

Women and Wine



SABBATH—MARCH 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 31;¹ Job 29:15; Proverbs 8; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Revelation 14:13.

MEMORY VERSE: “Don’t [do not] waste your strength on women. Don’t [do not] waste it on those who destroy kings. Lemuel, it isn’t [is not] good for kings to drink wine. It isn’t [is not] good for rulers to long [desire] for beer” (Proverbs 31:3, 4, NlrV).

DEFINITIONS

1. Proverbs 31—This chapter is written by King Lemuel. His mother taught these wise sayings to him. She spoke them as if they came from God.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS BEGAN WITH THE TEACHINGS OF A FATHER (Proverbs 1:1, 8; Proverbs 4:1). And it ends with the teachings of a mother (Proverbs 31:1). The name *Lemuel* may be Solomon. If so, then Lemuel’s mother is Solomon’s mother. She warns her son against the two most serious threats to the king: wine and women.

The warning about wine and women is serious. To be a good ruler, the king has to be careful of the influences he faces. Wine and women can be very powerful. The right woman could be good and positive, but alcohol is only trouble.

The father’s introduction was concerned with gaining spiritual wisdom. Now the mother’s closing advice is concerned with using wisdom in real life. The spiritual principles (important rules) taught by the father would mean nothing if the useful advice offered by the mother were not followed.

A TOAST “TO LIFE”? (Proverbs 31:4, 5, 8, 9)

In many cultures, drinking alcohol is connected with living a good life. People raise a glass and wish one another a long life. That really does not make sense because each glass works toward destroying life. Nicely designed bottles, poetic and funny drinking songs, clever advertisements, and even some “scientific” findings all comfort drinkers into thinking that alcohol is good for them. Proverbs has already warned us against this deadly lie (Proverbs 23:30–35). Now the theme reappears, showing us even more the damage that drinking can bring.

Read Proverbs 31:4, 5, 8, 9. Together, what do they say? And what does their message mean to every follower of the Lord, not just the king?

In almost the same language, Job describes himself as being “eyes to the blind, and . . . feet to the lame” (Job 29:15, NKJV). In the same way, the king or those who are rich should help support the poor and the needy. They are the people who are “speechless” in that they do not have a voice because no one listens to them.

The destructive result of wine can also be seen in how it can so easily twist a person’s judgment. Alcohol is bad enough for common people. But for a king or someone with power, alcohol can create terrible situations. The drinking king both “forgets the law” and does not know what is right. But he also makes bad judgments. For example, the guilty are said to be innocent, and the innocent are judged guilty.

What is important here is the ability to see the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. Basic wisdom teaches us how harmful drinking wine is. So, it makes sense that every human should not drink wine. Priests in the Bible are not allowed to drink wine so that they will be able to tell the difference between what is holy and what is not (Leviticus 10:9, 10).

Who has not seen the terrible results of alcohol in many lives? How can you help others stay clear of what can bring only harm to them and to others?



The king who drinks forgets the law and does not know what is right.

A TOAST “TO DEATH” (Proverbs 31:6, 7)

Read Proverbs 31:6, 7. How are we to understand these verses?

A quick reading of these verses seems to suggest that Lemuel’s mother allows wine drinking for the person who is about to die (verse 6) or for the person who suffers from depression (deep sadness) (verse 7). But this reading would not agree with the main theme. Lemuel’s mother has just warned the king against wine drinking. Also the general theme of the book of Proverbs does not allow wine drinking.

In addition, it does not make sense to offer something to the dying that would only make their health and well-being worse. And giving alcohol to a depressed person is like giving salt to someone who already lacks water and is very thirsty. God cares about our bodies and our health; so, it does not make sense to think that these verses encourage the use of alcohol.

More important, a careful study of the use of the wording “who is perishing [dying]” in the book of Proverbs shows that it is speaking about the wicked (Proverbs 10:28; Proverbs 11:7, 10; Proverbs 19:9; Proverbs 21:28; Proverbs 28:28). So, through the wording “who is perishing,” Lemuel’s mother is suggesting the wicked. The wording “bitter of heart” means the depressed (very sad) person (Proverbs 31:6, NKJV) who becomes insensitive and “forgets” the poverty (poor-ness) of others (Proverbs 31:7) as the wicked do.

