

Proverbs 31

A mother's advice is frankly but lovingly offered in [vs. 1–9](#). The [RSV](#) is probably correct in connecting Lemuel, like Agur ([30:1](#)), with Massa. He was the king of his people. His name means 'belonging to God', which reflects both the vow and the desire of his mother ([2b](#)). The sound counsel which she offers reveals an attitude far removed from an empty piety or wishful thinking. She was amongst those sensibly spiritual people who accept their responsibilities in connection with the fulfilment of their prayers. So she warns her son to avoid sexual promiscuity or drunkenness but to gain instead a reputation as the champion of the oppressed.

The ideal wife ([10–31](#)). The twenty-two verses of this section form an acrostic poem, with each verse beginning with one of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It is probably anonymous, although it has been attributed to Lemuel's mother. It presents an attractive picture of the function of a wife in an upper class home. Her affluent position is indicated by her many maid-servants ([15](#)), her ample resources ([16](#)), the quality of her materials ([21 f.](#)) and her husband's prominent position in the community ([23](#)). But her dependability ([11](#)), industry ([13–19](#), [24](#), [27](#)), generosity ([20](#)), foresight ([21](#), [25](#)), sagacity and kindness ([26](#)) may be emulated by those in less fortunate circumstances. Small

wonder that she earns the loving, respectful admiration of her family ([28 f.](#))! The source of her beautiful character, not beauty of the skin-deep variety, springs from her relationship to God ([30](#)). This can never be purchased by wealth, it is open to all. Hence this poem is much more than a valuable witness to the place and functions of a wife in Israelite society. In a book which has a great deal to say, by way of warning, against the ways of the immoral woman, it is refreshing to note, in contrast, the gracious, bountiful and upright wife of our section ([cf. 9:1–6](#)). The language of this lovely poem calls to mind the interdependence between Christ and His bride, the Church ([Eph. 5:23–32](#)). The latter acknowledges His lordship and works this out in loving, diligent service, whilst the former delights in her, rejoices in her faithfulness and regards her as infinitely precious ([cf. Eph. 1:18](#)).