

Proverbs

Women and Wine

Lesson #13 for March 28, 2015

Scriptures: Proverbs 8; 31; Job 29:15; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Revelation 14:13.

1. We have now come to the final chapter in the book of Proverbs. This chapter was written and/or composed by a woman. Are there any other portions of Scripture written by women?
2. Some believe that the name Lemuel used in this chapter is a codename for Solomon. If that is true, then this chapter was written by Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. Do you think she knew anything about the wiles of women? Of course, she was in competition with all of David's other wives! Do you think there was a deliberate association in this chapter between wine and women? There is an old adage suggesting that the downfall of many men has been "wine, women, and song." But, this chapter does not mention song—although it is written as poetry! There is no question about the fact that both women and wine have had enormous impact on kings and other men in influential positions down through the generations.
3. We also note that whereas the book of Proverbs began with advice from a father to his children, it ends up with the advice of a mother to her son. Would it be fair to suggest that this advice is good for all young people?
4. Why do you think that so many people—at least in developed cultures—think that alcohol is associated with living the good life? Look at all the money that goes into promoting alcohol from exhortations about its wonderful taste to fancy designs and advertising campaigns, even "scientific" findings to promote the drinking of alcohol. In fact, Proverbs deals with alcohol quite a bit. Recently, we studied Proverbs 23:29-35 which give a very clear and serious warning. Here in Proverbs 31, that theme reappears.
5. Read Proverbs 31:4-5,8-9. What is being suggested by these verses? We know that alcohol is a poison. It should not be used in any quantity. Seven percent of all the people who take their first taste of alcohol end up being alcoholics. So, how do we explain Proverbs 31:6-7? Drinking alcohol which could destroy us and those around us is certainly not a positive virtue.
6. How is alcohol produced? Alcohol is made by taking food and placing in it a small organism called yeast which consumes primarily the sugars in that food and produces a waste product called alcohol. The solid material is separated and is sometimes dried and concentrated into brewers yeast or "nutritional yeast" while people drink the liquid waste.
7. It has been clearly demonstrated that as we drink alcohol, it gradually benumbs our brains. In fact, the frontal lobes and especially the anterior portions of the frontal lobes are the first portions affected. That is why people who have had a few drinks feel more relaxed and less inhibited. It is also the reason why judgment can be so distorted by alcohol. Even one or two drinks can lead to fatal auto accidents. This is probably because alcohol slows one's reaction time. It has been estimated that there are 300 driving drunk incidents for every arrest made for driving under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol also affects one's moral sensibilities. Political leaders have sometimes turned right into wrong under the influence of alcohol. The Yalta Conference after World War II is a classic example.
8. Because of its addictive tendencies, drinking alcohol is a kind of Russian roulette. It is dangerous to drink alcohol even for the first time. Are we prepared to take on the responsibilities of destroying our own lives and even the lives of others because of some dangerous and irresponsible behavior resulting from alcohol consumption?

9. Read Leviticus 10:9-10. After drinking alcohol, Nadab and Abihu carried “strange fire” into the tabernacle in the wilderness. Apparently, God thought that was serious enough that He struck them dead on the spot. Drinking alcohol today may not have such immediate and serious consequences except if one drinks and drives. But, that story should warn us of the dangers of drinking alcohol.

When indulging their appetite for wine and while under its exciting stimulus, their reason was clouded, and they [Nadab and Abihu] 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. 295.2. [Content in brackets is supplied.]

