and independent, economically involved as well as involved in her family life, and respected by her family and community. This leads to researcher to reject the view of Ruether (1996:146-147) and concur with Waegeman (1989:101-103) and Lyon (1987:238) that the “noble woman” is independent, powerful, and that she sets an example for other women to be empowered and live an independent life. The “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 was not only defined by her family life as suggested by Braude (1996:146). Her life was characterised by many facets that added substance to her as a person. This pericope sketches the ideal woman with qualities other women reading the text could strive for (Hawkins 1996:21).

Modern women have the freedom to decide which facets they want to include in their lives or how they want to be defined. They do not have to conform to patriarchal ideologies and only be defined by one facet (woman/mother) of their lives; being a wife/mother and being an empowered, independent woman does not have to be mutually exclusive. Women, can be empowered by the pericope whether they identify as feminists or not. As Christian women, the Lord should be our source of empowerment and liberation and not ideologies created by man to oppress those created in His image. A woman is not less worthy when she chooses to combine a career and family life, neither is a woman less worthy when choosing to focus on her family and household as opposed to her career.

In 2018, it is evident in movements such as #MeToo (referred to in 4.5.1 Proverbs 31:10-31: a critique on patriarchy) that women are not permitting patriarchal systems to oppress and silence them.

As Proverbs 31:10-31 portrays a woman who is powerful, independent, and respected by her family and community, the researcher maintains that the “noble woman” would have supported movements such as #MeToo. Such movements’ value women’s worth in society just as the “noble woman’s” worth was praised by her husband and children (Proverbs 31:28).

#### **5.4 Objectives of the study**

The initial objectives were addressed as follows in the study:

- 1) It was seen through a contextual reading and application of the pericope that the attributes of the woman as portrayed in Proverbs 31:10-31 can still apply to modern women. The reading of the text by Masenya (1996) from the perspective of a Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman as well as by the researcher (in her own context) indicated that modern women, even in different contexts, could identify with the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31. This compiled image of the ideal woman can be an inspiration for every woman to develop her own potential as a woman. It became evident that no woman match the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31, but can learn from her diligence, integrity, and ingenuity (Burden 1993:937-938).
- 2) The difference between the experiential worlds of the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 and that of modern women was studied. Women living in contemporary society are confronted by challenges such as patriarchal systems and societal demands, which place strain on women and their ability to flourish in their experiential world.
- 3) The role of the modern woman and how it differs from the role of the woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 was considered. The above-mentioned disruption of family life in contemporary society meant that women need to fulfil the role of both breadwinner and carer in a context of high volumes of unemployment and limited economic opportunities (Budlender & Lund 2011:925).

- 4) The life challenges of the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 and modern women were distinguished. Masenya's (1996) and the researcher's reading of the text indicated that the Hebrew Scriptures of Christianity were used selectively in order to justify the marginalisation of women in Africa.
- 5) The final objective addressed the question of what happens to the text if it is read from the experienced world of a Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman's perspective. Masenya (1996:55) re-reads Proverbs 31:10-31 from the perspective of the Bosadi and grounded her reading in a feministic liberal perspective that is linked to an "African-ness" of a black South African woman.

## **5.5 Research methodology**

As was stated in sections 1.2 (Motivation for the study) and 1.3 (Research problem), it became evident that a contextual reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 is of importance to gain an understanding of the application of the pericope to modern society. Consequently, a contextual analysis of Proverbs 31:10-31 was done as part of the research study. Challenges to this contextual analysis included that the idea of the "noble woman" still causes historical and theological controversy (Yoder 2001:2). The relationship between Proverbs and the Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East is still contentious and the date and origin of the book are debateable.

The formal analysis of the text included the observance of the literary form as well as a structural analysis of Proverbs 31:10-31. The placement of Proverbs 31:10-31 within the Book of Proverbs was discussed as well as how this text is applicable to modern women. Masenya's view (1996:55) of a Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman's context in South Africa converged with the researcher's own context and perspective on Proverbs 31:10-31. Literary characteristics of Wisdom Literature were identified and discussed. The different literary forms that included proverbs, poetic forms, questions, riddles, dialogue and didactic narratives were taken into consideration during the analysis of the context of the text. This pericope referred specifically to the woman in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Perdue 2000:5).

For the purpose of this research, a literature study was conducted and a variety of relevant literature examined. The primary purpose of the literature review was to survey previous studies on Proverbs as well as relevant research that was conducted specifically on Proverbs 31:10-31. The purpose of the literature study was thus to lay a foundation for the current study (Oliver 2004:107). It furthermore assisted the researcher in conceptualising the problem statement and to identify limitations of the research study.

Literature relevant to this study included biblical scholars such as Crenshaw (1981), Wolters (2001), and Yoder (2001). These scholars studied the background, origin, and meaning of the Old Testament wisdom as well as wisdom as a “woman of substance”. This study also includes scholarly comments on Proverbs and specifically Proverbs 31:10-31 from Toy (1970), Van Leeuwen (1997), and Murphy (1998). Much of the literature used in the literature study are canonical sources on Proverbs (Loader 2014; Perdue 2000; Whybray 1995) and more specifically, Proverbs 31:10-31. The authors of the literature are therefore considered as authorities on the subject.

Most of the available material was written from the perspective of European white men (Crenshaw 2010; Fox 2009; Waltke 2007). This potentially limits the application of their research in the contextual reading of Proverbs 31:10-31. On the other hand, a Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman’s reading of the text was limited to the perspective of Masenya (1996). This is due to limited existing African research on Proverbs 31:10-31, and even more limited female authorship of the subject (Ackermann 1997; Claassens 2016).

This study furthermore entailed a thorough exegesis of Proverbs 31:10-31, with the intention of analysing the pericope by implementing a historical, literary, and theological scholarly reading thereof. Questions were asked of the text as part of the exegesis, many of which was provoked by the different dimensions of the text itself.



The following questions were asked of the text:

- Did the historical background of the pericope influence the acceptance and interpretation of the text?
- Has the opinions on the “noble woman” changed during the different time periods in history?
- How has history’s view of feminism changed?
- How have the different time periods in history changed the view and perception of women?
- If the “noble woman” was a character in a story, such as Ruth and Esther, would she have had the same influence on the readers of the pericope?
- Did the placement of the pericope at the end of the Book of Proverbs influence the literary reading of the text in contrast to placing it after Proverbs 9 (the “foolish woman”)?
- Is the woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31 a real woman or the ideal woman?
- What does the pericope mean for different religious communities?
- Was the intended purpose of the pericope to be read for religious reasons or as a guide for daily living?
- What is the value and influence of Masenya’s (1996) Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman’s feminist re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 on African culture?

