

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 20, Instruction for a King, Proverbs 31:1-9 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Konkell, Proverbs, Session 20, Instruction for a King, Proverbs 31:1-9, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. August Konkell's lecture analyzes Proverbs 31:1-9, focusing on the instruction given by a mother to her son, King Lemuel of Massa. **The lecture explores** the historical and linguistic context of the passage, highlighting the mother's role in shaping her son's kingship. **Konkell discusses** the mother's warnings against drunkenness and promiscuity, emphasizing the importance of a king's responsibility to his people. **He contrasts** this ideal with the self-serving nature of many modern leaders. **Ultimately**, the lecture examines the passage's timeless relevance regarding leadership and ethical conduct.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Konkell, Session 20 – 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).



Konkel_Prov_Session20.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Konkel, Proverbs, Session 20, Instruction for a King, Proverbs 31:1-9

Okay, here is a briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. August Konkel's lecture on Proverbs 31:1-9:

Briefing Document: Proverbs 31:1-9 - Instruction for a King

Overview:

This session focuses on Proverbs 31:1-9, which Dr. Konkel identifies as unique "instructions for a king," delivered by a woman, specifically King Lemuel's mother. The lecture examines the cultural, linguistic, and thematic significance of this passage, emphasizing the responsibilities of leadership and the dangers of excess.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Authority of Female Wisdom:

- The instructions for King Lemuel come from his mother, reinforcing the concept, found elsewhere in Proverbs, that mothers are vital teachers. This is not entirely new, given that wisdom itself is personified as a woman.
- This passage provides a unique instance in Proverbs where the specific identity of a female teacher is revealed.
- Dr. Konkel highlights this as an example of a child listening to and learning from their parent.
- Quote: *"But this is the one place in Proverbs where we know the identity of the woman. She is the mother of King Lemuel. And here's where we have the example of where the child has listened to the parent."*

1. Historical and Linguistic Context:

- King Lemuel is identified as the king of Massa, a northern Arabian tribe. This connection highlights the interactions between Israelites and other people from the Arabian Peninsula.
- The passage's language reflects linguistic influences from Northwest Semitic languages, including Aramaic, which further demonstrates how different linguistic influences and migrations play into the language's development.

- The use of the term "bar" for "son" (rather than the more common "ben" in Hebrew) is identified as a feature that shows the influence of Aramaic and older Semitic languages, showing this verse to come from an older linguistic background.
- Quote: *"Now, in ordinary Hebrew, the word for son is ben. In modern Hebrew, the word for son is b'ar...So, this would be the way that modern Hebrews say it. So, you talk about a bar mitzvah."*

1. **"What? My Son?": The Mother's Interrogation**

- The repeated phrase "ma bri, ma bri btnei, ma bar n'dvai" (what, my son, what son of my womb, what son of my vows) is interpreted as a mother's way of emphasizing the seriousness of her message and potentially reflecting parental frustration, similar to a modern "you did what?"
- It also alludes to the possibility of a dedication or vow made by the mother in regards to her son's service to God.
- Quote: *"And so, there's a what, what, what. There have been many suggestions as to what this might mean, but I think there is a way in which this is what mothers often have to say to their children. No, no, no."*

1. **Warnings Against Excess and Debauchery:**

- The mother warns King Lemuel against the temptations of "wine, women, and song," which are particularly dangerous for those in positions of power.
- Drunkenness and promiscuity are identified as threats to a king's judgment, with examples of these pitfalls from Biblical texts such as David and Bathsheba being invoked.
- The lecture makes it clear that the curses of such behavior apply to everyone, not just royalty.
- Quote: *"But kings need to avoid drunkenness, and they need to avoid promiscuity. They aren't privileged... the curses of drunkenness...and the curses of promiscuity...will come upon anyone who practices them, whether you're a king or not."*

1. **Responsibilities of a King:**

- Kings are judges, lawmakers, and must remember their previous decisions to maintain integrity.

- Sobriety is emphasized to keep clear memory and make responsible decisions.
- Kings are expected to use their "mouths" to speak for the voiceless, defend the poor and needy, and ensure justice for all. Kings are not to serve their own self-interest, but to serve the people they lead.
- The lecture criticizes modern leaders who are self-serving and neglect the well-being of their people.
- Quote: *"How should kings use their mouths? To exercise judgment on behalf of the poor, to defend them, and to provide for just decisions, because the poor and the needy are the special objects of the care of the king."*

1. **Proper Use of Wine:**

- While drunkenness is condemned, wine is acknowledged as a "good gift from God" that can provide comfort and even serve as a sedative.
- The lecture differentiates between the appropriate use of wine for comfort and the destructive effects of abuse.

