

THE ROLE OF WOMEN FIGURES IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

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Abstract

The Book of Proverbs reveals a rich and distinctive gallery of female characters, endowing them with a pivotal role in the life of the young student. Notable among them is the foreign woman, a formidable threat to the recommended way of life within the wisdom tradition, and the enigmatic and semi-divine "Lady Wisdom," the allegorical embodiment of wisdom itself. This article elucidates the role of female characters as responses to fundamental challenges in wisdom thought, both broadly and within the unique framework of the Book of Proverbs.

The analysis posits a seemingly paradoxical explanation, asserting that the inclusion of positive and negative female characters in Proverbs reflects their influential role in the student's life. However, this portrayal underscores their perception as the ultimate "other," relegated to the margins of discourse, rather than implying a high status. Their alienation facilitates the dichotomous portrayal of good and bad women, allowing for a fluid transition between real and allegorical. Such portrayals strategically establish the wisdom tradition and its teachings as embodiments of order, deftly averting the descent into chaos, and exemplify, in the most influential way, the benefits of wisdom as well as the perils of forsaking it. Furthermore, they anchor the authority of the wisdom teachings in social norms and cosmological principles, thus addressing a vulnerable point in the world of the wise.