

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 19, Teaching of King Lemuel's Mother (Prov. 31:1-9) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Heim, Proverbs, Session 19, Teaching of King Lemuel's Mother (Prov. 31:1-9), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Knut Heim's lecture analyzes Proverbs 31:1-9, focusing on the teachings of King Lemuel's mother. **The lecture explores the unusual context** of a foreign king and his mother's wisdom being included in the biblical book of Proverbs. **Heim interprets the mother's admonishments to Lemuel**, which include warnings against excessive drinking and promiscuity, as a call for social justice and responsible leadership. **He emphasizes the mother's strong and unconventional role**, highlighting the importance of women in biblical teaching and the powerful message of advocating for the vulnerable within society. **The lecture uses a verse-by-verse approach**, examining the nuances of the text and the mother's tone, and offering insightful interpretations.

**2. 8 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Heim, Session 19 – Double click icon to play in Windows
media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and
click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms &
Wisdom → Proverbs).**



**Heim_Prov_Session
19.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Heim, Proverbs, Session 19, Teaching of King Lemuel's Mother (Prov. 31:1-9)

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, Dr. Knut Heim's lecture on Proverbs 31:1-9:

Briefing Document: Proverbs 31:1-9 - King Lemuel's Mother

Introduction:

This lecture focuses on Proverbs 31:1-9, specifically the teachings of King Lemuel's mother. Dr. Heim emphasizes the unique nature of this passage, highlighting the voice of a woman delivering inspired instruction within the Book of Proverbs. This passage serves as a powerful and important culmination to the book of Proverbs, given that the rest of the book is written by men and primarily targeted at men.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Authority of a Woman's Voice:

- The lecture begins by establishing that the words of King Lemuel's mother are described as an "inspired utterance" (massa), placing her teachings on par with other prophetic pronouncements within the Bible, like the words of Agur (Proverbs 30). Dr. Heim finds this significant, noting that it is an instance of a woman's voice carrying divine authority in the text.
- **Quote:** "And here now, the words of the Queen Mother, the words of a woman, are declared to be an inspired utterance along the lines of the inspired utterance of Agur that we looked at in chapter 30 of the previous lecture."
- This challenges the notion that the Book of Proverbs is solely the domain of male wisdom, reinforcing the theme that women are vital in the spiritual sphere.
- **Quote:** "...women are important in spiritual matters, in theological matters, in the Bible. And they teach and instruct, if you like, they preach on the pages of the Bible. And here is one example."

1. King Lemuel's Identity and International Wisdom:

- The passage introduces King Lemuel, who is not identified in the historical books of the Bible. This strongly suggests that he was a foreign (non-Israelite) king.

- His mother's wisdom and ethical stance are in line with the overall teaching of Proverbs, implying a potential integration of foreign wisdom traditions. She may have been an Israelite woman married to Lemuel's father, and if that were the case, her perspective would carry even more weight and significance in this final chapter.
- Dr. Heim connects this to the incorporation of the Egyptian "Instruction of Amenemope" in earlier Proverbs chapters (22-24).
- International diplomatic exchange was likely how these foreign writings found their way into the collection of biblical books, which is fascinating and exciting.
- **Quote:** "...international writings, philosophical writings, were being exchanged and adapted and adopted in the collection of Biblical books as well."

1. **The Queen Mother's Rebuke:**

- The Queen Mother addresses her son, King Lemuel, in a tone that suggests he has erred. This is evident in her repeated use of "Listen, my son," and then the repeated use of "no."
- Her repeated "no" statements signal a correction.
- **Quote:** "Listen, my son, she says, listen, son of my womb, listen, my son, the answer to my prayers...By the time she needs to tell him, listen three times, emphasizing my son, my son, my son, son of my womb, he's clearly done something wrong."

1. **Critique of Sexual Indulgence and Its Consequences:**

- The Queen Mother warns Lemuel against giving his strength to women "who destroy kings." She is rebuking him for sexual misconduct. She is concerned that the king's indulgence in many sexual engagements is distracting him from his duties as a ruler.
- Dr. Heim posits that these women are likely prostitutes, who threaten to distract him from his leadership. He emphasizes that the text isn't so much condemning women as it is warning against the *foolishness* of indulging in such distractions, regardless of one's gender.
- **Quote:** "But the point here is not to make other women look bad. The main point is to warn her son of silly behavior. Foolish and dangerous behavior in this case."

