

## Proverbs 31 And The Wife Of Christ (Part Two)

Eshet Chayil

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May the Lord protect and defend you. May He always shield you from shame. May you come to be in Israel a shining name. May you be like Ruth and like Esther. May you be deserving of praise. Strengthen them, O Lord, and keep them from the stranger's ways. May God bless you and grant you long lives. May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you. May God make you good mothers and wives who will care for you.

That song from *Fiddler on the Roof* is one of my favorite pieces of music. And it is really interesting because when this film first came out in the early '70s Nancy and I were Catholics and never saw *Fiddler on the Roof* because it was a Jewish thing.

But after coming into the church of God we realized we could learn a lot of lessons from them, which we are going to pick up later on in the sermon.

We are going to begin the sermon in Romans 3, which I will be reading from the Amplified Classic Edition. I am using the Amplified because I think it may give us a bit of additional food for thought regarding the oracles of God and what our great God very purposefully continues to give us through the Jews. It is my opinion that the work God is doing through them for our benefit, even when they miss the point, may extend beyond the most obvious oracles of God.

Romans 3, verses 1 through 4 from the Amplified is Paul's comment on God's faithful work to continue to use them as a signet of the truth of His Word even though they themselves may have distorted it. Paul writes,

**Romans 3:1-4** (AMPC) Then what advantage remains to the Jew? [How is he favored?] Or what is the value or benefit of circumcision? Much in every way. To begin with, to the Jews were

entrusted the oracles (the brief communications, the intentions, the utterances) of God. What if some did not believe and were without faith? Does their lack of faith and their faithlessness nullify and make ineffective and void the faithfulness of God and His fidelity [to His Word]? By no means! Let God be found true though every human being is false and a liar, as it is written: That you may be justified and shown to be upright in what You say, and prevail when you are judged [by sinful men].

Many of you, as I said, who have seen either the play or the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, will remember that the foundation of the story was Jewish tradition. The overall theme is elucidated in Tevye's opening narration as he tells of life in their village is like a fiddler on the roof. They collectively keep their balance in life with one simple word: tradition. In the opening sequence, all the players, as residents of the village, join Tevye in song and dance to the melodic rendition of the song "Tradition."

This all takes place after he introduces the audience to the main theme of the play with these words. Tevye spoke:

Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years here in Anatevka. We have traditions for everything: how to sleep, how to eat, how to work, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear these little prayer shawls. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, why did this tradition get started? I'll tell you why—I don't know. But it's a tradition. And because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.

As I said, this opening sequence sets the theme for everything that happens in the rest of the play: the importance of their traditions, even though they have little or no idea why they do what they do. They only know that it is through their traditions that they find significance in their lives.

Of course, for us with Romans 3 in mind, this does not mean that all of their traditions are even remotely tied to the truth of God's Word. But I ask that we do not underestimate God's faithfulness to use His physically chosen people to make His intentions, His designs, His goals, His purposeful work

clearer to those He has called to faithfully become more focused on His marvelous work and our part in it.

As you just heard in the special music, one of their most beautiful traditions that is added by the playwrights is melodically on display as the family starts the Sabbath, standing around the dinner table before the meal.

As you just heard, Tevye and his wife begin the Sabbath singing these words basically to their daughters. It crescendos as you hear all the parents of the village join in, each in their own homes as they sang:

May the Lord protect and defend you. May He always shield you from shame. May you come to be in Israel a shining name. May you be like Ruth and Esther. May you be deserving of praise. Strengthen them, O Lord, and keep them from the stranger's ways. May God bless you and grant you long lives. May the Lord fulfill our Sabbath prayer for you. May God make you good mothers and wives. May He send you husbands who will care for you. May the Lord protect and defend you. May the Lord preserve you from pain. Favor them, O Lord, with happiness and peace. Oh, hear our Sabbath prayer. Amen.

This was a deeply emotional ballad composed by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick. But the truth of the matter is this song is loosely based on a very real Jewish tradition that started, as Tevye said, "I don't know."

