

Women *and* Wine



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Proverbs 31, Job 29:15, Proverbs 8, 1 Cor. 1:21, Rev. 14:13.*

Memory Text: “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” (*Proverbs 31:3, 4, NKJV*).

The book of Proverbs began with the teachings of a father (*Prov. 1:1, 8; 4:1*) and ends with the teachings of a mother (*Prov. 31:1*). The name *Lemuel* may allude to Solomon; if so, then Lemuel's mother is Solomon's mother, and she warns her son against the two most serious threats to the king: wine and women.

The association of wine and women is deliberate. To be efficient as a ruler, the king has to be careful of the influences he faces, and these two factors can be very powerful. Though the right woman could be beneficial, alcohol is only trouble.

The father's introduction was concerned with the spiritual acquisition of wisdom. Now, the mother's conclusion is concerned with applying wisdom in real life. For the spiritual principles taught by the father would mean nothing if the practical advice offered by the mother were not followed.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.

A Toast “To Life”?

In many cultures, drinking alcohol is associated with living a good life. People raise a glass and wish one another a long life, though the irony is that each glass works toward destroying life. Nicely designed bottles, poetic and funny drinking songs, clever commercials, and even some “scientific” findings all comfort drinkers in their idea that alcohol is good for them. Proverbs has already warned us against this deadly deception (*Prov. 23:30–35*). Now the theme reappears, showing us even more damage that drinking can bring.

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

In similar language, Job describes himself as being “eyes to the blind, and . . . feet to the lame” (*Job 29:15, NKJV*). Likewise, the king or those with means should help support the poor and the needy—those who are “speechless” in that they don’t have a voice because no one listens to them.

The destructive effect of wine can also be seen in how it can so easily distort one’s judgment. While alcohol is bad enough for common folk, for a king or someone with power, alcohol can create terrible situations. The drinking king not only “forgets the law” and does not know what is right, but he subsequently issues distorted judgments: the guilty are declared innocent, and the innocent guilty.

What is at stake here is the capacity to discern between right and wrong, good and evil. The prohibition of wine drinking has to do with basic wisdom and, as such, should apply to every human being. It is noteworthy that this concern is precisely the reason implied in the special prohibition of drinking for the priest: “that you may distinguish between holy and unholy” (*Lev. 10:9, 10, NKJV*).

Who hasn’t seen the devastating effects of alcohol in so many lives? How can you help others, especially the young, stay clear of what can bring only harm to them and to others?

A Toast “To Death”

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

A quick reading of these verses gives the impression that Lemuel’s mother allows the consumption of wine or any other alcohol for the person who is about to die (*vs. 6*) or for the person who suffers from depression (*vs. 7*). This reading, however, would contradict not only the immediate context—Lemuel’s mother has just warned the king against wine drinking—but also the general context of the book of Proverbs, which systematically and emphatically prohibits wine drinking.

In addition, it hardly makes sense to offer something to the perishing that would only make their health and well-being worse. And giving alcohol to a depressed person is like giving salt to someone who is already dehydrated. If, as we know, God cares about our bodies and our health, it doesn’t make sense to see these texts, especially in context, encouraging the use of alcohol.

More important, an analysis of the use of the expression “who is perishing” in the book of Proverbs reveals that it is speaking about the wicked (*Prov. 10:28; 11:7, 10; 19:9; 21:28; 28:28*). Through the expression “who is perishing,” Lemuel’s mother points in fact, by association, to the wicked. As for the expression “bitter of heart,” it refers to the depressed person (*Prov. 31:6, NKJV*), who, like the wicked, becomes insensitive and “forgets” poverty (*vs. 7*).

“Satan gathered the fallen angels together to devise some way of doing the most possible evil to the human family. One proposition 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 convert them into poisons, which would ruin man’s physical, mental, and moral powers, and so overcome the senses that Satan should have full control. Under the influence of liquor, men would be led to commit crimes of all kinds. Through perverted appetite the world would be made corrupt. By leading men to drink alcohol, Satan would cause them to descend lower and lower in the scale.”—Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 12.

A Virtuous Woman

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (*Prov. 31:10*).

