

# Proverbs 30:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

## Analysis

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**For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.** The final two intolerable scenarios: snu'ah (שנוֹאָה, odious/hateful woman) when tiba'el (תִּבְאֵל, she is married—literally 'becomes wife'), and shifchah (שִׁפְחָה, maidservant) when tirash gevirthah (תִּרְשֵׁשׁ גִּבְרִתָּה, inherits her mistress's place). Both describe women suddenly elevated beyond their preparation or character.

The odious woman—quarrelsome, contentious, bitter—whose unpleasant character should prevent marriage, somehow gains a husband. Once married, her toxicity makes home life unbearable (Proverbs 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15). The maidservant who displaces her mistress through manipulation, seduction, or circumstance lacks the wisdom, training, and character for household authority. Hagar's treatment of Sarah after conceiving Ishmael (Genesis 16:4) exemplifies this. Sarah's barrenness allowed Hagar temporary elevation; Hagar's contempt made the situation intolerable.

## Historical Context

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Ancient households included complex hierarchies. Wealthy families employed numerous servants; household management required significant skill. Marriages were arranged considering family alliances, not just personal attraction. The 'odious woman married' might refer to a socially undesirable match—perhaps a second wife taken reluctantly, or a woman whose reputation made her

unmarriageable except through desperation or deception. The maid servant supplanting her mistress violated social order, creating household chaos. Jacob's household illustrates: when Leah and Rachel gave him their maids Bilhah and Zilpah, the resulting rivalry and jealousy generated family dysfunction spanning generations. Proper order includes proper training, character development, and gradual preparation for responsibility.

## Related Passages

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**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does this proverb challenge both unjust hierarchies and the chaos of unprepared elevation—and how can Christians discern the difference?
2. What character qualities need development in you before assuming increased responsibility in marriage, family, work, or ministry?
3. How does the gospel transform bitter, quarrelsome hearts into gentle, peaceful spirits (Galatians 5:22-23), addressing the root issue of the 'odious woman'?

## Interlinear Text

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תִּשְׁפֹּת הָנָסָה שֶׁ נָזָה כִּי תַּבְּאֵל תַּבְּאֵל ! שִׁפְּתָח הַ

H8478      For an odious      H3588      woman when she is married      and an handmaid      H3588  
H8130      H1166      H8198

תִּשְׁפֹּת הָנָסָה שֶׁ נָזָה כִּי תַּבְּאֵל  
that is heir to her mistress

H3423      H1404

## Additional Cross-References

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**Proverbs 27:15** (Parallel theme): A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.

**Proverbs 21:19** (Parallel theme): It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.

**Proverbs 29:21** (Parallel theme): He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length.

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