

TEXT — 31:1-9

1. The words of king Lemuel:
The oracle which his mother taught him.
2. Why, my son? and what, O son of my womb?
And what, O son of my vows?
3. Give not thy strength unto women,
Nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.
4. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink
wine;
Nor for princes to say, Where is strong drink?
5. Lest they drink, and forget the law,
And pervert the justice due to any that is afflicted.
6. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish,
And wine unto the bitter in soul:
Let him drink, and forget his poverty,
And remember his misery no more.
8. Open thy mouth for the dumb,
In the cause of all such as are left desolate.
9. Open thy mouth, judge righteously,
And minister justice to the poor and needy.

STUDY QUESTIONS OVER 31:1-9

1. Who was Lemuel (v. 1)?
2. What three things did Lemuel's mother call him in v. 2?
3. How did kings behave (v. 3)?
4. What city in the U.S.A. is said to consume the most
liquor per capita (v. 4)?
5. Why should rulers especially leave strong drink alone
(v. 5)?
6. How did ancients use alcohol besides as a beverage (v.
6)?
7. Is strong drink really for well people to drink to forget
their sorrow (v. 7)?
8. What does "open thy mouth" mean in v. 8?
9. Why have the poor and needy often suffered in court
(v. 9)?

PARAPHRASE OF 31:1-9

1. These are the wise sayings of King Lemuel of Massa,
taught to him at his mother's knee:

- 2,3. O my son, whom I have dedicated to the Lord, do not spend your time with women--the royal pathway to destruction.
- 4-7. And it is not for kings, O Lemuel, to drink wine and whiskey. For if they drink they may forget their duties and be unable to give justice to those who are oppressed. Hard liquor is for sick men at the brink of death, and wine for those in deep depression. Let them drink to forget their poverty and misery.
- 8,9. You should defend those who cannot help themselves. Yes, speak up for the poor and needy and see that they get justice.

COMMENTS ON 31:1-9

V. 1. This chapter is another supplement (just like Chapter 30). History has not preserved, nor has archaeology uncovered, information that would help us identify "king Lemuel". If his father was a king with a harem of wives, the rearing and teaching of his sons became the work of his own mother. "Oracle" indicates a divine message. We are glad for this supplement that closes out the book of Proverbs, especially the material about the virtuous woman (vs. 10-31).

V. 2. "The thrice repeated... 'what', which Luther appropriately rendered by 'Ach!', is plainly an impassioned exclamation expressing the inward emotion of the mother's heart at the thought that the son might possible fall into an evil way" ("Lange"). The preciousness of this son to his mother is evident from her three expressions concerning him: (1) "my son"--her very own son, one of the dearest possessions that any woman can have; (2) "son of my womb"--not adopted by her but born by her, the fruit of her own body as blessed and enabling by God; (3) "son of my vows"--she, like Hannah (I Sam. 1:2,8,10,11), may have been barren, earnestly prayed for a child, and vowed that if God granted her a child she would rear the same to His honor and glory. Her teaching these important things to Lemuel were likely part of her fulfilling those vows.

V. 3. Her first plea was for him not to sacrifice his strength (Hebrew: "vigor") to women (kings kept harems). Her second plea concerning "that which destroyeth kings" was likely referring to "strong drink", which she goes on to discuss in succeeding verses. She was warning him against "wine" and "women".

V. 4. Solomon rightfully prayed for wisdom that he might be capable of ruling Israel (I Kings 3:9), but strong drink can affect man's reasoning powers. A king needs all of his mentality (and then some!) all the time, so his mother correctly said, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel." Ben-hadad and the thirty-two kings with him were drinking themselves drunk, and the Israelites defeated them that day (I Kings 20:16-21). Belshazzar was having a drunken feast when the handwriting appeared on the wall, telling him that that very night his kingdom would be given to the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:1-5,25-28). Eccl. 10:17 observes, "Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!". It is too bad that our own capital city (Washington D.C.) has been consuming more alcoholic beverages per capita than other city in the U.S.A.

V. 5. A drinking monarch will not be a good king: he will "forget the law" and "pervert...justice". Matters that need attention will be neglected because of drinking. As was observed, boozing affects one's mental powers, judgment-ability and general direction. Hos. 4:11 says, "Whoredome and wine and new wine take away the understanding."