“Satan gathered the fallen angels together to plan some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One idea after another was made, till finally Satan himself thought of a plan. He would take the fruit of the vine, also wheat, and other things given by God as food, and would change them into poisons. Then these poisons would ruin man’s physical, mental, and moral powers. And they would overcome the senses, giving Satan full control. Under the influence of alcohol, men would be led to do crimes of all kinds. Through overeating and eating and drinking impure food and drink, the world would be made sinful and weak. By leading men to drink alcohol, Satan would cause them to fall lower and lower in character [thought; feeling; action].”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, page 12.



If we care about our bodies, then we will not drink alcohol.



Satan came up with the plan to change grape juice into poison to ruin man’s mind, body, and soul.

A VIRTUOUS (NOBLE; WISE) WOMAN (Proverbs 31:10)

“Who can find a noble wife? She is worth far more than rubies” (Proverbs 31:10, NlrV).

Who is the “virtuous woman” of Proverbs 31:10? Several clues suggest that the author has more in mind than a godly woman or the ideal wife. Following the lead of many verses of the book (Proverbs 1:20–33; Proverbs 3:13–20; Proverbs 4:5–9; Proverbs 8), we have good reason to think that “the virtuous woman” means wisdom. This symbol (word-picture) of wisdom as a woman seems right because the Hebrew word for “wisdom,” *chokmah*, is a feminine² noun. This symbol also seems right because it also lets the Hebrew writer draw all kinds of lessons for our daily life. Wisdom is not pictured as something out of our reach. It is shown as a very sensible woman who could become our life partner.

This last teaching about wisdom is given through a beautiful poem: each verse begins with a Hebrew letter following the alphabetic order as it appears in the Hebrew language. This kind of poem is also found in Lamentations and in many psalms.

Compare the verses on wisdom in Proverbs 8 with our verses about the “virtuous woman.” What features of the “virtuous woman” remind us of wisdom in the book of Proverbs?

1. She is worth finding (Proverbs 31:10; Proverbs 8:35).
2. Her worth is more than rubies (Proverbs 31:10; Proverbs 8:10, 11, 18, 19).
3. She provides food (Proverbs 31:14; Proverbs 8:19).
4. She is strong (Proverbs 31:17, 25; Proverbs 8:14).
5. She is wise (Proverbs 31:26; Proverbs 8:1).
6. She is praised (Proverbs 31:28; Proverbs 8:34).

We live in the modern age. And we have received so much more knowledge than people in the past did. But there is little to show that our generation is any wiser than past generations. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

Read 1 Corinthians 1:21. What does it say to you? And how can this idea help you to live by faith?



The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is wisdom. She is worth more than rubies.

DEFINITIONS

2. feminine—of or belonging to the group of words (called a gender) that ordinarily includes most of the words referring to females.

SHE WORKS (Proverbs 31:12, 15, 18)

The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is not lazy. She works hard and is very active. The poem says so (Proverbs 31:27). It also shows the difference between the wise and the fool (Proverbs 6:6; Proverbs 24:33, 34). The field of the virtuous woman's activities is complete and useful. To be spiritual does not give us the right to be lazy or excuse our laziness by our concern for deeply important matters of religion. We do not have the right to neglect small matters that we think are less important. (Read Luke 16:10.) The woman "loves to work with her hands" (Proverbs 31:13, NIV). It is interesting that this very spiritual person is never pictured as praying. Instead, she is shown as a good and useful woman, much like Martha of the Gospels (Luke 10:38–40).

Read Proverbs 31:12, 15, 18. Why is the woman always working?

The woman works "all the days of her life" (verse 12). She even works during the night (verses 15, 18). She is always working and keeping things organized. The reason for her continuous work is her responsibility.

Read Proverbs 31:20, 25. What kind of projects is she involved in, both short term and long term?

Here we touch on an important point about our work. It will be tested by time. Only the future will show how well we have done our work. To work wisely is to keep the future in mind and not work just for a quick reward.

