

Dr. August Konkel, Proverbs, Session 20, Instruction for a King, Proverbs 31:1-9 6-min. Video Overview

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Alright, today we're going to dive into a really fascinating and honestly pretty unique ancient text. Think of it as an instruction manual for a king, and it's tucked away in the book of Proverbs. But the coolest part? Where this advice actually comes from is probably not what you're thinking.

So let me ask you this. When you picture a king, you know, from the ancient world, who's standing next to him, giving him advice? Is it a tough-as-nails general? A wise old philosopher? Maybe the high priest? Go ahead and get a picture in your head. Because in this text, the answer is his mother.

Yep, you heard that right. This incredibly powerful advice on what it means to be a good leader, which has been preserved for thousands of years, comes directly from a queen mother to her son, the king. It's just a remarkable example of a woman's voice carrying some serious authority.

But this story gets even more interesting. Because this isn't just any king. And to really get what his mother is telling him, we have to understand these surprising cultural crossroads that this whole conversation comes from.

These are the words of King Lemuel of Massa. And here's the twist. Massa was not an Israelite kingdom.

It was actually a tribe way down in the Arabian Peninsula. So what we have here is wisdom from a non-Israelite source, taught by a mother, that was considered so important and so true that it was included right inside the Hebrew Bible. That's a huge statement that, hey, wisdom is wisdom, no matter where it comes from.

And you can actually see this cultural mashup right there in the language itself. See, in standard biblical Hebrew, the word for son is ben. But this passage uses the Aramaic word bar.

You've probably heard that word before, right? Bar mitzvah. It means son of the commandment. This one little word is like a linguistic fingerprint, showing us a world where these cultures were talking to each other.

And here it is, right in the text. The mother starts off with my bar. By using this very specific word, the text is actually preserving the authentic voice of this queen from Massa, embedding that cultural exchange right into the scripture.

It's amazing. Okay, so now that we know who she is, this queen mother gets straight to the point. She doesn't waste any time.

Her instruction kicks off, not with some gentle advice, but with this incredibly urgent and intense warning. So her speech starts with this really strange repetition. She says, "What my son, what, what? Now, according to the scholar, Dr. August Konkell, this isn't a question at all.

It's more like how we might say, You did what? You know, it's pure shock and disapproval. He suggests that what we're really hearing is the mother's voice crying out. No, no, no.

Don't you even think about it. So what's got her so worked up? What is she warning him against? Well, it's the classic temptations, especially for somebody with immense power and luxury. She warns him about promiscuity and drunkenness.

And she knows that for a king, these aren't just personal problems. They lead to devastating public consequences. But why, though? I mean, why are these particular vices so destructive for a leader? What's really at stake here that makes her warning so incredibly urgent? Well, it all comes down to this.

A king's most important job is to be a judge. And as his mother points out, indulgence, especially drunkenness, is a direct attack on his ability to do that job. It makes a ruler literally forget the law, forget the decisions they've made, and in the end, deny justice to the very people they're supposed to protect: the vulnerable and the needy.

So after laying down the law about what a king must not do, the queen mother makes a brilliant pivot. She moves from all the negatives to the positive, to the profound duty of what a king must do. But before we get to that, it's really important to see what happens when these warnings are ignored.

And there's a perfect case study for this exact failure elsewhere in the Bible: the story of King David. It's a powerful, almost tragic example of how personal desires can completely cloud public judgment. So the story goes, the prophet Nathan comes to King David with a legal case.

He tells him about a rich man with huge flocks of sheep. When a guest arrives, this rich guy, instead of taking a lamb from his own massive flock, goes and steals the one single beloved lamb from his poor neighbor to serve for dinner. And then he asks the king for a verdict.

Well, David is absolutely outraged by this injustice. He doesn't even hesitate. His judgment is swift, and it is harsh.

He says the man deserves to die and must pay back four times what he took, way more than the law even required. At this moment, David the judge is fired up about justice for the little guy. And then Nathan drops the bombshell.

He looks the king dead in the eye and says, "You are the man. You see, David, who had taken the wife of his loyal soldier Uriah, was that rich man. He had everything, but he stole the one precious thing from his neighbor.

It's this brilliant, devastating moment that shows the core of the queen mother's warning. A leader's private sins make a total mockery of their public duty to be just. So what does this

ancient advice from a foreign queen mother really mean for us today? Well, it turns out to be an unbelievably timeless and relevant lesson for leadership in any time, in any place.

You can basically boil her counsel down into this powerful job description. Number one, stay vigilant, be self-controlled. Don't let your own appetites wreck your judgment.

Number two, and this is so important, use your voice for those who don't have one. Speak up for people who can't speak for themselves. And number three, actively go out and defend the rights of the poor and the needy.

When you get right down to it, this whole passage is a warning against the number one temptation of having any kind of power: becoming self-serving. It's this timeless reminder that leadership isn't about getting perks or prestige. It's about having a profound responsibility to care for the people you lead.

And that really leaves us with a final question, one to take with us. This ancient advice wasn't just for some king thousands of years ago. In any area where we have influence, whether that's at work, in our neighborhood, or even just in our own family, who are we truly serving? It's a powerful challenge on leadership delivered from a mother to her son that is just as relevant today.