But I have an idea that in God's faithfulness He may very well be calling our attention to another of His notable intentions through the Jews even though they misconstrued the lesson. As I was in the process of preparing this message on Proverbs 31 and the life of Christ, that beautiful Sabbath prayer from *Fiddler on the Roof* kept coming to mind, and I began to wonder if it may have been truly based on Jewish traditions. What I found out as I continued to investigate was something that I considered another bit of insight that God is giving us beyond the intent the Jewish community attaches to it.

The lyrics of the Sabbath prayer, I believe, were Sheldon Harnick's poetic abstract of a Jewish tradition that captured the essence of the actual piece

along with its intended purposes as the Jews saw it. Most religious Jews begin the Sabbath around the dinner table singing the *Eshet Chayil*. Those are the Hebrew words.

As you may remember from the introductory sermon to this series, *chayil* is the Hebrew word we saw is the foundation of virtuous, as it is used for the virtuous wife in Proverbs 31:10.

As a matter of fact, the words *Eshet Chayil* mean woman of valor, and it is the title of the pre-dinner blessing sung before the Sabbath every Friday night. Jewish tradition upholds this hymn each week to begin the Sabbath every Friday evening as the Jews see it. It is a song of thanksgiving and honor to the women of the home. The song is literally the last 22 verses of Proverbs 31.

The following comments are from a couple of websites on Judaism. The first one says:

The 22-verse acrostic poem from the book of Proverbs is a traditional blessing for the matriarch, celebrating her strength, love, and faith. The *Eshet Chayil* [this Hebrew phrase] translates to 'woman of valor' and is the name of the song, which is based on Proverbs 31:10 to 31. When it's sung, it's traditionally sung before the start of the Friday night Shabbat dinner, typically before the *kiddush*, the blessing over the wine.

The purpose: the custom is to honor the woman or the mother of the household. The song is seen as a blessing and a way to show appreciation for her contributions rather than a set of impossible expectations. The structure: the poem is an alphabetic acrostic with each of its 22 verses corresponding to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The origin: the exact origin or custom is unknown, but it has been widely adopted by almost every Jewish community.

The connection to Ruth: some scholars connect the poem to Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David, as both are described as *Eshet Chayil*.

From a second website that contains a rabbinic commentary that goes a bit farther into that last point, I found the following:

The *Eshet Chayil* is generally translated as 'woman of valor.' It's a portion from the book of Proverbs, specifically Proverbs 31:10-31, that is traditionally sung before the Friday night Shabbat meal.

The origin of the custom to sing *Eshet Chayil* on Shabbat is unknown, but it has been widely adopted by almost every Jewish community. It is sung at the beginning of the Shabbat evening meal immediately before the *kiddush*.

The rabbi then goes on to make a commentary on it on the Proverbs 31 woman of valor. He says,

The biblical poem is commonly understood as an ode to feminine strength and qualities and a moment of appreciation for all the hard work the women of the household have exerted in preparing the lavish Shabbat meal.

But this popular understanding is a bit perplexing. For starters, it doesn't really seem to make sense in context. After all, the *Eshet Chayil* is the closing section of the book of Proverbs, King Solomon's epic work of wisdom and morality. Why would Solomon choose to end this book by penning his ideal version of womanhood?

The rabbi continues:

The question becomes compounded when we pay closer attention to the actual words of the song, because it doesn't seem to be a universal ode to women. *Eshet Chayil* seems to be referring to someone very specific. For example, one of its verses reads, "Many women have displayed strength, but you have risen above them all." (Proverbs 31:29) That sure sounds like it's addressing a particular 'you' and not some generic feminine character.

And even if we do assume that *Eshet Chayil* is a generic poem about women, that raises a whole bunch of other questions. Why is this song idealizing an *Eshet Chayil* of all things? Literally, a woman of power or even military strength. Are those the first praiseworthy feminine virtues that come to mind?

He continues:

Furthermore, if we look at some of the other qualities of the woman of valor, they're not necessarily the kinds of things that we want to idealize about women in our day and age. For example, the song talks about a woman who bakes bread (verse 27) who sews curtain in 21-22, while her husband sits with elders in the gates of the city (Proverbs 31:23). How does that sit with our 21st-century sensibilities? Is this the model of womanhood that we want to sing about at our table?

For all these reasons, it's hard to reconcile the common understanding of the *Eshet Chayil* with the text itself.