Vs. 6,7. Another case of Hebrew parallelism in which the latter statement is but a restatement of the first. In other words, the "bitter in soul" is the same as "him that is ready to perish". We do utilize drugs and alcoholic-based medicines to relieve the afflicted in their final sufferings. If one overlooks the Hebrew parallelism here, he would end up having God advising the sorrowful to turn to booze. But life has proven that people who do that don't "drown their sorrows"; it is more as Archie Word observes: "They only give them swimming lessons."

V. 8. "The 'dumb' is any one who for any reason whatever is unable to plead his own cause; he may be of tender age, or of lowly station, or ignorant, timid, and boorish; and the prince is enjoined to plead for him" ('Pulpit Commentary'). The next verse continues the subject.

V.9. The command to "judge righteously" is found elsewhere in the Bible also: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor" (Lev. 19:15); "I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the

sojourner that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; ye shall hear the small and the great alike" (Deut. 1:16,17); "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). But often the poor and afflicted had no one to see that they received justice. The Bible speaks elsewhere on that also: "Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:17); "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well" (Jer. 22:16); "I delivered the poor that cried, The fatherless also, that had none to help" (Job 29:12).

TEST QUESTIONS OVER 31:1-9

1. Why is Lemuel's mother teaching him instead of his father (v. 1)?
2. Comment on each of the ways Lemuel's mother spoke of him in v. 2.
3. Lemuel was not to dissipate his strength upon (v. 3).
4. What else was Lemuel warned about in v. 3?
5. What instruction is given again in v. 4?
6. Suppose Lemuel drank as a king (v. 6).
7. What use for wine is mentioned in v. 7?
8. Who all would be included under "dumb" in v. 8?
9. What does the Bible say about judging righteously (v. 9)?

TEXT — 31:10-21

10. A worthy woman who can find?
For her price is far above rubies.
11. The heart of her husband trusteth in her,
And he shall have no lack of gain.
12. She doeth him good and not evil.
All the days of her life.
13. She seeketh wool and flax,
And worketh willingly with her hands.
14. She is like the merchant-ships;
She bringeth her bread from afar.
15. She riseth also while it is yet night,
And giveth food to her household.
16. She considereth a field, and buyeth it;
With the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.
17. She girdeth her loins with strength,

- And maketh strong her arms,
 18. She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable;
 Her lamp goeth not out by night.
 19. She layeth her hands to the distaff,
 And her hands hold the spindle.
 20. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor;
 Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
 21. She is not afraid of the snow for her household;
 For all her household are clothed with scarlet.

STUDY QUESTIONS OVER 31:10-21

1. Would such a woman be put into the slave market (v. 10)?
2. "Trust" in her in what sense (v. 11)?
3. "Good and not evil" in what ways (v. 12)?
4. What was flax used for (v. 13)?
5. How far (v. 14)?
6. What about her and late-morning sleeping (v. 15)?
7. Was she acting independent of her husband or for her husband (v. 16)?
8. How does v. 17 contrast her with many women?
9. Why "goeth not out" (v. 18)?
10. What are the "distaff" and "spindle" (v. 19)?
11. Did this busy woman think only of her family (v. 20)?
12. What is the connection between the two statements in v. 21?

PARAPHRASE OF 31:10-21

- 10-21. If you can find a truly good wife, she is worth more than precious gems! Her husband can trust her, and she will richly satisfy his needs. She will not hinder him, but help him all her life. She finds wool and flax and busily spins it. She buys imported foods, brought by ship from distant ports. She gets up before dawn to prepare breakfast for her household, and plans the day's work for her servant girls. She goes out to inspect a field, and buys it; with her own hands she plants a vineyard. She is energetic, a hard worker, and watches for bargains. She works far into the night! She sews for the poor, and generously gives to the needy. She has no fear of winter for her household, for she has made warm clothes for all of them.

COMMENT ON 31:10-21

V. 10. From here to the end of the chapter sets for the the beautiful description of a virtuous woman, wife and mother. It is the Bible's longest and best description of her. It has been a favorite of many Christian women, and every Christian girl should know it well. Each of the verses of this detailed description begins with the different letters of the Hebrew alphabet. To describe it in English, V. 10 begins with A, v. 11 with B, v. 12 with C, etc. to the end. Other passages on the virtuous woman: "A worthy woman is the crown of her husband" (Prov. 12:4); "A prudent wife is from Jehovah" (Prov. 18:22); "Whose adorning let it not be the outward adorning...but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner aforetime the holy women also, who hoped in God, adorned themselves" (I Pet. 3:3-5).