- The focus is on the dangers of distraction and the impact it has on one's responsibility.

1. **The Dangers of Intoxication:**

- She also advises against excessive drinking. She believes this leads to forgetting one's duty and perverting justice for the vulnerable.
- **Quote:** "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to desire strong drinks. Or else they will drink and forget what has been decreed and will be perverted and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted."
- This connects the king's personal conduct directly with his ability to uphold social justice.

1. **Sarcasm and Emphasis:**

- The Queen Mother sarcastically suggests giving strong drink to those who are suffering, as a way to illustrate that the king, who is in a position of power and has no excuse, should focus on his responsibilities rather than indulging in distractions. This is an exercise of imaginative reading, not a literal instruction.
- **Quote:** "Give strong drink to one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress. Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more... What is going on here, this is extreme sarcasm. You, my son, have no excuse. You are the king."

1. **The King's Responsibility and Social Justice:**

- The Queen Mother ultimately implores her son to advocate for the poor, destitute, and vulnerable in society.
- **Quote:** "Speak out for those who cannot speak for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the poor and needy."
- The king must ensure social justice.
- This is a key principle of leadership and connects to the larger teaching of the Book of Proverbs and the importance of righteous actions over selfish ones.
- The role of the leader isn't just to avoid injustice, but to actively promote justice.
- The righteous must be a pure fountain, and a clear spring that is a source of life, which is the core of their responsibility, especially those in authority and power in society.

Conclusion: Dr. Heim's lecture highlights the complex layers of Proverbs 31:1-9. It is not just a set of parental instructions to a king, but a profound statement on the responsibilities of leadership, the importance of social justice, and the authority of female voices in matters of faith. It also reinforces the notion that international wisdom traditions can complement the collection of the holy scriptures. The Queen Mother's powerful rebuke and call to action underscore the book's overall message about the significance of righteousness in all aspects of life, especially the lives of those in positions of power.

4. Study Guide: Heim, Proverbs, Session 19, Teaching of King Lemuel's Mother (Prov. 31:1-9)

Proverbs 31:1-9 Study Guide

Quiz

1. What is significant about the fact that King Lemuel is not a known king in the historical records of Israel? *This suggests Lemuel was likely a foreign, non-Israelite king, which may explain why his mother's wisdom, aligned with the Book of Proverbs, found its way into the collection. This also implies an international exchange of wisdom literature.*
2. According to Dr. Heim, what is remarkable about the inclusion of the Queen Mother's speech in Proverbs? *It is significant because it highlights the importance of women in the Bible, showcasing a female figure of international standing whose inspired words are recorded, challenging the idea that women do not have a vital role in spiritual matters.*
3. How does the Queen Mother's tone in her initial address to Lemuel indicate his behavior? *The repetition of "listen, my son" and "son of my womb" three times each reveals a chiding tone, suggesting Lemuel has been misbehaving and needs to pay close attention to his mother's counsel.*
4. What are the two primary behaviors that the Queen Mother warns Lemuel against? *She warns against sexual indulgence with many women and excessive drinking, both of which she argues will distract him from his duties as king.*
5. Why does the Queen Mother suggest that the women her son is involved with are "destroyers of kings"? *She suggests they are destroyers because their presence distracts him from his responsibilities as a ruler, not because of an inherent evilness of the women themselves.*
6. What is the primary danger of drinking alcohol, as the Queen Mother explains? *Drinking impairs a king's judgment and can cause them to forget their duties, specifically neglecting the rights of the vulnerable in society.*
7. What is the significance of the Queen Mother's sarcastic instruction in verses 6-7 to give strong drink to the destitute? *This is not meant to be taken literally. The sarcasm serves to emphasize that Lemuel has no excuse for his behavior while vulnerable people might seek solace in drink.*