Exegesis of a text involves asking questions. Some of these questions will not be resolved immediately (Gorman 2001:9-10) and these unresolved questions formed the basis of section 5.8 (Recommendations for further study).

The researcher is in agreement with Groenewald's (2005:552) view which combined a synchronic ("same time") textual reading and diachronic (meaning "across time") textual reading of Proverbs 31:10-31. The synchronic approach in Chapter 2 was of importance to the contextual reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 in that the pericope was analysed not only on its own, but also in relation to the world in which it first existed as a text (Gorman 2001:12). Furthermore, the origin and development of the pericope was investigated during the exegesis of the text in Chapter 3. The result was that the historical and literary aspects supported one another and helped in identifying the different dimensions of the text (Human 1999:358).

During this literary historical reading of Proverbs 31:10-31, certain aspects of investigation were valuable to the study of the text. These aspects included the text boundary, form analysis, tradition criticism, as well as historical aspects of how the text was reused and reinterpreted in different contexts over time. An integrated vision of the text thus came to light for the researcher and possibly also for the broader audience of this study.

The researcher's preconceived ideas about the text could also be tested by employing the literary historical approach to studying Proverbs 31:10-31 (Human 1999:362-364). Exegesis reflects the text as a living entity that exists in relation to life. Previous understandings and interpretations of the text will differ from the personal understandings and interpretations of the text for modern Bible readers. Current experiences essentially determine the researcher's, as well as the reader's understanding of the text (Steck 1995:3-4).

Scientific historical exegesis is critical exegesis. This study involved a critical recognition of the preconceived ideas held by the researcher, as well as the authors on Proverbs 31:10-31 who were consulted during the literature study. As soon as any preconceived ideas were identified, it was addressed by reviewing the original meaning of the text. At the same time, the critique was directed at the text and a position of methodological doubt was taken towards the text.

This led to a distinguishable historical formulation of judgement towards different perceptions, approaches, and conclusions of the character of the text, which also questioned the texts' claims to truth within its historical context (Steck 1995:5).

## **5.6 Chapter division**

The research study was examined according to the following chapter divisions:

**Chapter 1** introduced the research subject of Proverbs 31:10-31 as well as the motivation for the study. Subsequently, the research problem was addressed, followed by the objectives of the study, the research methodology, and the hypothesis. The chapter division in the study was done and the terminology relevant to the study was explained.

**Chapter 2** focused on Wisdom Literature, specifically Wisdom Literature in the Ancient Near East. The theology of Wisdom Literature was discussed. The background, structure, and author of the Book of Proverbs was reviewed. In addition the date, the composition and editing of the Book of Proverbs were examined. Possible outlines and sections of Proverbs were argued as well as the book's role in biblical theology. Proverbs, in relation to pan-oriental Wisdom Literature, was discussed. The significance and relevance of Proverbs was addressed before concluding the chapter.

**Chapter 3** discussed the position of the woman in Proverbs, specifically Proverbs 31:10-31, by means of a literature study on the subject. The date and place of origin of Proverbs 31:10-31 was discussed, before examining the social and economic setting of the pericope. The genre, purpose, and audience of Proverbs 31:10-31 was reviewed. Women's challenges and social status in the Old Testament was also discussed. An exegesis of Proverbs 31:10-31 was conducted using the NIV and the RSV before the chapter was inferred.

**Chapter 4** examined feminism, patriarchy, and feminist theology as well as the move from feminism to feminist theology. Feminist theology in Africa, more specifically South Africa, was discussed with a focus on African women and their relationship with Christianity. This was done with reference to Masenya's (1996) feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 by linking it to the public and the private spheres.

**Chapter 5** reflects a synthesis of the insights gained from the above-mentioned chapters. The chapter focused on the actuality of Proverbs 31:10-31 for modern women, addressing the previously identified problem statement relating to the use of the concepts of "noble woman" and "woman of wisdom" in Proverbs 31:10-31. The chapter reviewed the initial objectives of the study, the research methods as well as the stated hypothesis. Finally, the limitations of the current study and recommendations for further studies were proposed.

The problem statement (see 1.3 Research problems) has been adequately addressed. The concepts of the "noble woman" and the "woman of wisdom" were contextualised within the Ancient Near East, specifically the Ancient Hebrew context. The use, meaning, and development of the language and symbolism in Proverbs 31:10-31 was explored in Chapter 3.

The woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 was identified and portrayed as the ideal woman that portrayed desirable qualities that every woman should strive for (see 1.6 Hypothesis). The possible influence of this ideal woman on the self-worth of modern women was revealed. This was done in order to establish an understanding of the contextual reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 relating to wisdom, marriage, and the role of women. This can be applied to the experiential world of women, especially in contemporary South Africa.

This research study has made a contribution to scientific research of Proverbs, the "noble woman" of Proverbs 31:10-31, the Old Testament, and the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament.

## 5.7 Hypothesis

*The “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a personification of wisdom and the ideal woman. She did not exist, but is an example of favourable values and qualities women can strive for. The reader’s interpretation of this woman influences the contextual reading of the pericope.*

*The “noble woman” of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a personification of wisdom.*

The study revealed that the “noble woman” is a personification of wisdom and an example of how modern women can accomplish various tasks by approaching them with wisdom. A “woman of wisdom” should be grounded in her service to the Lord. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10, NIV).

*She is an ideal woman. She did not exist.*

The woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 did not exist but is an example of the woman modern women can strive to become. The woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 is a positive role model that modern women can look up to.

*She is an example of favourable values and qualities women can strive for.*

The values and qualities that the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 possesses are worth striving for. The values and qualities do not only uplift the “noble woman”, her family, and household, but also her community. Women such as Corrie Ten Boom, Mother Teresa, Christina Landman, Juliana Claassens, and Yolanda Dreyer have influenced not only their immediate societies, but also the world.

*The reader’s interpretation of who this woman is influences the contextual reading of the pericope.*

This study has demonstrated that the context in which women live and strive for change, is not only in their immediate communities, but also the greater community. It influences how the readers interpret Proverbs 31:10-31 and its relevance to their individual situations and struggles to bring about change.

It is, however, positive to note that women no longer allow the pericope to be interpreted by men only, but that women are interpreting the pericope themselves, including the meaning of the pericope for themselves and within their communities.