Conclusion:

This section of Proverbs 31 provides a framework for ethical leadership, rooted in female wisdom and cultural understanding. The lecture emphasizes the need for vigilance, self-control, and a commitment to justice and the well-being of all, especially the vulnerable, for any leader. It critiques modern leaders who fail to prioritize their responsibility to the people. The passage from Proverbs 31 is a lesson for all leaders across any era.

4. Study Guide: Konkell, Proverbs, Session 20, Instruction for a King, Proverbs 31:1-9

Proverbs 31:1-9 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Who is the speaker in Proverbs 31:1-9 and who is the intended audience?
2. What is unique about the speaker in this section of Proverbs? Why might that be significant?
3. According to Konkell, what might the repeated phrase "What, my son?" imply about the mother's tone?
4. What are the primary temptations the mother warns King Lemuel about?
5. How does the story of David and Nathan illustrate a king's need for vigilance?
6. According to Konkell, what is the appropriate use of wine? What is inappropriate?
7. How should a king use his mouth, according to the mother's instruction?
8. What does Konkell say about the role of leadership in relation to the people being led?
9. What evidence is there that King Lemuel's cultural background is from the northern Arabian Peninsula?
10. How does the linguistic analysis of the term "bar" contribute to our understanding of the passage's historical context?

Answer Key

1. The speaker in Proverbs 31:1-9 is the mother of King Lemuel and the intended audience is her son, King Lemuel. She provides him with instruction on how to rule wisely.
2. The speaker is a woman, which is significant because it demonstrates the importance of female wisdom and instruction in Proverbs. It shows that mothers, as well as fathers, have a role in teaching wisdom.

3. The repeated phrase "What, my son?" may imply a tone of disbelief or concern from the mother, like a mother rebuking a child and warning him about the dangers of excess. It sets a tone of firm instruction.
4. The mother warns King Lemuel about the temptations of drunkenness and promiscuity, emphasizing that these behaviors are detrimental to a king's judgment and responsibility.
5. The story of David and Nathan shows how a king can be blinded by his own power and privilege, forgetting the laws he upholds, and shows why vigilance is necessary in order to remember past judgments.
6. According to Konkel, wine is a gift from God that can provide comfort and soothe, but it must not be used to the point of drunkenness. Moderation and control are essential.
7. A king should use his mouth to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, to defend the poor and needy, and to provide just decisions, emphasizing justice for all, especially the vulnerable.
8. Konkel says that leadership should focus on the well-being of the people being led and should not be used for self-serving purposes like power and prestige. True leadership serves the people.
9. The text identifies King Lemuel as the king of Massa, a northern tribe in the Arabian Peninsula. Additionally, Konkel mentions the language used in the passage has affinities with North Semitic languages from that region.
10. The use of "bar" for "son" rather than the more common Hebrew "ben" indicates the passage's linguistic connections with Aramaic and other North Semitic languages, suggesting a cultural and historical context outside of mainland Canaan.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Develop a well-organized essay addressing the prompts below. Be sure to cite textual evidence from the source.

1. Analyze the significance of a mother's role as an instructor in Proverbs 31:1-9, and explain how this portrayal challenges or reinforces broader societal views of women's wisdom in the ancient world.
2. Discuss the warnings against indulgence and excess given to King Lemuel, and compare them to other instances of cautionary advice within the Book of Proverbs, noting any common themes or differences.
3. Examine the mother's instructions regarding leadership and justice and evaluate how these principles relate to contemporary notions of responsible leadership.
4. Explore the linguistic evidence presented by Konkel, particularly the use of "bar" instead of "ben," and discuss its implications for understanding the cultural and historical background of Proverbs 31:1-9.
5. Reflect on how the themes in Proverbs 31:1-9 regarding a king's responsibilities to the vulnerable are either affirmed or challenged by the other books of the Hebrew Bible.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Massa:** A northern tribe in the Arabian Peninsula, identified as the kingdom of King Lemuel in Proverbs 31:1.
- **Northwest Semitic:** A family of related languages spoken in the ancient Near East, including Hebrew, Aramaic, and Canaanite dialects.
- **Aramaic:** An ancient Semitic language closely related to Hebrew, influencing some aspects of biblical Hebrew.
- **Bat Mitzvah/Bar Mitzvah:** Jewish coming-of-age ceremonies that signify a young person's assumption of religious responsibilities.
- **Anson Rainey:** A late scholar who studied ancient inscriptions, his linguistic analysis pointed to connections between biblical Hebrew and other languages from the Edom and Moab area.
- **Edom/Moab:** Ancient kingdoms located east of the Dead Sea whose languages and culture show similarities to those of the Israelites.
- **Harem:** A living space in royal households often associated with the concubines of a ruler.
- **Asceticism:** The practice of severe self-discipline and abstention from worldly pleasures, often for religious reasons.
- **Nazirite:** A person who took a vow of special consecration to God in the Old Testament, often involving abstinence from wine and other restrictions.
- **Promiscuity:** The practice of having casual sexual relationships frequently, considered a vice in the context of the passage.
- **Decadence:** Moral or cultural decline characterized by excessive self-indulgence and luxury.
- **Stele:** An upright stone slab or pillar bearing an inscription or design. The Moabite Stele is mentioned by Konkel in relation to the Moabite language.
- **Deir al-Lah Engraving:** An ancient inscription that displays a blend of Aramaic and Hebrew languages.