Who is the “virtuous woman” of Proverbs 31:10? A number of indications suggest that the author has more in mind than a godly woman or the ideal wife. Following the lead of many passages of the book (*Prov. 1:20–33, 3:13–20, 4:5–9, Proverbs 8*), we have good reason to think that “the virtuous woman” represents wisdom. This personification of wisdom as a woman is justified not only because the Hebrew word for “wisdom,” *chokmah*, is a feminine noun but also because it allows the Hebrew writer to draw all kinds of concrete lessons for our daily life. Wisdom is not pictured as some lofty and unreachable ideal but as a very practical and approachable woman who could become our life companion.

This last teaching about wisdom is given through a beautiful acrostic poem: each verse begins with a Hebrew letter following the alphabetic order, as in the book of Lamentations and in many psalms.

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

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

Though we live in the so-called information age, and though we have acquired so much more knowledge than had previous generations, there’s little to indicate that our generation is any wiser than previous generations. Indeed, 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 live by faith?

She Works

The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is not lazy; she works hard and is very active. The poem insists on this quality (*Prov. 31:27*), which characterizes the wise versus the fool (*Prov. 6:6; 24:33, 34*). The field of her activities is comprehensive and concrete. To be spiritual does not mean that we should be idle, all under the pretext that we are concerned with highly important religious issues, and thus do not have time to take care of “trivial” matters. (See *Luke 16:10*.) The woman “willingly works with her hands” (*Prov. 31:13, NKJV*). It is interesting that this very spiritual person is never depicted praying or meditating. She is shown only as an efficient and productive woman, 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” (*vs. 12*), even during the night (*vs. 15, 18*). Her active and watchful presence is effective all the time. The reason for her constant attention is her responsibility.

Read Proverbs 31:20, 25. What is the temporal scope of her projects?

Here we touch on an important point regarding our work and effort: it will be tested by time. Only the future will testify to the quality of our deeds. To work wisely is to work with the future in mind, not just for an immediate reward.

Though not quite dealing with the same thing, the principle in the following text from Revelation is so important: “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (*Rev. 14:13*).

If you have a special woman (a wife, mother, 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

Read Proverbs 31:26–31. What other important characteristics are seen in this woman? Why are these important for all of us, regardless of who we are?

As we have seen all through this quarter, an emphasis is placed on words, on what we say. The woman is known for her wisdom and for her kindness. They are related. After all, couldn't one argue that kindness is another form of wisdom, especially when we understand that wisdom isn't just what we know but what we say and do?

Notice, too, the phrase the "law of kindness." That is, kindness isn't just some fleeting attribute that escapes from her mouth now and then. It is a law, a principle of her very existence. 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 revealed here that is so often forgotten?

All too often women are rated only in terms of outward appearance; that's such a shallow and superficial marker. The Bible points out just how "vain," how empty, that kind of attitude ultimately is. This woman's true beauty is found in her character and how that character is made manifest in her life and works. Beauty will always pass away; character can endure forever. "A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to all eternity."—Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 81.

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

Further Study: “When indulging their appetite for wine and while under its exciting stimulus, their reason was clouded, and they could not discern the difference between the sacred and the common. Contrary to God’s express direction, they dishonored Him by offering common instead of sacred fire. God visited them with His wrath; fire went forth from His presence and destroyed them.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 295.

“Let the children and youth learn from the Bible how God has honored the work of the everyday toiler. . . . Let them read . . . of the wise woman described in the Proverbs, who ‘seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands;’ who ‘giveth meat to her household, and their task to her maidens;’ who ‘planteth a vineyard,’ ‘and strengtheneth her arms;’ who ‘stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, . . . reacheth forth her hands to the needy;’ who ‘looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.’ Proverbs 31:13, 15, R.V.; 31:16, 17, 20, 27.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 217.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Why is total abstinence from alcohol the only right option? After all, what possible good can arise from any kind of alcohol consumption? On the other hand, think about all the damage that it often causes.
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that although we have a lot of knowledge for our time, we don’t necessarily have more wisdom. In what ways can knowledge without wisdom be even more dangerous than a lack of knowledge without wisdom? What are some recent examples we can see of just how damaging knowledge without wisdom can be?
- 3 Review the characteristics of the “virtuous woman.” How can the principles behind what is revealed in this specific situation be applied to believers, whatever their gender, marital status, or age?
- 4 The book of Proverbs is filled with practical wisdom. This should tell us that our religion, even with all its lofty theology and spiritual dimensions, has a very practical side to it, as well. How can we make sure that we don’t neglect the practical aspects of faith as we seek to fulfill its theological and spiritual dimensions?

