

Proverbs Chapter 31

This last chapter of proverbs contains 2 poems:

- (1) The Wise King 31:2-9; and
- (2) The Excellent Wife 31:10-31.

Both are the teaching of a godly mother to King Lemuel, who ancient Jewish tradition identified as King Solomon, but who is otherwise unknown.

Proverbs 31:1 "The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him."

The name "Lemuel" means unto God.

There is no record of a king Lemuel other than here.

Many believe this, too, is from Solomon to God.

So much of this has already been uttered by Solomon in previous lessons.

When we started (in Proverbs, chapter 1:8 told us):

"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:"

Proverbs 31:2 "What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? And what, the son of my vows?"

These 3 questions, as we stated before, make the person listening more attentive.

These questions indicate the serious passion of a mother's heart.

Like Hannah, she had dedicated her child to the Lord.

(In the verses of 2-9), the godly king is addressed and told that his reign should be characterized by:

- (1) Holiness, verse 3;
- (2) Sobriety, verses 4-7; and
- (3) Compassion, verses 8-9.

This section is filled with succinct and solemn warnings against vices to which kings are particularly susceptible; immorality, overindulgence, unrighteous rule and indifference to those in need.

Proverbs 31:3 "Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings."

The prince here, is reminded by his mother not to give his strength and power into the hands of a woman.

She is reminding him that someday he will be king, and he must retain his power for the throne.

Also, multiplying foreign wives destroys a king like it did Solomon.

Proverbs 31:4 "[It is] not for kings, O Lemuel, [it is] not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:"

Kings and princes are called upon to make decisions that affect the entire kingdom.

They must be sober and able to make clear headed decisions.

Alcohol affects your ability to function properly.

A drastic mistake could be made under the influence of strong drink.

In this verse and the next we see that intoxicating drinks can weaken reason and judgment, loosen convictions, or pervert the heart.

They do not suit rulers who need clear, steady minds and keen judgment.

Proverbs 31:5 "Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted."

A person under the influence of alcohol cannot think clearly and could not remember the laws of the land.

A drastic injustice could be done.

Proverbs 31:6 "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts."

Strong drink is to be reserved to kill pain.

Those who are grieving need wine to help them forget.

Strong drink as a medicine dulls the senses and helps to forget.

Proverbs 31:7 "Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."

Just as in this verse here, drinking is for those who cannot face reality.

Drinking is a symptom of a greater problem.

In extreme cases, possibly relating to a criminal on death row or someone agonizing in pain with a terminal illness or tragic circumstance, are in utter contrast to that of the king.

Proverbs 31:8 "Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction."

This is saying to speak up for those who, for one reason or another, cannot speak for themselves.

Plead their case, if you will.

Proverbs 31:9 "Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."

Don't just stand there and let them be punished, because they are unable to defend themselves.

Speak up for the poor and needy, especially those who are ruined by their condition of weakness.

The king's duty was to righteously uphold the case of the helpless in both physical (verse 6), and material (verse 9), crises.

The monarch thus mediates the compassion of God.

Verses 10-31

Contains a poem which offers a beautiful description of the excellent wife as defined by a wife and mother (verse 1).

Spiritual and practical wisdom plus moral virtues mark the character of this woman in contrast to the immoral women (of verse 3).

While the scene here is of a wealthy home and the customs of the ancient Near East, the principles apply to every family.

They are set forth as the prayer of every mother for the future wife of her son, and literarily arranged with each of the 22 verses beginning with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in consecutive order.

Proverbs 31:10 "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price [is] far above rubies."

This "virtuous or an excellent woman" is a woman of high morals who is upright in all her ways.

This is just saying that her worth cannot be measured in earthly things, such as rare stones (rubies).

She does exist, but is very hard to find.

Proverbs 31:11 "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil."

This woman is totally faithful to her husband.

He can have confidence in her, because she will not let him down.

His wife will always be faithful to him in every situation.

She will not even give the appearance of evil.

He does not maintain jealous guard over her or keep his valuables locked up so that she cannot access them as was a common ancient practice in a house of distrust.

She demonstrates impeccable loyalty to her husband, and her thrift and industry will add to his wealth.

Proverbs 31:12 "She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life."

She is on his side.

She is beside him helping in everything.

She loves to please him.

She respects him and builds him up when he is down.

She does not tear him down, but instills confidence in him.

Proverbs 31:13 "She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands."

She is industrious and helps him produce for the family.

She is not lazy.

She works willingly, because she wants to help.

Excellent women gathered the material for making cloths (as we'll see in verse 19).

Proverbs 31:14 "She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar."

We see that she goes forth wherever the food for her house is and brings it home.

Excellent women would go far to secure the best food for their families.

Proverbs 31:15 "She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens."

She is not a sleepy-head.

She gets up early and sees that her family and her maidens are fed.

Her first concern is the welfare of her family.

In order to have the food prepared for the family each day, she had to rise before dawn to begin the work, which she would do gladly.

Proverbs 31:16 "She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard."

I believe this is an indication that she is a business woman.

She takes on responsibility in buying the land.

She works outside the house when she plants the vineyard.

She was resourceful and entrepreneurial in her investing and reinvesting.

She doesn't say to the husband that making the money for the family is his job.

She helps him in this too, when she can.

Proverbs 31:17 "She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms."

We see here, that hard work makes her very strong.

Such women were not soft, but by virtue of rigorous work, they were strong.

Proverbs 31:18 "She perceiveth that her merchandise [is] good: her candle goeth not out by night."

That which she produced for the family of clothing, food and wealth was good and profitable.

Candle or lamp is to be understood literally.

