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## Wisdom for Leaders

### 31: 1-9

**A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.**



**The sayings of King Lemu'el contain this oracle** (Hebrew: *massa* meaning *oracle* or *burden*) **which his mother taught him (31:1 NLT). The mother of King Lemu'el urges him** to live moderately, avoiding excessive drinking and a large harem. Instead, **she** urges self-control. But more than that, **she** calls on him to bring justice to **his kingdom**. The true business of **kings** is to defend **the poor and the helpless**, and to use **their** power to help those who have none.<sup>564</sup> Nothing is known about **King Lemu'el**. The same question of translation occurs here with *massa* that occurred in **30:1**. It is possible that *massa* is a place; however, the idea of a *burden* normally describes a prophetic **oracle** of some kind. **Jewish legend identifies Lemu'el as Solomon and the advice as from his mother Bathsheba**. We have already noted and commented on the fact that in Hebrew proverbs, as opposed to other ancient Near Eastern proverbs, **mothers** are mentioned as those engaged in the instruction of **their** children (**to see link click [Ak - Obey Your Parents](#)**). However, this is the only place where we actually hear

the voice of **the mother** independently of **the father**. The topic of **her** teaching is something that **a wise mother**, especially **the wise mother** of a leader, would want to drive home to **her son**: women and alcohol are great temptations that young men face along with power and money.<sup>565</sup>

**Listen, my son! Listen, son of my womb! Listen, my son, the answer to my vow (31:2 NIV).** Vows were extremely important in Jewish society (see the commentary on [Leviticus Fb - Personal Vows](#)), as seen in **Hannah's vow to ADONAI Almighty** (see the commentary on [the Life of King Sh'ul Aj - Hannah's Prayer](#)). This probably meant that if **God** gave **her a son, she** would dedicate **him** to live according to **God's wisdom**. Appealing to **Lemu'el's** affection for **her, she** motivated **him** to embrace **her** teachings. **He** then immortalized **her** life and teachings by passing them on to others, and **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** and the Council of Jamnia canonized them following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 ACE (**Psalm 116:16; Ephesians 6:4; Second Timothy 1:5 and 3:15**). **Her wisdom** through **Lemu'el** still instruct the people of **God** today.<sup>566</sup>

**Do not waste your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings (31:3 NIV).** It would be a tremendous temptation for a king to use his power to amass a great number of wives and concubines. Because women can get even a king in trouble. Solomon is an example of that, with multiple wives, who ultimately led him astray (see the commentary on [the Life of Solomon Bx - Solomon's Wives](#)). This was also illustrated by **David** whose pursuit of **Bathsheba** (see the commentary on [the Life of David Dc - David and Bathsheba](#)) was responsible for many palace intrigues that plagued **his** later years and succession. In any case, the sages surely would argue that even **the king** had the same responsibility to act with integrity in sexual relationships as the teaching required for other young men (see **Chapters 5-7**).

**Lemu'el's mother** also warned **him** about the danger of getting **drunk**. The sages have already warned about **drinking** too much (**20:1, 23:19-21 and 29-35**). The problem has to do with one's ability to make good decisions if under the influence of alcohol. A clear mind is important to the wise person. The Bible as a whole is not opposed to **drinking**, but it is opposed to getting **drunk** (see the commentary on [Ephesians Bs - Do Not Get Drunk with Wine](#)). It is very important for **a king** to know what **he** is doing when **he** makes important decisions. **It is not for kings, Lemuel - it is not for kings to guzzle wine; rulers should not crave alcohol. For if they get drunk and forget what has been decreed, they deprive all the oppressed of their rights (31:4-5 Hebrew).**

**Alcohol is for the dying, and wine for those whose life is bitter.** That **Lemu'el's mother** commends the use of **alcohol to the poor** may be seen in part as a strategy to discourage **her royal son. Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their troubles no more (31:6-7 NLT).** In other words, it's almost like **she** is saying, "Don't act like those derelicts who **drink to forget their hardships.** Act like **the king** you are!" **The king** is the human representative of **ADONAI Himself**, who protects the rights of those who lack power.<sup>567</sup>

**Verses 4-7** negatively warned **the king** against getting **drunk** so that **he** couldn't issue just decrees to protect **the poor**. By contrast, **verses 8-9** positively command **him** to enact righteous decrees to protect **them**. **Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and the helpless (16:10, 20:18, 25:5, 29:4a and 14; Psalm 72:12-14; Jeremiah 22:15-19), and see that they get justice (31:8-9 NLT).** They are socially and economically too weak to defend **themselves** against **the rich and powerful**. **The poor** may be defenseless against **them** because **they** are too ignorant to counteract the obstructionist tactics of the legally savvy, too inarticulate to state **their** case convincingly, too **poor** to produce proper evidence, and/or too lowly to command respect. Furthermore, **the rich and powerful** can bribe witnesses to accuse **them** falsely. In the final analysis, **the king** must be accessible to **the people (2 Sam 15:3; 1 Kgs 3:1ff; 6:26ff)**, and champion the cause of **the one** who cannot otherwise get a fair hearing.<sup>568</sup>

Both **men** and **women** can be leaders. All **the gifts of the Spirit** are available to **women** except, **do not preach or have authority over men** (see **Genesis Lv - Women and Spiritual Gifts**). The book of **Ezra-Nehemiah** is a training manual for leaders, giving twelve examples of leadership from the life of **Nehemiah** (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Bt - The Third Return**), and also giving us the ten fatal flaws that derail those who think they are in charge (see **Ezra-Nehemiah Ch - The Completion of the Walls Despite Opposition**).