10. Certainly, every healthcare provider who deals with the general public has seen the devastating effects of alcohol. Most of the rest of us probably have also. Personally, I will never forget the time when I, as a child, was traveling with my parents in northern Idaho. We passed a young pregnant woman who was staggering down the edge of the road on a Saturday night. It turned out that she first became pregnant at the age of 12 and then delivered twins. When we saw her, she was on her second pregnancy and completely drunk. What possible good outcome could there be to her children from her use of alcohol?
11. Read Proverbs 31:6-7. Is there ever a time when alcohol could or should be used? We need to remember that in Solomon’s day, there were no anesthetic agents and no pain killers available. Sometimes, alcohol was used in ancient times in preparation for doing emergency surgery. Babies were sometimes delivered using this; and sometimes, large stones were removed from bladders after giving the person alcohol. Of course, the patient was tied down tightly, hoping s/he would not move too much during the surgery. Many doctors would probably agree that if a person was dying of advanced cancer and had severe pain, alcohol might have been useful. Such instances, of course, were and are quite rare.
12. Modern scientific literature keeps mentioning the fact that alcohol is good for the heart. Of course, they never mention the damage done to the liver and the brain. They usually go on to say that only a small quantity is beneficial. A doctoral study done at Loma Linda University demonstrated that pure water worked a lot better! It is also true that the beneficial effects of wine are probably related to the resveratrol in the grapes. In studies in mice, resveratrol reduced low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol (the “bad” cholesterol). However, one would have to drink 1000 liters (about 250 gallons) of red wine per day to get the human equivalent of the dose of resveratrol used in that study. (www.mayoclinic.org on resveratrol) Antioxidants such as some flavinoids in alcohol are also beneficial.
13. Proverbs 31:6 seems to suggest that alcohol might be a way to drown one’s troubles, especially if one is depressed. One sage commented on that thought as follows: “Don’t drink; troubles can swim.”
14. The overall message of the book of Proverbs is certainly opposed to the drinking of alcohol. There is some suggestion that the “perishing” mentioned in Proverbs 31 is really talking about the wicked. Such people are bent on doing evil and will probably drink alcohol as a part of their lifestyle. (Proverbs 10:28; 11:7,10; 19:9; 21:28; 28:28) This is not a suggestion that we should give alcohol to the wicked to make them more wicked! It is probably just a note about what is most likely to happen.
15. Where did the idea of drinking alcohol come from?

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, *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1901 par. 7; *Temperance*, p. 12.2.

16. Read Proverbs 31:10-31. This poem about a “virtuous woman” is an acrostic. An acrostic is a poem in which each verse begins with the next letter of the alphabet, probably as an aid to memorization. It is very carefully constructed.
17. Read Proverbs 1:20-33; 3:13-20; 4:5-9; and Proverbs 8. These passages seem to suggest that the virtuous woman in Proverbs is really a representation of wisdom. Several lessons back, we suggested that in Proverbs 8 when it talked about wisdom, *wisdom* was a codename for Jesus Christ Himself. Wisdom is being suggested as a reachable goal, not something unpractical and unreachable for the average person.
18. Compare some ways in which the wisdom in Proverbs 8 lines up with the wisdom in Proverbs 31.
 1. She is precious and worth finding. (Proverbs 31:10; 8:35)
 2. Her worth is more than rubies. (Proverbs 31:10; 8:10-11,18-19)
 3. She provides food. (Proverbs 31:14; 8:19)
 4. She is strong. (Proverbs 31:17,25; 8:14)
 5. She is wise. (Proverbs 31:26; 8:1)
 6. She is praised. (Proverbs 31:28; 8:34)
19. We have asked before and now I ask again: What is the relationship between knowledge and wisdom? We live in the so-called information age. But, it seems that as we are flooded with sound bites and scientific knowledge, we are becoming less and less wise! Martin Luther King once suggested, “We have guided missiles and misguided men.”
20. Read 1 Corinthians 1:21. Paul was speaking of something fairly obvious to those who sincerely believe in Christianity. To the early Christians in Paul's day, the idea that a Person crucified as a traitor to the Roman government could be the Savior of the world seemed preposterous. But, the facts: 1) That He was the Son of God; and 2) That He arose from the grave using His own power certainly set Him apart from any other person who has ever lived on planet earth. The gospel is only foolish to those who do not understand it. For those who understand it even in a limited way, it is the greatest good news!
21. The wise woman described in Proverbs 31 was certainly not lazy! She was very busy from early morning until late at night accomplishing many very practical tasks. She did a wide variety of things. She certainly was not “so spiritually minded that she was no earthly good”! The idea that someone could be so involved in important religious issues that s/he does not need to deal with trivial matters is complete nonsense. (See Luke 16:10.) This very important woman was apparently the head of a large household of workers, and she was not afraid to work with her own hands. (Proverbs 31:13) Why do you think this woman described in Proverbs 31 is not pictured as praying or meditating or being involved in any other specifically religious activities? How would you compare her to Martha, the sister of

Lazarus and Mary, as described in the Gospels? (Luke 10:38-40)

22. Read Proverbs 31:12,15,18. This wife and mother had many responsibilities. She not only cared well for her family and her husband but also for a number of other people as well. She was constantly looking out for the poor, disabled, and disadvantaged. And she had an eye for the future. *To be wise* means to have a clear understanding of the consequences of one's actions. One needs to be aware of what the future could hold.
23. How many of us have a wife, a mother, or another woman who has been a family member, teacher, boss, or friend who has had a great influence on us and has been of tremendous benefit to us personally? How do we show our appreciation for such a woman?
24. Read Proverbs 31:26-31. This very busy wife and mother apparently met all the needs of her family and her husband. But, she was also faithful to the Lord. In this context, what does that imply? How do you think she will fare in the judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46? This woman is praised not only for her wisdom but also for her kindness. Words are very important, but those words need to be matched by actions.
25. So many women in our day seem to be thinking only about their outward appearance. Charm and beauty seem to be the ultimate goal in their lives. But, charm and beauty are fleeting. (Proverbs 31:30) A woman's true beauty is what is inside and not just what is outside.