## **5.8 Limitations of the study**

There were several limitations to the study:

- The researcher's own context influenced her reading of Proverbs 31:10-31. The researcher is a white Afrikaans-speaking woman from South Africa whose religious views are influenced by a traditional Protestant Christian background. The researcher's view on women's roles in society is ultimately shaped by her position as a married woman with children who is working as a Counselling Psychologist in private practice.
- The researcher's reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 would have been enhanced by knowledge of the Hebrew language and the ability to read the pericope in the language in which it originated. Studying Biblical Studies, which excluded Ancient languages and not Theology as such, limited the researcher's reading and understanding of the text.
- Primarily, the study is not a feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31. A text of this magnitude can, however, not be studied without providing a broad overview of feminism and its interpretation and application of the text.
- In a fast paced world, the dynamic views and positions of women in society can influence the way in which the current study is viewed, interpreted, and accepted.
- The study is context-specific as it primarily focuses on a Northern Sotho (Bosadi) woman's perspective (Masenya 1996) and an Afrikaans-speaking woman's perspective (the researcher) on Proverbs 31:10-31.

## 5.9 Recommendations for further study

The researcher recommends the following potential avenues for future research studies on the topic:

- Further research can be done on the different interpretations of Proverbs 31:10-31 from the diverse cultural groups in South Africa such as the isiXhosa, isiZulu, and so forth.
- Studies can be done on the different discourses pertaining to women of the traditional and more charismatic Church communities in South Africa in relation to Proverbs 31:10-31.
- A comparative study between a patriarchal and feminist reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 can be conducted.
- A study on the influence of movements such as #MeToo on the interpretation and future relevance of Proverbs 31:10-31 may be beneficial.
- Further research can explore the notion of human flourishing in relation to Proverbs 31:10-31.

## Bibliography

About. n.d. *Alice Walker*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.alicewalkersgarden.com/about> [Accessed 29 September 2015].

About Brené n.d. *Brené Brown*. [Online]. Available from: <https://brenebrown.com> [Accessed 3 September 2018].

About Elisabeth. n.d. *Elisabeth Elliot*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.elisabethelliott.org/about.html> retrieved [Accessed 14 December 2015].

About Metoo n.d. *MeToo Movement*. [Online]. Available from: <https://metoomvmt.org/> [Accessed 14 April 2018].

Ackermann, D., Draper, J.A. & Mashinini, E. (Eds.). 1992. *Women hold up half the sky: Women in the church in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.

Ackermann, D.M. 1997. Forward from the margins: Feminist theologians for life. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, vol.99, pp.63-67.

Act Against Abuse. [n.d.]. *16 Days of Activism Against Abuse*. [Online]. Available from: [www.southafrica.info](http://www.southafrica.info) [Accessed 14 December 2015].

Address by President Nelson Mandela on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the South African Communist Party. n.d. *SACP*. [Online]. Available from: [www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=248](http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=248) [Accessed 6 November 2017].

Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu. 2011. *SAHO*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/albertina-nontsikelelo-sisulu> [Accessed 6 November 2017].

Althaus-Reid, M.M., & Isherwood, L. 2007. *Controversies in Contextual Theology Series. Controversies in Feminist Theology*. London: SCM Press.



- Amina, Cachalia. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/amina-cachalia> retrieved [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Ansberry, C.B. 2011. *Be Wise my Son, and Make my Hart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs*. New York: De Gruyter.
- Antonio, E. 2007. Black Theology. In *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*. Edited by C. Rowland. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp.81.
- Aquino, M.P. 1998. Latin American feminist theology. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 14, no.1, pp.89-107.
- Arnold, B.T. & Beyer, B.E. (Eds.). 2002. *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study*. Michigan: Baker Academic.
- Asher-Greve, J.M. 1985. *Frauen in altsumerischer Zeit* (Vol. 18). USA: Undena Publications.
- Ayesha Bibi "Asa" Dawood. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/Ayesha-bibi-asa-dawood> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- Barr, J. 1995. The synchronic, the diachronic and the historical: a triangular relationship? In *Synchronic or diachronic? A debate on method in the Old Testament exegesis*. Edited by J.C. De Moor, Leiden: Brill, pp.1-14.
- Beavis, M.A. & Gilmour, M.J. (Eds.). 2012. *Dictionary of the Bible and Western Culture*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
- Bell, D.V.J. 1975. *Power, influence and authority*. London: Oxford University.

- Benzel, K., Graff, S.B., Rakic, Y. & Watts, E.W. 2010. *Art of the Ancient Near East: a resource for educators*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Bergant, D. 1997. *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Berger, I. 2007. Generations of Struggle: Trade Unions and the roots of feminism 1930-1960. In *Women in South African History*. Edited by N. Gasa. Cape Town: HSRC Press, pp.195.
- Berryman, P. 1987. *Liberation Theology: Essential facts about the revolutionary movement in Latin America and beyond*. Philadelphia: Teple University Press.
- Bertha Gxowa (Mashaba). 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/bertha-gxowa-mashaba> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- Bettie du Toit. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/bettie-du-toit> retrieved [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Bible, The Holy Bible, New International Version NIV Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica International.
- Bible, The Holy Bible New King James Version NKJV. Copyright 1979, 1980, 1982. United States: Harper Collins.
- Bible, The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version RSV, Copyright 1946, 1952, 1971 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.
- Bidegain, A.M. 1989. Women and the Theology of Liberation: Through her Eyes. *Women's Theology from Latin America*. Edited by E. Tamez. Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers.

- Bird, P.A. 1974. Images of women in the book of Proverbs. In *Religion and sexism: Images of women in the Jewish and Christian tradition*. Edited by R.R. Ruether. New York: Simon and Schuster, pp.41-60.
- Bird, P.A. 1987. The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus. In *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*. Edited by P.D. Miller, P.D. Hanson & S.D. McBride. Philadelphia, pp.399-419
- Boff, L. & Boff, C. 1987. *Introducing liberation theology*. London: Burns & Oates.
- Borowsky, H.M., Eisenberg, M.E., Bucchianeri, M.M, Piran, N. & Neumark-Sztainer, D. 2016. Feminist identity, body image, and disordered eating. *Eating Disorders*, vol 24, no. 4, pp.297-311.
- Boström, L. 1990. The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs. *Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament series*, vol. 29, pp.44-45.
- Bowden, J. 2001. *Woman in Christianity*. London: Continuum.
- Bowen, N. 2006. "Women, Violence, and the Bible." In *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Katherine Doob Sakenfeld*. Edited by L. Day & C. Pressler. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, pp.190.
- Brenner, A. 1993. Proverbs 1-9: An F voice? In *On Gendering texts: Female and male voices in the Hebrew Bible*. Edited by A. Brenner & F. van Dijk-Hemmes. Leiden: Brill, pp. 113-130.
- Brueggemann, W. 1970. Scripture and an ecumenical life-style: A study in wisdom theology. *Union Seminary Magazine*, vol.24, no.1, pp.3-19.
- Brunner, H. 1991. *Die Weisheitsbücher der Agypter*. Zurich: Artemis.