She planted the vineyard during the day and wove late at night.

She rose early before dawn to prepare the food, thus keeping a before sunrise to after dark schedule to care for her household, which was the foremost priority of her life.

She protects what is her own.

She appreciates her husband and her family and works to keep them.

Proverbs 31:19 "She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff."

We see here, that she looks for useful work to do.

She is not lazy, as we said before.

These tools are used to turn wool into thread for making clothing.

(In verses 20-24), her activities, driven by the priority of caring for her family, resulted in multiplied fruitfulness for:

- (1) The poor and needy (verse 20);
- (2) Her own household (verse 21);
- (3) Herself (verse 22);
- (4) Her husband (verse 23); and
- (5) The tradesmen (verse 24).

Proverbs 31:20 "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."

She is not selfish, but shares with the less fortunate.

She is generous in helping the poor and needy.

She has a big, giving heart.

Proverbs 31:21 "She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household [are] clothed with scarlet."

She has seen to it that her whole family has warm, comfortable garments, even for snowy weather.

Snow indicates the cold that occurs in the high altitudes of Palestine.

Her labors anticipated her family's need for warm clothing in such cold places and seasons.

Proverbs 31:22 "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing [is] silk and purple."

She looks nice for her family.

She takes care of herself, as we read earlier, and dresses nice so her husband will be proud to tell people that she is his wife.

The efforts she makes to honor others are rewarded to her.

These silk and purple garments are expensive evidences of the blessings returned to her by God's grace.

Proverbs 31:23 "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land."

She builds her husband up, and he has respect in the town.

She never does things to make him ashamed.

This woman made a significant contribution to her husband's position in the community and to his success.

His domestic comfort promoted his advancement in public honor.

A man's good reputation begins with his home and thus the virtue of his wife.

Proverbs 31:24 "She maketh fine linen, and selleth [it]; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant."

Here again, we see her making money away from the home to help her husband.

"Fine linen", of course, means righteousness spiritually.

With all her other responsibilities faithfully discharged, she took time to make items of clothing for the purposes of trade.

The section (of verses 25-27), emphasizes her character.

Proverbs 31:25 "Strength and honor [are] her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come."

These words describe the character of the woman who fears the Lord.

Her inward clothing displays divine wisdom, giving her confidence to face the future with its unexpected challenges.

This woman is upright in all of her ways, and the Lord will reward her.

She will be among those who will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant".

She is well covered in the spiritual things of righteousness.

Proverbs 31:26 "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue [is] the law of kindness."

Her teaching of wisdom and the law is tempered with mercy.

Her speech conveys her wisdom and kindness.

Her words build up and don't tear down.

She is not a gossip or a slanderer.

When she speaks, it is to help.

Her wisdom instructs her children.

Proverbs 31:27 "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness."

We said before, she is industrious; and her first thought is for the well being of the members of her own house.

She was a skilled manager of the home.

The "bread of Idleness" literally means "eyes looking everywhere" as in the lazy man (in verses 6:6 & 9); of who the same root word is used.

Proverbs 31:28 "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband [also], and he praiseth her."

Her husband and her children (who know her best), see her unselfishness, love, and care that she has for all of them.

They are proud of her.

She is a good mother and wife, and they let her know it.

She is greatly respected because she has earned the praise of her family.

There can be no higher joy for a mother than for her children to grow up to praise her as the source of the wisdom that made them godly.

Proverbs 31:29 "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all."

This is saying that many women are faithful to their husbands, but fall short in some of these other areas; but she has done the best of all toward her family and God.

This was her husband's superlative praise (verse 28), which was well deserved, in which he used the same word for "excellent" (found in verse 10).

Proverbs 31:30 "Favor [is] deceitful, and beauty [is] vain: [but] a woman [that] feareth the LORD, she shall be praised."

Here, we see that doing favors' can be good.

To have a wife who is attractive to look at is nice, but the very best you can do is to have a wife who fears God and keeps His commandments; and she will have all of these other things as an extra.

True holiness and virtue command permanent respect and affection, far more than charm and beauty of face and form.

She is to be praised, because she has chosen the best: salvation through the Lord.

Proverbs ends where it began: with a reference to the fear of the LORD.

Proverbs 31:31 "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates."

Her works speak for themselves.

She has earned her praise.

We see in this, the Lord is pleased with her, because she has done His will in her life.

While she receives material reward (verse 22), the praise and success she labored to bring to her family and community will be her praise.

The result of all her efforts is her best eulogy.

Proverbs 31 Questions

1. What does "Lemuel" mean?

2. Who is he, probably?
3. Why are there 3 questions in verse 2?
4. Why was he warned against giving his strength to women?
5. Who were not to drink wine or strong drink?
6. When they drank, what were they likely to forget?
7. Who should strong drink be given to?
8. What is given to those of a heavy heart?
9. Drinking is for people who cannot do what?
10. Who are we to speak up for?
11. What is the price of a "virtuous woman"?
12. Her husband has no need of spoil. Why?
13. She will do him _____ and not _____.
14. How does she work?
15. What is meant by "bringing food from afar"?
16. When does she get up out of bed?
17. Who does she feed?
18. What Scripture indicates she is a business woman?
19. What is intended by her perceiving her merchandise is good?
20. How does she feel about the poor and needy?
21. What is her household clothed in?
22. What does she do to help her appearance?
23. What does she make and sell to the merchant?
24. What two things are her clothing?

25. In her tongue is the law of _____.

26. She is _____ not idle.

27. What do her husband and children call her?

28. Beauty is _____.

29. Who shall be praised?

30. What kind of works does she have?