8. What is the positive course of action that the Queen Mother directs Lemuel toward in verses 8 and 9? *She urges him to actively speak out for and defend the rights of the poor, destitute, and those who cannot speak for themselves.*
9. How does the Queen Mother's instruction relate back to the concept of the "righteous" discussed in earlier lectures? *It aligns with previous teachings about the righteous having a life-giving impact and that those in power should act as advocates for those who cannot help themselves.*
10. According to Heim, what is "astonishing" about the Queen Mother's commands in verses 8-9? *It's astonishing because it demonstrates that, in the ancient world, the responsibilities of those in power are to not only avoid wrongdoing but to actively engage in advocacy for the poor, the vulnerable and those who cannot help themselves.*

Answer Key

1. This suggests Lemuel was likely a foreign, non-Israelite king, which may explain why his mother's wisdom, aligned with the Book of Proverbs, found its way into the collection. This also implies an international exchange of wisdom literature.
2. It is significant because it highlights the importance of women in the Bible, showcasing a female figure of international standing whose inspired words are recorded, challenging the idea that women do not have a vital role in spiritual matters.
3. The repetition of "listen, my son" and "son of my womb" three times each reveals a chiding tone, suggesting Lemuel has been misbehaving and needs to pay close attention to his mother's counsel.
4. She warns against sexual indulgence with many women and excessive drinking, both of which she argues will distract him from his duties as king.
5. She suggests they are destroyers because their presence distracts him from his responsibilities as a ruler, not because of an inherent evilness of the women themselves.
6. Drinking impairs a king's judgment and can cause them to forget their duties, specifically neglecting the rights of the vulnerable in society.
7. This is not meant to be taken literally. The sarcasm serves to emphasize that Lemuel has no excuse for his behavior while vulnerable people might seek solace in drink.

8. She urges him to actively speak out for and defend the rights of the poor, destitute, and those who cannot speak for themselves.
9. It aligns with previous teachings about the righteous having a life-giving impact and that those in power should act as advocates for those who cannot help themselves.
10. It's astonishing because it demonstrates that, in the ancient world, the responsibilities of those in power are to not only avoid wrongdoing but to actively engage in advocacy for the poor, the vulnerable and those who cannot help themselves.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the Queen Mother's role in Proverbs 31:1-9. How does her speech challenge traditional views of women in the ancient world, and what does it reveal about their potential influence?
2. Analyze the use of sarcasm and chiding in the Queen Mother's speech to King Lemuel. What does this literary device reveal about their relationship, and how does it emphasize the seriousness of her warnings?
3. Explore the themes of social justice and responsibility that are present in the Queen Mother's advice to her son. How does her counsel challenge conventional notions of power and kingship?
4. Compare and contrast the Queen Mother's warnings about sexual indulgence and excessive drinking. How do these two dangers relate to each other, and what are their potential consequences for a ruler?
5. Evaluate the significance of Proverbs 31:1-9 within the broader context of the Book of Proverbs. How does this passage relate to earlier themes and teachings, and what does it contribute to the overall wisdom of the collection?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Massa:** Hebrew word meaning "inspired utterance" or "oracle," used to describe the Queen Mother's teachings.
- **Queen Mother:** The mother of a king, holding a significant position of influence in the ancient Near East. In Proverbs 31, she is the primary speaker.
- **King Lemuel:** A foreign king to whom the Queen Mother is giving instruction in Proverbs 31:1-9. His name is not recorded anywhere else in the Bible.
- **Social Justice:** The concept of ensuring fairness and equity in a society, especially for the most vulnerable members, which the Queen Mother advocates for Lemuel.
- **The Afflicted:** Those who are suffering or oppressed, often referring to widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor, for whom the king is to advocate.
- **Inspired Utterance:** A speech or pronouncement that is believed to be divinely inspired, as the Queen Mother's message is described.
- **Sarcasm:** The use of irony to mock or convey contempt, evident in the Queen Mother's words in verses 6 and 7 of Proverbs 31.
- **Chiding:** Scolding or reprimanding in a gentle way, which is the tone used in the Queen Mother's address to her son.
- **Advocacy:** The act of publicly supporting or recommending a particular cause or policy, in this case, for the rights of the poor and vulnerable.
- **Destitute:** People lacking the basic necessities of life. The Queen Mother calls for the king to protect the rights of the destitute.