- Bryan, B.M. 1996. *In women good and bad fortune are on earth: status and roles of women in Egyptian culture*. Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns.
- Budlender, D. & Lund, F. 2011. *South Africa: A legacy of Family Disruption, Development and Change*, vol.42, no.4, pp.925-946.
- Burden, J. 1993. In *Spreuke. Bybel in Praktyk*. Edited by W. Vosloo & F. Van Rensburg. Vereeniging: Christelike Uitgewersmaatskappy, pp.937-938
- Busby, M. 1992. *Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent from the Ancient Egyptians to the Present*. London: Pantheon Books.
- Camp, C.V. 1985. *Wisdom and the Feminine in the book of Proverbs*. Great Britain: Redwood Burn Ltd.
- Camp, C.V. 1987. Woman Wisdom as root metaphor: A Theological consideration. In *The listening heart: Essays in Wisdom and Psalms in honour of Roland Murphy*. Edited by K.G. Hogland. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, pp.45-76.
- Camp, C.V. 1996. Telephone Conversation with Masenya. In *Proverbs 31:10-31 in A South African Context: A Bosadi (Womanhood) Perspective*. Edited M.J. Masenya. PhD Dissertation. University of South Africa.
- Carmody, D.L. 1988. *Biblical women: Contemporary reflections on scriptural texts*. New York: Crossroad.
- Charlotte Nee Manye. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/charlotte-nee-manye> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- Chitando, E. 2004. 'The Good Wife': A Phenomenological Re-Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 in the Context of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. *Scriptura*, vol.86, no.151.

- Chung, H.K. 1990. *Introducing Asian Women's Theology*. New York: Maryknoll.
- Claassens, J. 2015. Wat is 'n knap vrou nou eintlik? *Lig Tydskrif*, Augustus 2015, no.45. Kaapstad: Bybel Media, pp.45.
- Claassens, L.J.M. 2016. *Claiming Her Dignity: Female Resistance in the Old Testament*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press.
- Clifford, R.J. 1997. Introduction to Wisdom Literature. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol.5, pp.1-16.
- Clifford, R.J. 1999. *Proverbs: A commentary*. Westminster: John Knox Press.
- Clifford, A.M. 2001. The "why" and "what" of Christian feminist theology. *In Introducing feminist theology*, 9-45. Maryknoll, New York: Oribis.
- Collier, J.F. 1974. Women in politics. In *Women, culture and society*. Edited by M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere. Stanford: Stanford University, pp.89-96.
- Collins, J J. 1980. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.
- Corrie Ten Boom. 2014. *Biography*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.biography.com/people/corrie-ten-boom-21358155> [Accessed 14 December 2015).
- Crenshaw, J.L. 1981. *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.
- Crenshaw, J.L. 1985. The Wisdom Literature. *The Hebrew Bible and its modern interpreters*, vol.1, pp.369-408.
- Crenshaw, J.L. 1995. *Urgent advice and probing questions: Collected writings on Old Testament wisdom*. USA: Mercer University Press.

- Crenshaw, J.L. 2010. *Old Testament wisdom: an introduction*. Westminster: John Knox Press.
- Crook, M.B. 1954. The Marriageable Maiden of Prov. 31: 10-31. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol.13, pp.137-140.
- Davies, G.I. 1995. Were there schools in ancient Israel? In *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*. Edited by J. Day, R.P. Gordon & H.G.M. Williamson. New York: Bambridge University Press, pp.199-211.
- Dell, K.J. 2006. *The book of Proverbs in social and theological context*. UK: Cambridge University Press.
- De Moss, M.S. & Miller, J.E. (Eds.). 2002. *Dictionary of Bible and Theology Words*. Michigan: Zondervan.
- De Vaux, R. 1978. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Instructions*. Great Britain: Fletcher & Son Ltd.
- Dr Kesaveloo Goonaruthmunm Naidoo Dr Goonam. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/dr-kesaveloo-goonaruthmun-naidoo-dr-goonam> [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Du Toit, M.M. 1921. *Vrou en feminist, of iets oor die vrouevraagstuk*. Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers.
- Ebrahim, S. 2016. Equal pay for work of equal value in terms of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998: lessons from the International Labour Organisation and the United Kingdom. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 19, pp.1-28.
- Edet, R.N. & Ekeya, B.J. 1988. Church Women of Africa: A Theological Community. In *With Passion and Compassion: Third Worlds Women doing Theology, Reflections from the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third*

*World Theologians*. Edited by in V. Fabella & M.A. Oduyoye. New York: Orbis Books, pp.7.

English Translator. n.d. *Linuee*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.liguee.com/spanish-english/translation/lo+cotidioano/html> retrieved [Accessed 14 April 2015].

Eudaemonism. n.d. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eudaemonism> [Accessed 23 September 2018].

Farmer, K.A. 1991. *Who Knows What is Good? A Commentary on the Books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Fatima Seedat. 2011. *SAHO*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/fatima-seedat> [Accessed 5 November 2017].

Fewell, D.N. & Gunn, M.D. 1993. *Gender, power and promise: The subject of the Bible's first story*. Nashville: Abington.

Fischer, I. 2005. *Women Who Wrestled with God: Biblical Stories of Israel's Beginning*. United States of America: Liturgical Press.

Fischer, J.A. 1978. *God said: Let there be woman: A Study of Biblical Women*. New York: Alba House.

Florence Matomela. 2011. *SAHO*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/Florence-matomela> [Accessed 6 November 2017].

Fontaine, C.R. 1988. Proverbs. In *Harpers Bible Commentary*. Edited by J.L. Mays. San Francisco: Harper and Row, pp.495-517.