Brethren, it seems there are some interesting questions raised. But his answers fall under the limits of Jewish tradition without the expansive view of God's Word that comes from a clearer look at His incredible plan for all men. It is interesting that the rabbinical commentary limited this to the narrow view of things that come from the minds of men.

For instance, on the one hand, he claims that God's Word is limited by, as he said, 21st-century sensibilities, while at the same time he considers you cannot apply the broad definition of *chayil*, military strength, to this woman of valor. But we addressed this very thing in the last sermon. The word does clearly carry with it the basic idea of strength, force, influence, worthiness. This is something that we are going to get into in the next sermon as we begin to look in Proverbs and tie it into the book of Esther.

However, as noted in the last sermon "Proverbs 31 and the Wife of Christ," it is God Himself who is the source of this strength. As a reminder of this,

please turn with me back to II Samuel 22. We will once again see King David extolling God's deliverance of him from his enemies. David writes,

**II Samuel 22:31-34** As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust Him. "For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? God is my strength and power, and He makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer, and He sets me on my high places."

Here in II Samuel 22:33, the word strength is the same Hebrew word *chayil*. David declares all strength—as well as everything good that *chayil* represents—comes from God.

One more scripture addressing this point, as was previously mentioned, which I believe is of great importance to us at this time and why I feel God wants us to look more deeply into what we can learn by connecting the Proverbs 31 woman of valor to the wife of Christ, is in Habakkuk. So let us turn back to Habakkuk. We will pick up with the first chapter, verse 1.

**Habakkuk 1:1-4** The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" and You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

And then in chapter 3, verse 17 (the end of the book), Habakkuk concludes:

**Habakkuk 3:17-19** Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.

Brethren, this book starts off with a profound sense of frustration with the chaotic circumstances of life, but it ends with a clear understanding of the perfect sovereignty of God. The Lord is my *chayil*. He will make my feet like deer's feet. He will make me walk on my high hills. The only way for each of us individually to wholeheartedly arrive at this same conclusion lies in the oft-quoted and ultimate theme of this book as stated in the following verse, also in Habakkuk.

**Habakkuk 2:4** Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.

God has given us all the things we need to do this individually, and I believe one of them very clearly lies within the description of the perfected wife of Christ as set before us in Proverbs 31:10-31. A metaphorical view of Proverbs 31 wife of valor, which I do not disagree with, is that God intended this section as a type of the church. We will be looking into this in more detail when we tie this section from the book of Proverbs into the book of Ruth. But in our thinking, this must come to a deeper, more well-thought-out idea.

It is a clear message not just to the church in general but to each individual member now called to properly prepare for our very personal relationship with Christ as His perfected helpmate. Brethren, you may think I am stretching Romans 3 a bit far, but in my opinion, I firmly believe this Jewish tradition of unknown origins actually has its source in our great and sovereign God who wants us to consider the full intent of Proverbs 31:10-31 for each now called to successfully make ourselves ready as the wife of Christ.

I find it very interesting that God has carefully tied the wife of valor—the wife of Christ—to the very beginning of each Sabbath, perhaps as a point of reflection for each one of us to carefully consider weekly how we are measuring up to what He expects from us.

It was pretty interesting this morning in the Berean that it mentioned the plumb line in Amos. Is this our plumb line which we can take some good advice from to become the wife of Christ, perfected?

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After I gave that first sermon in this series, I felt I had not done a very good job of pointing to why we should look at Proverbs 31—the woman of valor—beyond the conventional view of the ideal woman or the church of God in general. But I think I have found a more satisfying answer in the Jewish tradition of the *Eshet Chayil*.

I believe God has purposely positioned the perfected wife of Christ at the very beginning of the weekly Sabbath, and we should sit up and take notice because I think it is the standard that God wants each of us to measure ourselves against for our very specific responsibilities at Christ's return: the plumb line.

Before going any farther into this split sermon though, I want you to know that today we are not going to get into what we need to specifically learn from this God-inspired message to His carefully chosen wife—the wife of Christ—for His Son. Because I want to try to do a better job of explaining why we should take this beyond the surface description of the ideal woman or even the metaphor of the church in general. Because unless we drill down on this, carefully considering our individual responsibilities of maintaining the very personal relationship of a wife with her husband, we are going to fall short of developing the deep and abiding relationship with Jesus Christ as stated in Proverbs 31:11.