V. 11. The first part of this description relates her to her husband, and the first thing it says is that he can trust her. "The husband of such a wife goes forth to his daily occupations, having full confidence in her whom he leaves at home that she will act discreetly and promote his interests while he is absent" ("Pulpit Commentary"). See the contrast in Prov. 7:18,19. "The man is not at home; He is gone on a long journey...Come, let us take^v our fill of love until morning." His confidence in her integrity and her attention to the family's interests shows up in "he shall have no lack of gain". V. 13 onward shows the important part she plays in the sound financial condition of the home. Contrast her relationship to this with the spendthrift wives who fairly wreck their husbands financially.

V. 12. She is altogether an asset to him and in no sense a liability. Again, she brings him joy and not sorrow by her behaviour and by her contributions. "Her good is unmixed: she will do him good and not evil...Her good is...constant and permanent...all the days of her life" ("Clarke"). "All the days of her life" shows that she will still be his wife in years to come; she will be faithful to the marriage vow: "Until death do us part." She will not only do good to him while he is strong and able but also when he is older and infirm.

V. 13. Wool and flax (from whence comes linen) were made into yarn or thread, the yarn or thread into cloth, and the

cloth into garments. This made it a big job to make clothes for the family, but she did it "willingly" and cheerfully. She was neither lazy nor complaining.

V. 14. Even as she sought wool and flax (v. 13), evidently wanting good materials to work with, even so she provides her family with good food, some of which came from distant places. Their markets contained items made possible by merchant-ships. She had planned meals--not just thrown-together ones or krick-krack eating.

V. 15. We notice three things: (1) she gets up early--is no late-sleeper who is only concerned about herself instead of her family; (2) she cooks a good breakfast for the family--a good breakfast is a good foundation for the family's day's activities: they do not leave the house with empty stomachs; (3) she gets the family's maidens busy with their work for the day. By that time some of our society-loving women finally get out of bed, she has a half-day's work already done. She is filling her God-intended role in the home.

V. 16. In this she is probably not acting independent of her husband, but since he is one of the elders of the land (v. 23), she acts as his agent to investigate the worth of a particular field, to purchase it, and to plant it with vines for a vineyard.

V. 17. All of this activity and working with her own hands elevated her out of being a weak, sickly woman. She was strong and healthy and able to uphold her part of the family's work and projects. And she didn't think she needed to be "liberated"!

V. 18. She is a busy woman. She not only gives tasks to the maidens (v. 15), but she herself works. She not only works outdoors, planting vineyards, etc. (v. 16), but she makes garments and sells them (v. 24). No wonder "her lamp goeth not out by night"! Yet she is not just a slave who works but has no responsibility to see that the business is profitable: she so manages things that her merchandise is "profitable".

V. 19. In v. 13 we saw that "she seeketh wool and flax" (the raw materials). In this verse she is using the "distaff" and the "spindle" to make the thread or yarn. V. 24 tells of her going on to make the actual garments and delivering them to the merchant to sell to the public. The distaff-and-spindle system of making thread preceded the spinning wheel: "The spindle and distaff are the most ancient of all the instruments used for spinning, or making thread. The spinning wheel superseded them" ("Clarke"). The distaff held the wool to be

made into thread or yarn, and the spindle was what the finished thread or yarn was collected on. Before the spinning wheel, which mounted both of these on its solid framework, they were two independent pieces that had to be held and handled by the hands, under the arm, on the lap, etc. during the operation.

V. 20. More Hebrew parallelism: "stretcheth out her hand" is the same as "reacheth forth her hands"; "to the poor" is the same as "to the needy". She works for her family (v. 20), but she does not forget others who are needy. Again, she is interested in business (personal, legitimate gain), but in so doing she is not unmindful of those who are having financial difficulties. We are taught to remember the unfortunate also: Matt. 25:34-36; Acts 11:29; I Cor. 16:1,2; Eph. 4:28; I John 3:17.

V. 21. They did not have the severe winters that we do; on the other hand, they didn't have the weather-tight houses and furnaces that we have. So they had to have warm clothing to cope with their times of colder weather. Her children were well and comfortably clothed--they were not neglected waifs of the street. The scarlet color would be warmer than plain white garments and dressier too. Every good mother wants her family to look nice.