5. FAQs on Heim, Proverbs, Session 19, Teaching of King Lemuel's Mother (Prov. 31:1-9), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Proverbs 31:1-9

1. **Who is King Lemuel and why is his mother's teaching included in the Book of Proverbs?** King Lemuel is likely a foreign, non-Israelite king, as no king by that name appears in the detailed historical records of the kings of Israel. His mother's inclusion in Proverbs, a collection of Israelite wisdom, underscores the book's incorporation of international wisdom. It suggests that wisdom and ethical teaching could be valued and adopted from other cultures. There may also be a connection to international diplomacy, which resulted in the exchange and adaptation of philosophical writings, such as the Instruction of Amenemope, which was also adapted in the book. This shows that the text is open to voices from different backgrounds and traditions.
2. **Why does Lemuel's mother speak so sternly to him at the start of her address?** The Queen Mother's tone is initially chiding and direct, repeating "listen, my son" three times. This suggests that her son, King Lemuel, has been misbehaving or making poor choices. Her repetition of "no" three times indicates he has been engaging in behaviors she disapproves of. She's appealing to his respect for her to get his attention, indicating her concern about his actions and the need to correct him. She is also appealing to his good sense, to consider her perspective.
3. **What are the main behaviors that Lemuel's mother warns him against?** Lemuel's mother warns him against two major distractions that would derail his kingship: sexual indulgence with multiple women, whom she describes as "those who destroy kings," and excessive consumption of alcohol. These two behaviors pose danger to his responsibility. She does not necessarily condemn the women, but rather the king's lack of focus. She does not condemn alcohol in general, but rather its dangers in terms of the king. Her warning is not about the inherent wickedness of these things, but about the dangerous distraction they pose to his responsibilities and judgement.

4. **What is the significance of Lemuel's mother's warning about women "who destroy kings"?** Her warning about women who "destroy kings" likely refers to prostitutes or women of that nature, who distract and corrupt leaders. These women distract the king from the business of ruling, leading to a neglect of his duties. The focus is on how unchecked sexual indulgence can lead to a leader's downfall, rather than on condemning the women themselves. The concern is about the king's foolishness, and not necessarily about the wickedness of the women.
5. **Why does Lemuel's mother warn him against drinking alcohol, and what is her greater point about responsibility?** She warns against alcohol as it leads to forgetting "what has been decreed," which is likely the divine commandments, which leads to perverting the rights of the afflicted. It also poses an issue in terms of distraction, as she also warns against sexual indulgence. She highlights that leaders who are distracted by such indulgences will fail to uphold social justice for the vulnerable. By neglecting their duties, leaders will fail to help the "afflicted" – the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the foreigners.
6. **Why does the Queen Mother say, "Give strong drink to one who is perishing" when she is warning her son against drink?** This statement is not intended to be taken literally, but rather as an extreme form of sarcasm. She's not encouraging her son to get the poor drunk, but rather highlighting the irony of his position as king, who doesn't have the excuse of the poor. While the poor may seek solace in alcohol to forget their misery, a king, who is supposed to protect the poor, shouldn't be indulging. The point here is to underscore that the king has no excuse for neglecting his responsibilities, especially when it comes to protecting the vulnerable in society.
7. **What positive actions does Lemuel's mother encourage her son to take?** She encourages him to "speak out for those who cannot speak," and "defend the rights of the poor and needy." These actions are presented as a direct response to his possible indulgence in behaviors that would derail his judgement. Her positive direction emphasizes the king's active role in promoting social justice, advocating for the vulnerable, and ensuring that the marginalized have a voice.

8. **What is the broader significance of Lemuel's mother's teaching in the context of Proverbs and biblical wisdom?** Her teaching emphasizes the responsibility of those in power, especially leaders, to actively advocate for the vulnerable in society. It aligns with the broader themes of Proverbs that emphasize social justice. It also highlights that wisdom is not limited by gender or by ethnic boundaries. The Queen Mother's inclusion as a significant voice shows that women can play important spiritual and theological roles, teaching and instructing within scripture. This speaks to the value of international and cross-cultural wisdom and demonstrates that God's truth can come from many voices.