“Sabbath Shoes”

Becky needed a new pair of shoes. Going to her favorite shop near Newport Beach, California, she picked out a pair but discovered her size wasn't in stock.

Dwight McKeever, the sales rep, assured her that her size could be ordered, and the shoes would be in by Wednesday afternoon.

Becky returned on Wednesday, but the shoes hadn't arrived. On Thursday, still no shoes. When Becky came into the shop late Friday afternoon, Dwight explained that the delivery truck hadn't arrived but would any time soon. Becky waited a few more minutes, but then said she had to go. Fifteen minutes after she left the store, the shoes arrived.

Quickly phoning Becky's home, Dwight left a message. Sometime later, she returned his call, explaining that she would wear her old shoes the next day and pick up the new ones on Saturday night.

Just a few minutes later, Becky returned to the store. “I just came to let you know that I'm not angry that the shoes didn't arrive on time and that I'm very impressed with all you've done to help solve this problem.” Then she turned to leave.

“But what about your shoes?” Dwight asked. “I'll get them tomorrow night,” came the response as Becky walked out the door. Thinking that maybe she needed money, Dwight offered her a loan, but money wasn't the problem. Frustrated, Dwight couldn't understand what the problem was.

Finally Becky explained, “I'm a Christian. I want to honor God on the Sabbath.”

“Sabbath?” The only Sabbath Dwight knew of was the rock group Black Sabbath.

“I'm a Christian too,” he told her, “but what does that have to do with buying shoes?”

“If you're a Christian,” she replied with a smile, “then you know that the Ten Commandments tell us to keep the Sabbath holy and that means we shouldn't buy or sell.”

Intrigued, Dwight wanted to learn more. Becky invited him to a Revelation Seminar being held nearby, and he accepted. “I had picked up the Bible a few times and wanted to know how it would all end, so I went straight to the last book but couldn't understand a thing,” he recalls. “There was a beast with all these heads, but I wasn't too worried because I knew with nuclear warfare we could just blow up all those heads.”

When he told that to Becky, she laughed. “You might want to come to the seminar and learn what it's really all about.”

To see how Becky's faithfulness led Dwight and many of his family to accept Bible truth, continue reading the story in *Mission* magazine, for first quarter 2015, or online at www.adventistmission.org/mqa-home.

Luke, a Gentile convert and doctor, directed his Gospel account to Greek and Gentile members of the community of faith while not disregarding the Jewish roots of Jesus. Luke presents Jesus, the Son of man, as the Savior of the world and friend of humanity. We will study his account in our second quarter 2015 study guide, entitled *The Book of Luke* by John M. Fowler. The universality of salvation is the underlying theme of his Gospel, and so Luke's genealogy traces Jesus all the way to Adam and links Him to God. Luke's Gospel is the largest in the New Testament, and it contains six miracles and 13 parables that are unique to its account. Some theologians have recommended the book of Luke as a good biography of our Lord Jesus. So as a world church, the book of Luke will be the focus of our study for second quarter 2015.

Lesson 1—The Coming of Jesus

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: “An Orderly Account” (*Luke 1:1–3, Acts 1:1–3*)

MONDAY: “Call His Name John” (*Luke 1:13–17*)

TUESDAY: “Call His Name Jesus” (*Luke 1:31*)

WEDNESDAY: The Manger of Bethlehem (*Luke 2:7*)

THURSDAY: The Witnesses to the Savior (*Luke 2:25–32*)

Memory Text—*Luke 1:37, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Luke's readers must stand in awe and wonder at the fact that Jesus is real, and that through Him, God has invaded history with the “Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (*Luke 2:11, NKJV*).

Lesson 2—Baptism and the Temptations

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Prepare the Way of the Lord (*Luke 3:1–14*)

MONDAY: “You Are My Beloved Son” (*Luke 3:21, 22*)

TUESDAY: Not by “Bread Alone” (*Luke 4:4*)

WEDNESDAY: “Worship Me” (*Luke 4:5–8*)

THURSDAY: Christ the Victor (*Luke 4:9–13*)

Memory Text—*Luke 3:22, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Jesus was baptized and received the benediction of Heaven that He is God's “beloved son” (*Luke 3:22*) and began His ministry at the time when the Roman Empire was being ruled by great historical dignitaries.

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