The principle in the following verse from Revelation is very important: " 'Blessed are the dead who die as believers in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Holy Spirit. 'They will rest from their labor. What they have done will not be forgotten' " (Revelation 14:13, NIV).

If you have a special woman (a wife, mother, other family member, teacher, boss, or friend) in your life, what can you do to show your appreciation for her and for all she has done for you?

SHE CARES (Proverbs 31:26–31)

Read Proverbs 31:26–31. What other important points are seen in this woman’s character (thoughts; feelings; actions)? Why are these important for all of us, no matter who we are?

As we have seen all through this quarter, Proverbs encourages us to be careful with what we say. The woman is known for her wisdom and for her kindness. They are related. Could one not argue that kindness is another form of wisdom? This is very true when we understand that wisdom is not just what we know but what we say and do.

Notice, too, the wording that says the “law of kindness.” Kindness is not just some careless words that escape from her mouth now and then. It is a law, a principle of her very life. How powerful it would be if the “law of kindness” were to guide all that came out of our mouths.

Read Proverbs 31:30. What important point is shown here that is so often forgotten?

All too often women are judged only by their looks. That is not a true test of any woman’s worth. The Bible points out just how vain, or how empty, that kind of attitude (feeling or thought) is. This woman’s true beauty is found in her character. And that character is shown clearly in her life and works. Beauty will always pass away. But character can continue forever. “A great name among men is as letters written in sand. But a spotless [pure] character will continue for all eternity.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*,³ page 81.

In what areas of your life do you need to see your character improve? Praying about it is fine, but what positive steps must you take in order to see growth?

DEFINITIONS

3. grace—God’s gift of mercy and forgiveness that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “When drinking much wine and while under its exciting influence, their [Nadab’s and Abihu’s] minds became clouded. And they could not see the difference between the holy and the common. By disobeying God, Nadab and Abihu dishonored Him by offering common fire instead of holy fire. God punished them in His anger. Fire went forth from Him and destroyed them.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁴ for the Church, volume 3, page 295.

“Let the children and youth learn from the Bible how God has honored the work of the everyday worker. . . . Let them read . . . of the wise woman described in the Proverbs, who ‘chooses wool and flax. She loves to work with her hands.’ . . . ‘She provides food for her family. She also gives some to her female servants.’ . . . ‘She . . . plant[s] a vineyard.’ . . . ‘Her arms are strong.’ . . . ‘She opens her arms to those who are poor. She reaches out her hands to those who are needy.’ . . . ‘She watches over family matters. She is busy all the time.’ Proverbs 31:13, 15, 16, 17, 20, 27, Nlrv.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 217.

DEFINITIONS

4. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why is total avoidance from alcohol the only right choice? After all, what possible good can come from drinking any kind of alcohol? Think about all the damage that alcohol often causes.
- ② Think deeply about the idea that we have a lot of knowledge for our time. But we do not necessarily have more wisdom. What are some recent examples we can see of just how knowledge without wisdom can do much damage?
- ③ Review the character of the “virtuous woman.” How can the principles used by the “virtuous woman” be used by all believers in character building?
- ④ The book of Proverbs is filled with useful wisdom. This should tell us that our religion is down-to-earth too. How can we make sure that we do not neglect the down-to-earth part of faith, as well as the religious and spiritual parts?

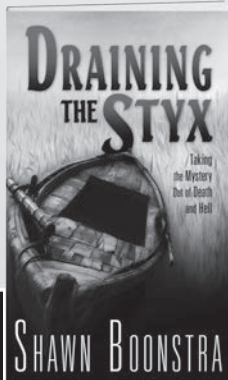
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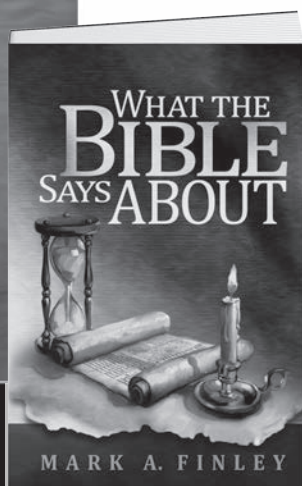
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