- Fontaine, C.R. 1990. The sage in family and tribe. In *The sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*. Edited by J. Gammie & L. Perdue, L. Winonalake: Eisenbrauns, pp.155-164.
- Fontaine, C.R. 1992. Proverbs. In *The women's Bible Commentary*. Edited by C.A. Newsom & S.H. Ringe. Louisville: Westminster, pp.145-152.
- Fox, M.V. 2009. Proverbs 10-31: *A new translation with introduction and commentary*, vol.18, part 2. New York: Doubleday Publishing Group.
- Frances Baard. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/frances-baard> [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Frankfort, H. 1961. *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Introduction*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Frates, L.L. 1993. Women in the South African National Liberation Movement, 1948-1960: An Historiographical Overview. *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, vol.21, no.1-2), p.p27-40. California: California Digital Library.
- Freedman, D.N. (Ed). 1992. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol.6, Si-Z. London: Doubleday.
- Frostin, P. 1988. Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa. *Studia Theologica Lundensia*, vol.42, pp 85-103. Sweden: Lund University Press.
- Galtung, J. 1990. Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, vol.27, no.3, pp.291-305.
- Garrett, D.A. 1993. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs. In *The New American Commentary*, vol.14. Edited by D.A. Garrett. United States of America: B&H Publishing Group.



- Gasa, N. 2007. Feminism, motherism, patriarchies and women's voices in the 1950s. In *Women in South African History*. Edited by in N. Gasa. Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- G.D. Anderson. 2007. *Poetic Diversity*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.poeticdiversity.org/main/poets2php?name Code=G.D. Anderson> [Accessed 12 May 2018].
- Gese, H. 1958. Geschichtliches Denken im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament. *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, vol.55, no.2, pp.127-145.
- Goldingay, J. 1979. The 'Salvation History' Perspective and the 'Wisdom' Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology. *The Evangelical Quarterly*, vol.51, pp.194-207.
- Gorman, M.J. 2001. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Gottlieb, C. 1991. The Words of the Exceedingly Wise: Proverbs 30-31. In *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective: Scripture in Context IV*. Edited by K.L. Younger, WW. Hallo & B.F Batto. New York: Edwin Mellen.
- Grant, J. 1989. *White woman's Christ and black woman's Jesus*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Greengus, S. 1966. Old Babylonian Marriage Ceremonies and Rites. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, vol.20, no.2, pp.55-72. USA: The American Schools of Oriental Studies.
- Grey, M. 2007. Feminist theology: a critical theology of liberation, In *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by C. Rowland. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Groenewald, A. 2005. Once again methods: Is there method in the madness? *Old Testament Essays*, vol.17, no.4, pp.544-559.
- Grosz, K. 1983. Bridewealth and Dowry in Nuzi. In *Images of Women in Antiquity*. Edited by A. Cameron & A. Kuhrt. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, pp.193-205.
- Hanks, P. (Ed.). 1994. *Collins Paperback English Dictionary*. Finland: WSOY.
- Hard, R. 2004. *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*. Based on H.J. Rose's Handbook of Greek Mythology. London: Routledge.
- Harris, A. 1993. Eishet Chayil 'A Woman of Worth'. *Jewish Affairs*, vol.48, no.2, pp.31.
- Hawkins, T.R. 1996. The Wife of Noble Character in Proverbs 31:10-31. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol.153, pp.12-23.
- Helen Joseph. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/helen-joseph> retrieved [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Helen Suzman. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available From: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/helen-suzman> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- Hendrik Verwoerd. 2018. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. [Online.]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/print/article/626778> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- Hilda Bernstein. n.d. *Revisions*. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.revisions.co.za/biographies/hilda-bernstein/> [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Hiralal, K. 2018. 'Mary and Annie resist': gender and resistance in South Africa 1900s-1950s. *South Asian Diaspora*, vol.10, no.2, pp.123-128.

- Hobsbawn, E. 2003. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *The Age of Capital*. London: Abacus, pp.1848-1875
- Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984. USA: Colorado Springs.
- Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
- Hubbard, D.A. 1962. *New Bible Dictionary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp.1257-1258.
- Hudson-Weems, C.F. 1981. *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press.
- Human, D.J. 1999. Die literêr-historiese lees van 'n teks. *Skrif en Kerk*, vol.20, no.2, pp.354-368.
- Ida Fiyo Mntwana. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/ida-fiyo-mntwana> [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- International Women's Day. [n.d.]. *International Womens Day*. [Online.]. Available from: [www.internationalwomensday.com/about](http://www.internationalwomensday.com/about) [Accessed 14 December 2015].
- Isasi-Diaz, A.M. 2002. Lo Cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology. *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology*, vol.10, no.1, pp. 5-17.
- Isherwood, L. & McEwan, D. 2001. Method in feminist theology. In *Introducing feminist theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by L. Isherwood & D. McEwan. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, pp.74-106.
- Jacobs, L. & Tyree, T. 2013. "The Construction of femininity, Race and Sexuality in Alcohol Advertisements in South Africa and American Women's Magazines." *Gender & Behaviour*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp.5788-5803.

- Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom. n.d. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johannes-Gerhardus-strijdom> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- Johnson, E.A. & Rakoczy, S. 1997. *Who do you say that I am? Introducing Contemporary Christology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Josie Mpama Palmers. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/josie-mpama-palmers> [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Joubert, S. & Smith, J. 2010. *Vrou-wees...Hoe om buitengewoon te leef*. Vereeniging: Christelike Uitgewersmaatskappy.
- Jupp, V. (Ed.). 2006. *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kaiser, W.C. 1991. *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Michigan: Zondervan.
- Kampen, J. 2011. Wisdom Literature. In *Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls*. USA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Kanyoro, M.R.A. 1996. Feminist Theology and African Culture. In *Violence Against Women: Reflections by Kenyan Women Theologians*. Edited by G. Wamue & M.N. Getui. Nairobi: Acton Press.
- Kanyoro, M.R.A. 2001. Engendered communal theology: African's women contribution to theology in the 21st century. In *Talitha cum! Theologies of African women*. Edited by N.J. Njoroge & M.W. Dube. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pp.158-180.
- Kanyoro, M.R.A. 2002. Beads and strands: Threading more beads in the story of the Circle. In *Her-stories: Hidden histories of women of faith in Africa*. Edited by I.A. Phiri, D.B. Govinden & S. Nadar. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pp.15-38.

