

I. IDENTITY OF KING LEMUEL

A. THE OPTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING LEMUEL

1. A Pseudonym for Solomon

- LEMUEL (לְמוּעַל) likely means “belonging to God” or “for God.”
- Fits the pattern of poetic or symbolic names elsewhere in Proverbs (cf. Agur in Proverbs 30).
- The voice of the mother echoes Bathsheba’s known role in guiding Solomon (1 Kings 1:11–31).

2. A Non-Israelite God-Fearing King

- Some commentators (especially later Christian interpreters) posit a Gentile monarch who received wisdom by God’s mercy.
- We have no record of such a king.

3. A Literary or Allegorical Figure

- Lemuel may be a stand-in for “any” king—an idealized son receiving prophetic instruction.
- This view removes historical specificity and treats the figure symbolically.

B. ARGUMENT FOR LEMUEL AS SOLOMON

1. Name as Theological Title

- Like Jedidiah (“beloved of the Lord”), Lemuel could be a theological name assigned to Solomon, emphasizing his divine commission and accountability.
- There are no records of Lemuel being used as a real name for any historical figure, supporting the idea that it functions symbolically or theologically rather than as a personal name.

2. Rabbinic Tradition and Internal Consistency

- Those in the Jewish tradition identify Lemuel with Solomon.
- Proverbs 30 and 31 are both framed as “words” from beyond the standard Solomonic material—yet most commonly interpreted as Solomonic instruction.

II. A MOTHER'S ROYAL WARNING: PROVERBS 31:1-9

A. SUPERScription: A MOTHER’S PROPHETIC BURDEN (V. 1)

• “The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.”

- PROPHECY (מְנַשָּׂא) here is the same term used for oracles of judgment and burden in the prophets (e.g., Isaiah 13:1).
- The mother speaks with the voice of Torah, charged with preparing her son for covenantal kingship.
- “Taught” (יְסָרְתוּ) doesn’t mean a cozy fireside lesson—it means chastised, corrected, disciplined. It comes from the same Hebrew root (יָסַר) used in Proverbs for the chastening of a father or the reproof of the Lord (cf. Proverbs 3:11–12). She didn’t just instruct—she **REBUKED**.
- This framing tells us we’re not getting the highlights from a graduation speech. We’re hearing a **prophetic rebuke from a mother who sees disaster coming** if her son fails to rule with wisdom.

B. A MOTHER’S LAMENT: THE GRIEF OF A TORAH-WOMAN (V. 2)

“What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows?”

- The verse opens with **three urgent cries**, each escalating in **maternal intimacy**:
 1. “My son” — general relationship.
 2. “Son of my womb” — physical labor and pain.
 3. “Son of my vows” — spiritual investment, perhaps a Nazarite-style dedication (cf. Hannah in 1 Samuel 1).
- This is **not yet correction**—it’s a mother’s **anguished appeal**, signaling that her heart is heavy over something her son has done.
- The threefold “what?” (מָה בְּרִי) functions like the prophets’ use of **lament formula**—grief before confrontation.
- We are not told **what event triggered this**—but from the emotional tone and what follows, we know that **something has gone wrong**.
 - Rabbinic tradition (as cited in Rashi) places this after Solomon oversleeps during Temple worship, on the day of the Temple’s dedication.
 - Even without that background, the tone implies **disappointment in a son who should know better**—especially one with **royal and covenantal responsibility**.
- This verse functions as a **lament before the law**—a mother’s heartbreak before she delivers the rebuke.

C. A KING’S REBUKE: TORAH FOR THE THRONE (VV. 3–9)

1. THE DANGER OF COMPROMISE: WOMEN WHO DESTROY KINGS (V. 3)

“Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.”

v. 3

- **“Give not thy strength unto women”** – This isn’t a blanket statement about marriage; it’s a warning against **surrendering royal authority** to those who would **manipulate or seduce** a king away from Torah.
- **“Nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings”** – The phrasing broadens the warning from women to **any pathway of self-indulgence**, political entanglement, or moral erosion.
- In Solomon’s case:
 - His **first wife was Pharaoh’s daughter** (1 Kings 3:1), a political alliance—not immediately condemned.
 - **1 Kings 11:1–4** reveals the turning point:

“But king Solomon loved many strange women... of the nations... and his wives turned away his heart.”
 - Importantly, **this happened “when he was old”** (v. 4). His decline was gradual. His mother may be warning him **at the beginning of the slide**.
- Prophetically, this verse serves as a **template warning** to all kings of Judah: **compromise starts slow, but it ends in idolatry and ruin** (cf. Deut. 17:17).

2. THE DANGER OF CLOUDED JUDGMENT: STRONG DRINK AND FORGETTING TORAH (VV. 4–7)

“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.”

vv. 4–5

- Kings must be **sober in more than one sense**. Alcohol represents not just literal intoxication but **any indulgence that clouds moral clarity**.
- The danger is twofold:
 1. **“Forget the law”** – The word **LAW** here is **Torah**. The king who forgets Torah forgets the foundation of righteous rule.
 2. **“Pervert the judgment of the afflicted”** – The first group to suffer when a ruler is corrupt is always the poor and powerless.
- Solomon himself had warned Rehoboam of wine in Proverbs 23:29-35
- The **Torah explicitly commands** Israel’s kings to **write their own copy of the Law** and read it daily (Deut. 17:18–20). The mother is reinforcing that covenant expectation.

“Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.”

vv. 6–7

- She concedes: **wine has a place**—for the dying and the despairing.
- But her implication is sharp: **you are not the one who needs escape**.
- **Kings are not called to numb their senses**—they are called to **see clearly**, especially on behalf of those who suffer.
- In this sense, it was a chastisement for Solomon to be placed into the category of the perishing or miserable.

3. THE DUTY OF JUSTICE: ADVOCACY FOR THE VOICELESS (VV. 8–9)

“Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.”

“Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.”

- These are **imperatives**. Repeated twice: **OPEN YOUR MOUTH!** The silence of the king is **not neutrality—it’s negligence**.
- **“The dumb”** – Those who **cannot speak for themselves**, due to social, legal, or economic constraints.
- **“Appointed to destruction”** – Likely refers to those being crushed by the system: victims of unjust rulings or structural injustice.
- **“Judge righteously”** – The king’s role is not just to maintain order, but to **ensure equity** in line with the righteousness of the covenant.
- **“Plead the cause”** – Legal terminology: act as a **public advocate**. This is Deuteronomic justice—care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger (Deut. 10:18–19).
- These verses **form the moral backbone of kingship**. Without them, the king is just another tyrant with a crown.