

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

For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress. The final two intolerable scenarios: *snu'ah* (שְׁנוּאָה, odious/hateful woman) when *tiba'el* (תִּבְעַל, she is married—literally 'becomes wife'), and *shifchah* (שִׁפְחָה, maidservant) when *tirash gevirtah* (תִּירַשׁ גְּבוֹרְתָּהּ, 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

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 maidservant 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

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

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

תַּחַת	שְׁנוֹאָה	כִּי	תִבְעַל	אֶשְׁפָּחָה	כִּי
H8478	For an odious	H3588	woman when she is married	and an handmaid	H3588
	H8130		H1166	H8198	
שֶׁהִיא	גְּבוּרָתָהּ:				
that is heir	to her mistress				
H3423	H1404				

Additional Cross-References

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.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org