- Keane, M.H. 1998. Feminist and Womanist Theology. *In Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutic*. Edited by S. Maimela & A. König. Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik Publishers, pp.123-124.
- Keimer, L. 1926. The Wisdom of Amen-em-ope and the Proverbs of Solomon. *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, vol.43, no.1, pp.8-21.
- Kidner, D. 1964. Proverbs, an introduction and commentaries. In *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, vol.17. Illinois: Downers Grove.
- Kitchen, K.A. 1977. Proverbs and wisdom books of the Ancient Near East: the factual history of a literary form. *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol.28, pp.69-114.
- Koptak, P.E. 2003. *Proverbs: NIV Application Commentary*. Michigan: Zondervan.
- Kwok, P. 1993. Racism and Ethnocentrism in Feminist Biblical Interpretations. In *Searching the Scriptures*. Edited by E. Schüssler-Fiorenza. New York: Crossroad.
- Lambert, W.G. 1960. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Lang, B. 2004. Woman's Work, Household and Property in Two Mediterranean Societies: A Comparative Essay on Proverbs XXXI 10-31. *Vetus Testamentum LIV*, vol.2, pp.188-207.
- Landman, C., 1994. *The piety of the Afrikaans women: Diaries of guilt*. Koedoespoort: Sigma Press.
- Landman, C. 1995. Ten Years of Feminist Theology in South Africa. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol.11, no.1, pp.143-148.

- Levenson, J.D. 1987. The source of Torah: Psalm 119 and the Modes of Revelation in Second Temple Judaism. In *Ancient Israelite Religion: essays in honour of Frank Moore Cross*. Edited by P.D. Miller, P.D. Hanson & S.D. McBride. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Lewis, C.S. 1958. *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Lillian Masediba Ngoyi. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/lillian-masediba-ngoyi> [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Lion, B. & Michel, C. 2016. *The Role of Women in work and society in the Ancient Near East*. Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc.
- Loader, J.A., 2014. *Proverbs 1-9*. Leuven: Peeters.
- Loades, A. 1998. Feminist interpretation. In *Cambridge companion to biblical interpretation*. Edited by J. Barton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.81-94.
- Longman, T. 2006. *Proverbs*. USA: Baker Publishing Group.
- Longman, T. & Enns, P. 2008. *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*. USA: Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship.
- Lucy Buyaphi Mvubelo. 2013. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/lucy-buyaphi-mvubelo> retrieved [Accessed 5 November 2017].
- Lyons, E.L. 1987. A note on Proverbs 31:10-31. In *The listening heart: Essays in Wisdom and Psalms in honor of Roland E. Murphy*, vol.58. Edited by K.G. Hogland, & R.E. Murphy. London: Burns & Oates, pp.237-245.

- Magubane, Z. 2010. Attitudes towards feminism among women in the ANC, 1950-1990: A theoretical re-interpretation. *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol.4, pp.975-1033.
- Marks, R.G. 1983. Dangerous hero: Rabbinic attitudes toward legendary warriors. *Hebrew Union College Annual*, pp.181-194.
- Marsman, H.J. 2003. *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East*. Leiden: Brill.
- Martin, J.D. 1995. *Proverbs. Old Testament Guides*. England: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Masenya, M.J. 1995. African Womanist Hermeneutics: A suppressed voice from South Africa speaks. *JFSR*, vol.11, no.1, pp.149-155.
- Masenya, M.J. 1996. *Proverbs 31:10-31 in A South African Context: A Bosadi (Womanhood) Perspective*. PhD Dissertation. University of South Africa.
- Masenya, M. 1997. Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A Reading for the Liberation of African (Northern Sotho) Woman. *Semeia*, vol.78, pp.55-68.
- McCreesh, T.P. 1985. Wisdom as wife: Proverbs 31: 10-31. *Revue Biblique (1946-)*, vol.92, no.1, pp.25-46.
- McKane, W. 1970. *Proverbs: A new approach*. London: SCM Press.
- Meinhold, A. 1991. *Die Spruche*. ZBK; Zurich: Theologischer Verlag.
- Meintjes, S. 1996. The women's struggle for equality during South Africa's transition to democracy. *Transformation*, vol.30, pp.47-64.
- Mercy Amba Oduyoye. 2016. BIOLA. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/mercy-am> [Accessed 12 March 2018].

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 2002. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.mw.com/home.htm> retrieved [Accessed 3 December 2017].

#Me Too movement founder Tarana Burke says time for talk is over as she calls for action. 2018. *The Telegraph*. 6 May. p 2. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/06/metoo-movement-founder-tarana-burke>. [Accessed 8 May 2018].

Meyers, C. 1988. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meyers, C. 1991. 'To Her Mother's house': Considering a counterpart to the Israelite Bet' ab. *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, pp.39-51. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press.

Meyers, C. 2014. "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol.133, no.1, pp.8-27.

Mieder, W. 1993. *Proverbs are never out of season: Popular wisdom in the modern age*. USA: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, B.E. 2009. *Plantations and Death Camps: Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Mitchem, S.Y. 2002. *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books.

Möller, P.L. 2010. They also served: Ordinary South African women in an extraordinary struggle: The case of Erna de Villiers (Buber). *New Contree*, vol.59, pp.61-84.

Moore, E. 1994. *The Domestic Warrior*. Unpublished paper submitted for OT 813 Proverbs, to Bruce Waltke, Westminster Theological Seminary, p.18.



Mosala, I. & Tlagale, B. (Eds.). 1986. *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.

Mother's Day. n.d. *Mother's Day Celebration*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.mothersdaycelebration.com/mothers-day-history.html> [Accessed 14 December 2015).

Mother Teresa of Calcutta. n.d. *Catholic.org* [Online]. Available from: <http://www.catholic.org/clife/teresa/> [Accessed 14 December 2015].

Murphy, R.E. 1981. *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*, vol.13. Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Murphy, R.E., 1994. Wisdom Literature and Biblical Theology. *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 24(1), pp.4-7.

Murphy, R.E. 1998. *Proverbs: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol.22. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Musiwa, E. 2012. Frances Baard's and Helen Joseph's struggle against apartheid 1950-1963: A comparative analysis. *Historia*, vol.57, no.1, pp.66-81.

Nasimuyu, A. 1993. Feminism and African Theology. *African Christian Studies*, vol.9, no.2, pp.21-29.

Nel, P.J. 1982. *The structure and ethos of the wisdom admonitions in Proverbs*, no.158. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Nhlumba Bertha Mkize. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/nhlumba-bertha-mkize> [Accessed 5 November 2017].