5. FAQs on Konkel, Proverbs, Session 20, Instruction for a King, Proverbs 31:1-9, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Proverbs 31:1-9

1. **Who is the author of Proverbs 31:1-9, and what is unique about this section?**
This section of Proverbs is attributed to the mother of King Lemuel, who is not the main author of Proverbs. It is significant because it is the only place in Proverbs where a woman is identified as the teacher of a king, reflecting the theme throughout Proverbs that mothers alongside fathers provide wisdom. In this case, the son, the king, passes on the knowledge he has received from his mother.
2. **Who was King Lemuel and where did he rule?** King Lemuel is identified as the king of Massa, a northern tribe in the Arabian Peninsula. This region, although not a central focus of biblical history, had interactions with the Israelites, especially during the Exodus period, indicating that this connection is not entirely unexpected or unusual.
3. **What is the linguistic significance of the way the mother addresses her son in this passage?** The mother addresses her son using the word "bar" for son rather than "ben", which is more common in Hebrew, a connection to the North Semitic languages, specifically Aramaic. The term "bar" is more common in Aramaic and modern Hebrew and is illustrated in terms like "Bar Mitzvah". This shows the linguistic interchange between Hebrew and Aramaic and suggests this passage has affinities with these neighboring languages.
4. **What is the meaning of the repeated phrase "What, my son? What, son of my womb? What, son of my vows?"?** The repetition of "what" is understood as a rhetorical device that acts as an intensifier, much like how in English, "you did what?!" can denote disbelief or disapproval. It is interpreted as the mother expressing concern and even a sense of negativity towards the temptations and potential pitfalls her son may face, such as those temptations faced by kings. It may also be suggestive of a vow made by the mother to dedicate her son, and thus is a strong way of reminding him of his special role.

5. **What are the primary warnings given to King Lemuel by his mother?** The primary warnings from his mother revolve around the dangers of excessive indulgence, specifically wine and promiscuity. She emphasizes that these vices can lead to a king's downfall and are not appropriate behaviors for rulers. Kings are held accountable as judges and decision-makers, so their judgement cannot be impaired.
6. **How does the story of David and Bathsheba illustrate the importance of the mother's instruction?** The story of David's sin with Bathsheba serves as a cautionary example of how even kings can succumb to temptation and abuse their power. David's actions highlight the consequences of forgetting one's role and responsibilities. This echoes the mother's warning to King Lemuel, underscoring the need for leaders to be vigilant, sober, and just.
7. **How is the use of wine presented in the text? Is it always seen as a negative?** The text does not condemn the use of wine entirely. It acknowledges that wine can be a gift from God that can sometimes provide comfort and act as a sedative to ease one's burden. It's the *excessive* use of wine that is cautioned against. The key is moderation and not letting it impair judgment, which is essential for a king who is a decision-maker and needs to maintain vigilance.
8. **What is the king's primary responsibility according to the mother's advice, and what is it a reminder of for all leaders?** The king's primary responsibility, as outlined by his mother, is to advocate for and exercise judgment on behalf of the poor and those who cannot speak for themselves. This advice extends beyond royalty, serving as a reminder for all leaders to use their positions for the well-being of the people they lead, and not for self-serving gain or the pursuit of status. Leadership is not about personal prominence but rather about serving others.