Every member of the church that has been specifically called to be the perfected wife of Christ who has made herself ready, will perfectly maintain Christ's affectionate trust, as it says in verse 11, in faithfully carrying out our individual responsibilities. Please keep in mind that what I am trying to do before getting into the meat of what God intends for us to learn from the Proverbs 31 woman of valor is that these lessons must be considered at a very personal level by each one of us or we are going to fall short.

Please turn with me back to the book of Genesis. I am going to pick up something else here now. We will start out right there in the first chapter. Let me read a number of verses, starting with verse 24.

**Genesis 1:24-28** Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind." And it was so. And

God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

**Genesis 1:31** Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

**Genesis 2:1-3** Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

**Genesis 2:7-9** And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground [This is a more detailed explanation of what we saw in the first chapter.], and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**Genesis 2:15-19** Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may

freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

**Genesis 2:21-25** And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And the Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Now please turn with me to the other end of the book in Revelation, in the time just prior to the return of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the Millennium. Revelation 19, verse 6. This is Christ's return and the beginning of the Millennium.

**Revelation 19:6-8** And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Brethren, we read through these very familiar verses because we needed to see in type the wife of Christ. The last thing God created before He created the holy Sabbath time—a time Jesus Christ clearly told was made for man, as recorded in Mark 2:27—was the woman and marriage. He then very purposely created the Sabbath to provide for carefully nurturing this relationship with Him. Right from the beginning we see God's plan in action.

God's Word tells us in Romans 5:14 and I Corinthians 15:45 that Adam was the type of the antitype, Jesus Christ. We saw in Genesis 2 that Adam was alone, which God said was not good. So we saw in type that God decided

there needed to be somebody just like Him. And in a type of the sacrificial work of Christ, God creates the perfect match for him who is just like him—just like Adam.

We do not have time to go into this now in detail, but right from the beginning we see the last thing before the Sabbath was created for man is the type of the marriage of Christ and His wife whom *God* had made ready to be Adam's wife. In the antitype, God has ensured that the wife of Christ has made herself ready to continue to work with Him in perfect unity throughout the Millennium. That is pictured with the Sabbath.

This is why it is so important for us now to examine the principles we can pick up from the woman of valor who begins this Sabbath rest for a thousand years in the perfect unity with Jesus Christ. God establishes that it is He who provides the strength of purpose and character for the one He is preparing for the perfect harmony with Christ. It is He that is in the process of making those whom He already sees as His precious and finished jewels that will perfectly complement Christ. It is He who is introducing us to the perfected work and character of the wife of Christ, who does good and not evil all the days of her life.

I want us to conclude this sermon in Matthew 25 and Jesus Christ's warning to His disciples, whom He had chosen. But we are going to back up a little bit and start off in Matthew 24 just so we can see who He is speaking to.

**Matthew 24:3** Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Christ then goes on to give them a concise answer of the circumstances and events that would be going forward from that time forward, things that would continue in an increasing amount and intensity.

Down in verse 45. Christ said:

**Matthew 24:45-47** "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due

season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods."

But then we go to Matthew 25. Here He gives us a clear warning to all the individuals who He has called to be His helpmate at His coming. We will pick up Matthew 25, verse 1 (again, very familiar scriptures), but they should be very concerning for us:

**Matthew 25:1-13** "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."

Only *half* of those called had been chosen, and they were chosen because of their own efforts as they went along. Brethren, you have been called *now* to individually use what God has freely given in His strength to make yourself personally ready to be Christ's perfected wife throughout His millennial rule, to rule with Him. But He is warning us here in these 13 verses, half did not use the time and the strength He has freely given to live up to the perfect standard of the wife of valor that He has given.

We need to make the *Eshet Chayil* our weekly Sabbath beginning for self-examination. Hopefully, as we have gotten through this, I hope you

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understand why we need to do this. And in the next sermon, we are going to explore the general lessons that each one of us need to learn and take with us to become the perfected wife of valor for Jesus Christ.