Nunes, C. & Van Deventer, H.J.M. 2009. Feminist interpretation in the context of reformation theology: A consideration. *In Die Skriflig*, vol.43, no.4, pp. 737-760.

- Nussbaum, M.C. 1999. *Sex and Social Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Oduyoye, M.A. 1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Maryknoll, New York: Oribis Books.
- Oduyoye, M.A. 2001. Significant contexts of African women's theology. In *Introducing African women's theology*. Edited by M.A. Oduyoye. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, pp.22-38.
- Oleson, J.P. 1992. *Water Works: Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol.6, Si-Z. London: Doubleday.
- Oliver, P. 2004. *Writing Your Thesis*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Osiek, C. 1997. The Feminist and the Bible: Hermeneutical Alternatives. *HTS*, vol.53, no.4, pp.956-968.
- Paul, J. 1993. *The Ponteficial Biblical Commission: The interpretation of the Bible in the church*. Boston: St. Paul Books & Media.
- Pedersen, J. 1926. *Israel: Its life and culture*, vol.1. London: Oxford University Press.
- Pederson, A. 2003. Feminist Theology. In *Encyclopaedia of Science and Religion*, vol.1 A-I. Edited by J.W. Van Huysteen. USA: Macmillan Reference.
- Perdue, L.G. 1981. Liminality as a social setting for wisdom instructions. *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, vol.93, no.1, pp.114-126.
- Perdue, L.G. 1990. *Cosmology and the Social Order in the Wisdom Tradition: The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, pp.457-478.
- Perdue, L.G. 2000. *Proverbs. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: John Knox Press.

Personification. n.d. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/personification> [Accessed 23 September 2018].

Phiri, I.A. 1997. Doing theology in community: The case of African women's theologians in the 1990s. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, vol.99, pp.68-76.

Pinnock, D. 2012. *Voices of liberation: Ruth First*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Pollock, S. 1999. *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden that never was*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pomeroy, S.B. 1975. *Goddesses. Whores, Wives and Slaves*. Germany: Schocken Books.

Pomeroy, S.B. 1995. The contribution of Women to the Greek Domestic Economy: Reading Xenophons Oeconomicus. In *Feminisms in the Academy*. Edited by D.C. Stanton & A.J. Stewart. USA: University of Michigan Press.

Preuss, H.D. 1974. *Alttestamentliche Weisheit in Christlicher Theologie? Questions disputes d'Ancien Testament*, pp.165-181.

Priest, J.F. 1963. Where is Wisdom to be Placed? *Journal of Bible and Religion*, vol.31, no.4, pp.275-282.

Professor Fatima Meer. 2011. *SAHO*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/Professor-Fatima-meer> [Accessed 6 November 2017].

Proverbs. n.d. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. [Online.]. Available from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Proverbs> [Accessed 9 March 2016].

Rahima Moosa. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/rahima-moosa> [Accessed 6 November 2017].

Rakoczy, S. 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Ray Alexander Simons. 2011. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/ray-alexander-simons> [Accessed 5 November 2017].

Reiss, J.K. 1997. The Woman of Worth: Impressions of Proverbs 31: 10-31. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol.30, no.141, p.51.

Rosaldo, M.Z. 1974. Women, culture and society: A theoretical overview. In *Women, culture and society*. Edited by M.Z. Rosaldo, & L. Lamphere. Stanford: Stanford University, pp.17-42.

Rowland, C. 2007. The theology of liberation. In *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edited by C. Rowland. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ruether, R.R. 1993. *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Ruether, R.R. 1995. Ecofeminism: Symbolic and social connections of the oppression of women and the domination of nature. *Feminist Theology*, vol.3, no.9, pp.35-50.

Ruether, R.R. 2004. The emergence of Christian feminist theology. In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*. Edited by S.F. Parsons. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Ruth Heloise. n.d. SAHO. [Online.]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/ruth-heloise-first> [Accessed 6 November 2017].

- Saint Anselm. n.d. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Anselm> [Accessed 16 April 2015].
- Sakenfeld, K.D. 1985. Feminist uses of biblical materials. In *Feminist interpretations of the Bible*. Edited by M. Russell. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, pp.55-64.
- Sakenfeld, K.D. 1989. Feminist interpretation. *Theology Today*, vol.46, pp.154-168.
- Sampson, C. 1991. The Bible in the Midst of women. In *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*. Edited by D. Ackermann, J.A. Draper & E. Mashinini, E. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Sandberg, S. & Scovell, N. 2013. *Lean in: Women work and the will to lead*. United Kingdom: WH Allen.
- Sawyer, D.F. 1990. Feminist interpretation. In *A dictionary of Biblical interpretation*. Edited by R.J. Coggins & J.L. Houlden. London: SCM, pp.231-234.
- Schaalman, H.E. 1995. *Personal conversations with Madipoane Masenya*. Evanston.
- Schmitt, A. 2003. Enkomien in Griechischer Literatur. *FISCHER, Auf den Spuren*, pp.358-381
- Schneider, L.C. & Trentaz, C.J. 2008. Making Sense of Feminist Theology Today. *Religion Compass*, vol.2, no.5, pp.788-803.
- Schneiders, S.M. 1989. Feminist ideology criticism and biblical hermeneutics. *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, vol.19, pp.3-10.
- Schneiders, S.M. 2000. *With oil in their lamps: Faith, Feminism and the Future*. New York: Paulist Press.

- Schüssler-Fiorenza, E. 1993. *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation*. USA: SCM Press.
- Schüssler-Fiorenza, E. 1999. *Sharing her word: Feminist biblical interpretation in context*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Schüssler-Fiorenza, E. 2001. *Wisdom ways: Introducing feminist biblical interpretation*. New York: Oribis Books.
- Schwab, G.M. 2009. The Book of Proverbs. In *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*. Edited by P.W. Comfort. Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp.456.
- Setel, R.T. 1985. Feminist insights and the question of method. In *Feminist perspectives on biblical scholarship*. Edited by A.Y. Collin. California: Scholars Press, pp.35-42.
- Sobrinho, J. 1988. *Spirituality of liberation: Toward political holiness*. New York: Oribis Books.
- Sonia Beryl Bunting. 2018. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sonia-beryl-bunting> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- Sophia Theresa Williams de Bruyn. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sophia-theresa-williams-de-bruyn> [Accessed 6 November 2017].
- South Africa celebrates the first National Women's Day. 2012. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/south-africa-celebrates-first-national-womens> [Accessed 3 April 2018].
- Sparks, K.L. 2009. *Ancient texts for the study of the Hebrew Bible: a guide to the background literature*. United States: Hendrickson Publishers.