A great name among men is as letters traced in sand, but a spotless character will endure to all eternity.—Ellen G. White, *5 Testimonies* 578.2; *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 81.5.

26. Whether we are male or female, the example of this wife and mother is an excellent one. What do we need to do as individuals to improve our effectiveness, our characters, and our relationships with God?

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. 1; *Conflict and Courage* 333.5; *To Be Like Jesus* 234.4.

27. Throughout the book of Proverbs, young men have been warned against the dangers of strange women and the ruinous effects that can result from their seductive powers. What a contrast we see in this final chapter. This woman not only was a blessing to her husband (Proverbs 31:11-12) but also he, in turn, blessed her. (Proverbs 31:28-29) Her husband was not just relaxing at the city gate chatting with his friends! In those days, the city gate was the place where one went to do business. There were no telephones, radios, televisions, or Internet. The way to contact someone that one needed to see or do business with was to go to the city gate. How many of us today would measure up to this virtuous woman of long ago?

The Lord is served as much, yea, more, by faithful home work than by the one who teaches the word. As verily as do the teachers in the school, fathers and mothers are to feel that they are the educators of their children. (*Manuscript* 32, 1899)

The Christian mother's sphere of usefulness should not be narrowed by her domestic life. The salutary influence which she exerts in the home circle she may and will make felt in more widespread usefulness in her neighborhood and in the church of God. Home is not a prison to the devoted wife and mother.—Ellen G. White, *The Health Reformer*, June 1, 1877 par. 6; *Pacific Home Journal*, June, 1890; *The Adventist Home*, p. 236.3.

28. Notice these words by Ellen G White.

The influence of an ill-regulated family is widespread, and disastrous to all society. It accumulates in a tide of evil that affects families, communities, and governments.

It is impossible for any of us to live in such a way that we shall not cast an influence in the world. No member of the family can enclose himself within himself, where other members of the family shall not feel his influence and spirit. The very expression of the countenance has an influence for good or evil. His spirit, his words, his actions, his attitude toward others, are unmistakable. If he is living in selfishness, he surrounds his soul with a malarious atmosphere; while if he is filled with the love of Christ, he will manifest courtesy, kindness, tender regard for the feelings of others and will communicate to his associates, by his acts of love, a tender, grateful, happy feeling. It will be made manifest that he is living for Jesus and daily learning lessons at His feet, receiving His light and His peace. He will be able to say to the Lord, "Thy gentleness hath made me great."—Ellen G. White, *The Youth's Instructor*, June 22, 1893 par. 1; *AH*, pp. 33.3-34.0; *MLT* 53.5

29. The words in Proverbs 31 are directed to King Lemuel and that may have represented Solomon. But, isn't it true that the advice in this chapter would be very appropriate even for single men and women? Has this advice lost any of its impact even though it was written thousands of years ago?
30. Would you say that Proverbs 31 is in direct conflict with the values of our society today? Think of how many lives would be saved if people would stop drinking alcohol. What if people acted like the woman in this chapter? Think of the woes that could be prevented, the marriages that could be preserved, and the abuse that could be prevented.
31. We started out the book of Proverbs by talking about the fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom. Would a true reverence for God lead us to develop the kind of behaviors and lifestyle portrayed in Proverbs 31?
32. Would it be fair to say that the recommendations in this book are recommendations for a meaningful lifestyle? Does lifestyle include more than what we eat and drink? The virtuous woman in this chapter got plenty of exercise and was a tremendous benefit to her household, to her husband, to her children, and also to the poor, needy, and neglected around her.
33. Looking back over the book of Proverbs, we should recognize that it is full of practical wisdom. True religion has a very practical aspect. How can we make sure that our lives are a blessing to those around us as well as preparing us for a home in heaven?
34. Proverbs clearly points to a reverence that we each should have for the creator God. That also implies that we should regard all human beings as our brothers and sisters.

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