TEST QUESTIONS OVER 30:10-21

1. What subject is discussed in these verses (v. 10)
2. How does each verse from v. 10 to the end of the chapter begin (v. 10)?
3. What is the first thing affirmed of the virtuous woman (v. 11)?
4. What does v. 12 say of her goodness to her husband?
5. What caused making clothing to be such a big job in those times (v. 13)?
6. What is said of her spirit in v. 13?
7. How concerned was she that her family was well fed (v. 14)?
8. What three things are affirmed of her in v. 15?
9. Why is she doing all this work instead of her husband (v. 16)?
10. Why is she a strong, healthy woman (v. 17)?
11. Comment upon the busy life that she leads (v. 18).
12. What was made with the distaff and spindle (v. 19)&
13. What does v. 20 tell us about this busy woman?
14. What about her family's clothing (v. 21)?

TEXT — 31:22-31

22. She maketh for herself carpets of tapestry;
Her clothing is fine linen and purple.
23. Her husband is known in the gates,
When he sitteth among the elders of the land.
24. She maketh linen garments and selleth them,
And delivereth girdles to the merchant.
25. Strength and dignity are her clothing;
And she laugheth at the time to come.
26. She openeth her mouth with wisdom;
And the law of kindness is on her tongue.
27. She looketh well to the ways of her household,
And eateth not the bread of idleness.
28. Her children rise up, and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praiseth her saying:
29. Many daughters have done worthily,
But thou excellest them all.
30. Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain;
But a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised.
31. Give her of the fruit of her hands;
And let her works praise her in the gates.

STUDY QUESTIONS OVER 31:22-31

1. What kind of man did the virtuous woman marry (v. 22)?
2. Why would she work (making and selling things) when her husband was one of the leaders of the city (v. 24)?
3. Why does she "laugh at the time to come" (v. 25)?
4. Why give special attention to her speech in v. 26?
5. What is meant by the "ways of her husband" (v. 27)?
6. How long has it been since you praised your wife (or been praised by your husband if you are a woman) (v. 28)?
7. She has excelled whom (v. 29)?
8. What is "grace" in v. 30?
9. Why is beauty "vain" (v. 30)?
10. What is meant by "in the gates" in v. 31?

PARAPHRASE OF 31:22-31

- 22-24. She also upholsters with finest tapestry; her own clothing is beautifully made--a purple gown of pure

linen. Her husband is well known, for he sits in the council chamber with the other civic leaders. She makes belted linen garments to sell to the merchants.

25-29. She is a woman of strength and dignity, and has no fear of old age. When she speaks, her words are wise, and kindness is the rule for everything she says. She watches carefully all that goes on throughout her household, and is never lazy. Her children stand and bless her; so does her husband. He praises her with these words: "There are many fine women in the world, but you are the best of them all!"

30,31. Charm can be deceptive and beauty doesn't last, but a woman who fears and reverences God shall be greatly praised. Praise her for the many fine things she does. These good deeds of hers shall bring her honor and recognition from even the leaders of the nation.

COMMENTS ON 31:22-31

V. 22. The virtuous woman continues to be described in her relationship to different aspects of life. This verse shows that she likes nice things ("Carpets of tapestry") and is gifted at making them. She not only likes outdoor work ("she planteth a vineyard"--v. 16) but indoor work (needlework) as well. But she doesn't go overboard on making nice things--she doesn't neglect her family making them. Our verse also shows that this healthy, hardworking woman also likes to look nice ("her clothing is fine linen and purple"). Her wearing purple and fine linen shows that the family was not poor (compare Luke 16:19).

V. 23. And what about her husband? Is he a lazy, no-good type of man? No, she was married to a prominent man, a successful man, one of the rulers of the land. Instead of a courthouse where legal transactions were recorded, their legal business was transacted in the city gates in the presence of the elders: Ruth 4:11; Deut. 25:5-10. He was one of them.

V. 24. Reference has already been made to her business enterprises: see vs. 16,18,19.

V. 25. Clothes, we are told, express the person. In this sense this woman is expressed by two qualities: "strength" and "dignity". These two qualities are evident in all that has been said of her. "This 'laughing at the future' is of course not to be understood as expressive of a presumptuous self-confidence, but only of a consciousness of having all appropriate and

possible preparation and competence for the future" ("Lange").

V. 26. Special mention is here made of her speech habits. An idle woman will often get herself into tongue-trouble: "Withal they learn also to be idle, going about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not" (I Tim. 5:13). The busy, useful life lived by Proverbs' "virtuous woman" would help keep her from the above. Tit. 2:3 instructs womanhood to be "not slanderers". This will be foreign to the virtuous woman, for she is both wise and kind in her speech. When she speaks, it is wisdom that comes forth, and the "law of kindness" governs her lips also.