- Steck, O.H. 1995. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Guide to the Methodology*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.
- Stol, M. 2016. *Women in the Ancient Near East*. Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc.
- Stol, M. & Wiggermann, F.A.M. 2000. *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: it's Mediterranean setting*, vol.14. Groningen: SIYX Publications.
- Stuart, D.S. 1980. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- Swindler, L.J. 1979. *Biblical affirmations of woman*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.
- Taylor, A. 1931. *The Proverb; and, an Index to "The Proverb."* Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Terrien, S. 1962. Amos and Wisdom. In *Israel's prophetic heritage: essays in honor of James Muilenburg*. Edited by B.W. Anderson & W. Harrelson. New York: Harper Collins Publishing, pp.108-15.
- The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. n.d. *The Circle Cawt*. [Online]. Available from: [thecirclecawt.org](http://thecirclecawt.org) [Accessed 31 March 2015].
- The turbulent 1950's – Women as defiant activists. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/turbulent-1950s-women-defiant-activists> [Accessed 3 April 2018].
- The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. 1995. UN. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/poverty.htm>. [Accessed 14 December 2015].
- The YCW. 2015. *Young Christian Workers*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.ycwimpact.com/> [Accessed 16 April 2018].

- Thiam, A. 1993. *Black Sisters, Speak Out. Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*. London: Pluto Press.
- Toy, C.H. 1970. *The Book of Proverbs (ICC)*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Trible, P. 1978. *God and the rethoric of sexuality: Overtures to Biblical Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press
- Truth, S. 1972. Ain't I A Woman? In *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*. Edited by M. Schneir. New York: Vintage Books, pp.95.
- Tyrian Purple. 2016. Ancient History Encyclopedia. [Online]. Available from: [https://www.ancient.eu/Tyrian\\_Purple](https://www.ancient.eu/Tyrian_Purple) [Accessed 12 October 2018].
- Van der Westhuizen, C. 2017. *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press.
- Van Leeuwen, R.C. 1997. *The book of Proverbs: The New Interpreters Bible*, vol. V. Nashville: Abingdon Press, pp.19-264.
- Van Rooy, H.F. 1985. Fertility as blessing and infertility as curse in the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament. In *Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Paper Presented at the First International Conference on Archaeology of the Ancient Mediterranean, University of Malta, 2-5 September 1985 (vol.1, p. 225). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Van Zyl, B. 2017. Equal pay for equal work dispute. *HR Future*, pp.40-44.
- Venter, P.M. 1999. Spreuke. In *Die Bybellennium: Die Bybel uitgelê vir eietydse toepassing*. Edited by W. Vosloo & F.J. Van Rensburg. Vereeniging: Christelike Uitgewersmaatskappy.
- Vivante, B. 2006. *Daughters of Gaia*. USA: University of Oklahoma Press.



Von Rad, G. 1972. *Wisdom in Israel*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Waegeman, M. 1989. The perfect wife of Proverbs 31:10-31. In *Golden Apfel in silbernen Schalen*. Edited by K. Schunck & M. Augustin. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp.101-107.

Walker, A. 1983. *In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose*. New York: Harcourt Inc.

Walker, C. 1991. *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers.

Waltke, B.K. 1979. The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology. *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol.136, no.544, pp.302-17.

Waltke, B.K. 1988. Lady Wisdom as Mediatrix: An Exposition of Proverbs 1:20-33. *Covenant Seminary Review*, 14 (1), pp. 1-15.

Waltke, B.K. 2005. *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 15-31*. Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Waltke, B.K. & Yu, C. 2007. *An Old Testament theology: An exegetical, canonical, and thematic approach*. Michigan: Zondervan.

Weeks, S. 2010. *An introduction to the study of Wisdom Literature*. London: A&C Black Publishing.

West, G. 1991. Silenced Women Speak: Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics. In *Women hold up half the sky: Women in the churches in South Africa*. Edited by D. Ackermann, J.A. Draper & E. Mashinini. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pp.76-80.

- Westbrook, R. 1991. *Property and the family in biblical law*, vol.113. London: A&C Black.
- What is 16 Days of Activism? 2017. *Western Cape Government*. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/what-16-days-activism> [Accessed 3 October 2015].
- Whybray, R.N. 1991. *The social world of the wisdom writers. The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, pp.227-250.
- Whybray, R.N. 1994. *The composition of the book of Proverbs*, vol.168. London: A&C Black.
- Whybray, R.N. 1995. *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study*, vol.1. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Williams, D. 1993. *Sisters in the wilderness: The challenge of womanist God-talk*. Markynoll, New York: Oribis Books.
- Williams, J. 1990. Towards a Womanist Theology of Liberation in South Africa. Black Domestic Workers: A Case Study. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, vol.6, pp.46-52.
- Williams, R.J. 1962. *Wisdom in the Ancient Near East: Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary vol.*, pp.949-952.
- Wilson, F.M. 1987. Sacred and profane? The Yahwistic redaction of Proverbs reconsidered. *The Listening Heart*, vol.328, pp.313-334
- Wolters, A. 1988. Proverbs xxxi 10-31 as heroic hymn: A form-critical analysis. *Vetus Testamentum*, 38(Fasc. 4), pp.446-457.
- Wolters, A. L. 2001. *The Song of the Valiant Woman: Studies in the Interpretation of Proverbs 31:10-31*. UK: Paternoster Press.

Wright, G.E. 1952. *God who acts: Biblical theology as recital*, no.8. London: SCM Press.

Yoder, C.E. & Yoder, C.R. 2009. *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries*. Proverbs. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Yoder, C.R. 2001. *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31: 10-31*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Yoder, C.R. 2012. Proverbs. In *Women's Bible Commenatry: Revised and Updated*. Edited by C.A. Newsom, S.H. Ringe & J.A. Lapsley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Young, I.M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Young Christian Students (YCS). n.d. *St Paul's Chapel*. [Online]. Available from: <http://stpauls-chapel.org/young-christian-students-ycs> [Accessed 14 April 2015].

Zimmerli, W. 1976. *Concerning the Structure of Old Testament Wisdom*. Minnesota: Fortress Pess.

20 000 Women march to the Union Buildings in protest of pass laws. 2011. SAHO. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/20-000-women-march-union-buildings-protest> [Accessed 7 April 2018].