

## Sayings of King Lemuel – Wisdom in Advocacy

### Proverbs 31:1-9

**Proverbs 31:1-9** - *“The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him: What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows?”*

*Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings.*

*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink, lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted.*

*Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.*

*Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die.*

*Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”*

### Background Notes

For background, the first question that needs to be answered is: Who was King Lemuel? We don't know! Of the nineteen kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, or of the twenty kings of the southern kingdom of Judah, there was no “King Lemuel.” Proverbs 31:1 is the only mention of King Lemuel in the Bible.

If the word “utterance” or “oracle” in verse 1 is translated as “location of Massa” (as was the possibility for Agur in chapter 30), then it means that Lemuel was a king in the line of Ishmael (Genesis 25). That's one possibility. It has also been suggested that Lemuel was another name for King Solomon. In Hebrew, Lemuel means “*belonging to God*” or “*devoted to God*” or “*dedicated to God*.” When Solomon was born, David and Bathsheba named him Solomon, meaning “*peaceable*,” but the prophet Nathan named him Jedidiah, meaning “*beloved of the Lord*.” “*Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the Lord loved him, and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord*” (2 Samuel 12:24-25).

A further suggestion is that Bathsheba gave her son, Solomon, the name Lemuel when she dedicated this son to the Lord. Verse 2 might indicate that Lemuel was dedicated to the Lord: “*And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows?*”

There is nothing in the records about Solomon in either Kings or Chronicles that backs up this suggestion. However, whoever King Lemuel was, verse 2 tells us that his mother made vows regarding his birth and childhood. Do you remember the vows that Hannah made before her son Samuel was born? *“Hannah made a vow and said, ‘O Lord of Hosts, if you’ll indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant and remember me and not forget your maidservant but will give your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.’”* (1Samuel 1:11).

## Doctrinal Point

### The sayings of King Lemuel contain truth for every believer.

Verse 1 tells us that the teachings of this chapter are the life lessons that King Lemuel’s mother taught him when he was a boy. Not just as a young child, but as a boy who was old enough to understand what she was teaching about wine, women, and wives.

**Verse 3:** *“Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings.”*

Here’s a warning against sexual immorality. Sin in the area of sex is not just sin – it’s a sin that has a debilitating effect on your physical body and on your mind. And sexual sin will definitely have a negative effect on a ruler’s ability to lead - whether a king or president or governor or congressperson. Think of the heartbreak and bad fallout from recent sex scandals in high places.

**Verses 4-5:** *“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink; lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted.”*

These verses warn kings to avoid excessive use of wine and strong liquor. This is wise advice for **everyone!** Alcohol can dull the mind. It can impair judgment and diminish the ability to make good decisions. As a result, justice can be denied to the oppressed.

This warning is not only important for kings and government officials, but for all of us. The Bible is very clear in its teaching that being drunk with wine or strong drink is sinful. Ephesians 5:18 says, *“Do not be drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.”*

Do you remember back to Proverbs 23:29-35 and the vivid description of a drunkard’s pathetic condition?

*“Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things.*

Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: *“They*

*have struck me, but I was not hurt. They have beaten me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?"*

That is the sad state of one who cannot resist alcoholic beverages. But is there no good use for wine or strong drink?

Proverbs 31:6-7 gives us the answer:

**Verses 6-7:** *"Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."*

Some Christians hold to the position that the Bible teaches that there is no good use for wine or strong drink. How do they interpret Proverbs 21:6-7? Since they can't take their usual position, they say that the "wine" in verse 6 is just grape juice. But grape juice certainly doesn't help a person forget his poverty and remember his misery no more!

In order to maintain their position that Christians should not use alcoholic beverages - under any conditions - some folks say that verses 6-7 are irony. Using irony, let me paraphrase verses 6-7: "What? Give strong drink to someone whose life is ending – someone who is dying? Are you kidding? No way! You would never do that."

My own position: Verses 6-7 are speaking of pain relief for a fatally ill or injured person. These verses support a biblical position that pain relief medication is proper and helpful, including the medicinal use of wine.

This position is supported by Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:23 where we read, *"No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities."* This verse was written in the context of Timothy's medical problems (not about drinking in general). Apparently Timothy was not in the best of health, and he was ministering in Ephesus where the water was not the greatest. So Paul told Timothy to use a little wine for the sake of his stomach, and for his frequent or chronic illnesses. This is still good medical advice. Ever since my cardiac bypass surgery, my cardiologist recommends that I drink a small amount of red wine every day to help prevent further heart problems.

Notice - in this verse the apostle Paul was not discussing social drinking, and this verse should not be used as a "proof-text" for drinking wine. There are other Scriptures on the subject of Christian liberty that apply to the question of drinking or not drinking. Remember: the aim of everything we do - or don't do - should be to bring glory to God!

**Verses 8-9:** *"Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy."*

In verses 8-9, King Lemuel passed on to us the important advice his mother gave him about defending the rights of the poor or needy.

This is wise teaching for all of us. In Mark 14:7, the Lord Jesus told us, *"You have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good."* Whenever and wherever, we can speak up for the rights of those who have

been railroaded, or silenced, or denied their just and biblical rights in some way. We have a responsibility to speak up and *“plead the cause of the poor and needy.”*

The sayings of King Lemuel contain truth for every believer.

## **Practical Application**

### **Be a mother like King Lemuel’s mother!**

In our background notes we said this chapter implies that King Lemuel’s mother taught him Bible stories - stories from Israel’s history - when he was a child. And she also taught him biblical truths and life lessons when he was older - as a teen, and perhaps even beyond.

And godly mothers have the same responsibility today!

This, of course, does not relieve fathers of their responsibility to teach and train their sons. For example, Ephesians 6:4 specifically charges fathers to raise their children in the training and knowledge of the Lord. But Proverbs 31 gives mothers this responsibility as well.

In the New Testament, Timothy’s mother and grandmother were believers, and they taught him the Scriptures - starting at a very young age! The apostle Paul urged Timothy to *“continue in what you have learned and of what you have become convinced, because... from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-15).*

So, mothers who have sons - have you taught your sons about the dangers of drinking? Have you encouraged them to defend the rights of the poor and less fortunate? Have you warned them about consequences of sexual sin? You have the biblical right and responsibility to teach your son the biblical mandates in these areas.

Be a mother like King Lemuel’s mother!