V. 27. Her thorough care of her household is again emphasized (we might say in contrast with those women who are neglectful of their households, not seeing that they have proper meals, not seeing that their clothing is in good order, not keeping up the house, etc.). And her busyness in their behalf is again emphasized (we might say in contrast with those women who are lazy, sleeping in far beyond the proper time to get up, and then not working with diligence after they get up).

V. 28. And her household notices her care of them and her work in their behalf, and she is greatly appreciated. Her husband does not overlook her good life and work, but "he praiseth her" (to herself, privately, to others upon appropriate occasion, and to God who gave her to him). And he teaches the children to appreciate her many efforts too, and the longer they live and the older they get, the more they rise up and call her "blessed", making "Mother" one of the sweetest and dearest words in all the world to them. "Mother and goodness" and "Mother and love" go together in their minds. You men have good wives, tell them so, and you children who have good mothers, tell them so.

V. 29. "Many daughters" means "many women" (or "many daughters of men"). Yes, the husband admits that there are many women who have done worthily, but to him his own is the very best of all! And isn't this the way it should be? Thinking of her in this way, he will be happy and satisfied with her. He will not be thinking of other women nor leaving her for them.

V. 30. He realizes that others may have "grace", and others may display "beauty", but it is better to be married to a woman who "feareth Jehovah". Such a woman as he has will be

praised, but to fall for the grace of the other woman will be found to be "deceitful", and he will see how empty ("vain") her beauty can be when she lacks the important qualities of womanhood. Oh, that all women realized how deceitful grace can be and how vain mere physical beauty is! Concerning "elegance of shape, symmetry of features, dignity of mien, and beauty of countenance," "Clarke" says, "Sickness impairs them, suffering deranges them, and death destroys them."

V. 31. Psa. 128:1,2 speaks of the righteous person getting to eat the product of one's hands: "Blessed is every one that feareth Jehovah, That walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thy hands." God's final message concerning her to us is that we should give her what she deserves, what she has rightfully earned, especially praise and public recognition ("in the gates"). Let us listen to "Clarke" in his rather eloquent close: "Let what she has done be spoken of for a memorial to her; let her bright example be held forth in the most public places. Let it be set before the eyes of every female, particularly of every wife, and especially of every mother; and let them learn from this exemplar what men have a right to expect in their wives, the mistresses of their families and the mothers of their children."

TEST QUESTIONS OVER 31:22-31

1. What new thoughts concerning the virtuous woman are found in v. 22?
2. Tell of her husband (v. 23).
3. What items did she make to sell (v. 24)?
4. What two qualities stand out in her (v. 25)?
5. How is her speech described (v. 26)?
6. What does v. 27 re-emphasize concerning this good woman?
7. Besides the satisfaction that she receives from a job well done, what does v. 28 tell us of her reward?
8. How does her husband express his feelings concerning her great worth (v. 29)?
9. V. 30 says, "..... is deceitful, and is vain."
10. What is God's final message concerning her to us (v. 31)?

NOTE: "Noticeable Groupings" within a chapter are found only in those chapters made up of 1-verse sayings (chapters 10-29).

OUTLINE OF THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

- I. She is married to a good man (v. 23).
- II. Her husband has no fears of her unfaithfulness to him (vs. 11,12).
- III. She gets up early, cooks breakfast for the family, and gets the day underway (v. 15).
- IV. She lives a busy, industrious, useful life:
 - A. She clothes her family in a commendable way (vs. 13,19,21).
 - B. She raises some of their food (v. 16), but she buys those things that she cannot raise (v. 14).
 - C. She looks after every need of her household (v. 27).
 - D. She is strong and healthy as a result of her work (v. 17).
 - E. She likes nice things and makes them (v. 22).
 - F. She makes extras and sells them (v. 24).
 - G. She puts in a long day (v. 26).
 - V. She is known for her kind speech (v. 26).
- VI. She looks nice (v. 22), but she steers away from feminine vanities (v. 30).
- VII. She is not afraid of the passing of years but will grow old gracefully (v. 25).
- VIII. She should and shall be praised (vs. 28-31).

PONDERING THE PROVERBS
GOD BELIEVES IN CORRECTION

God is not with the modern trend to let evil go unrebuked. He Himself is a corrector: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (3:11,12).

He says to fathers, "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (23:13, 14). He says, "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul" (29:17).

God says that people who believe in keeping His law believe in contending with the wicked, that those who pat the wicked on the back are the ones who depart from the law themselves: "They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them" (28:4).

These verses present but a sample of the many things said in the book of Proverbs on the subject of correction.