



Proverbs - Chapter Thirty One

Summary of Chapter Thirty One

Speak up for the speechless. Who can find an excellent wife? She buys a field, she makes garments, she watches over her household.

VIII Proverbs 31:1-9 - The Teaching of King Lemuel's Mother

The word translated oracle in v.1 is the same as the word for oracle in Proverbs 30:1; and, as in 30:1, some have preferred to see it as the name for a place called Massa. The NRSVA has followed the Masoretic text here; refer also to the comment on Proverbs 30:1-33 for more.

No one knows who Lemuel was, or where he was king. Most suppose that he was not an Israelite for he is not listed in the two Books of Kings. It is likely that he was a pagan king but a believer in the true God, which is consistent with the fact that the words for son in v.2 and kings in v.3b have Aramaic spellings, and with the absence of the special name Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, from any of the sayings.

The purpose of vv.2-9 is to instruct in what the ideal human king ought to look like: he is judicious personally (vv.3-4) so that he may attend well to protect others through justice (v.5 and v.9) and with compassion (vv.6-8). This description runs contrary to ordinary experience, now as in biblical times, where power is often pursued and used to the gain of the individual rather than for the sake of those being led.

If Lemuel was in fact a ruler from outside Israel, then the call of these verses underscores the teaching of Proverbs that all rulers are called upon to rule justly and are judged accordingly. This is confirmed by the comments of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8:14-16.

¹ The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him:

Proverbs 31:1

The words of King Lemuel. The name Lemuel means ‘belonging to God’. There was no king of Israel or Judah with this name, so either he was a foreign king or it is a pen name for the author. Several older commentators and Jewish legends often say Lemuel, the one belonging to God, was Solomon himself and his mother was Bathsheba, but there is no evidence for this.

Adam Clarke commented, “There is no evidence whatever that Muel or Lemuel means Solomon; the chapter seems, to be much later than his time, and the several Chaldaisms which occur in the very opening of it are no mean proof of this. If Agur was not the author of it, it may be considered as another supplement to the Book of Proverbs. Most certainly Solomon did not write it.”

An oracle that his mother taught him. Like Solomon (Proverbs 2:6) and Agur (Proverbs 30:1), Lemuel understood that his words were an utterance, a prophecy or revelation, from God. Perhaps like Timothy Lemuel had a Jewish mother who taught him the fear of the Lord and God’s wisdom. Refer to 2 Timothy 1:5.

² No, my son! No, son of my womb!

No, son of my vows!

³ Do not give your strength to women,

your ways to those who destroy kings.

Proverbs 31:2-3

No, my son! No, son of my womb! No, son of my vows! The sense is that an excessive sexual interest in women wastes a man’s strength. This speaks of an unhealthy obsession with romance or sex, which have a proper place in life, but should not be made into a reason for living. The practice of sexual immorality and sex obsession gives away a man’s strength, in the sense of his spiritual strength, his self-respect, his self-control, his example and standing in the community.

Do not give your strength to women. That this proverb refers to mistresses (or a harem) rather than to monogamous marriage is obvious from the plural women rather than ‘a woman.’ Having mistresses is a waste of a man’s strength (perhaps meaning his wealth, but, in the present context of a king, more likely his energy and vigour for ruling well).

Of course, it could also be rightly said that in sexual immorality and sex obsession a woman gives away her strength as well, but King Lemuel’s mother spoke this to her son, not directly to her daughter. Both men and women need

to remain faithful to God in regard to sex and romance, or they will give away their strength, both in terms of their role in life and their spirituality.

Your ways to those who destroy kings. Connected with the previous line, it seems that Lemuel's mother warned him and later generations of Scripture readers against sexual and romantic obsession, something so powerful it destroys kings - even the greatest kings. King Solomon himself was destroyed as he gave his strength to women; refer to 1 Kings 11:1-10. Solomon's father, King David, suffered tragically as he also gave his strength to women; refer to 2 Samuel Chapters 11-12.

- ⁴ It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine,
or for rulers to desire strong drink;
- ⁵ or else they will drink and forget what has been decreed,
and will pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Proverbs 31:4-5

It is not for kings to drink wine. Kings and those who lead should avoid alcohol, i.e. intoxicating drink. This idea is repeated for emphasis. Although the Bible does see a potential blessing in wine, for example: <<*You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart*>> (Psalm 104:14-15), and: <<*Honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine*>> (Proverbs 3:10), it is a dangerous blessing that must be carefully regarded and for many (such as kings and leaders), voluntarily set aside. The calling of kings is to serve the well-being of their subjects, especially in protecting the rights of all the afflicted. They must never allow their judgement to be clouded by wine or strong drink.

Or else they will drink and forget what has been decreed. The responsibilities of a king are so great that it is essential that he not be impaired in his judgement or abilities in any way. This principle is true not only for kings, but for leaders of many types, including and especially those who consider themselves leaders among God's people today.

The Bible does not prohibit drinking alcohol but it does teach that Christians should enjoy all of God's pleasures in a way that bring glory to him. Clearly, drinking alcohol to a point where a person loses self control so that they say or do things that do not honour God is not a good thing to do.

- 6 Give strong drink to one who is perishing,
and wine to those in bitter distress;
- 7 let them drink and forget their poverty,
and remember their misery no more.

Proverbs 31:6-7

The strong drink would help those in bitter distress to forget their poverty. This is often taken to mean that the king should provide strong drink to those who are perishing or in misery for medicinal purposes, that is, to relieve their pain and suffering. However, it could also mean that the king should invite these people to a banquet where they can have some innocent merriment and forget their troubles for a while. This is in line with the teaching of Jesus: <<*He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous'*>> (Luke 14:12-14).

Clarke observed, "We have already seen, that inebriating drinks were mercifully given to condemned criminals, to render them less sensible of the torture they endured in dying. This is what was offered to our Lord; but he refused it."

Remember their misery no more. King Lemuel's mother understood that strong drink, wine, and other intoxicants take away from a person's performance and excellence. For this and other reasons, many people - especially those in leadership - should consider avoiding alcohol altogether.

Charles Spurgeon commented, "If any man should be wicked enough to draw from it the inference that he would be able to forget his misery and poverty by drinking, he would soon find himself woefully mistaken; for if he had one misery before, he would have ten miseries afterwards; and if he was previously poor, he would be in still greater poverty afterwards. Those who fly to the bottle for consolation might as soon fly to hell to find a heaven; and, instead of helping them to forget their poverty, drunkenness would only sink them still more deeply in the mire." Sadly, this is seen all too often in the world today. People, in their times of trouble or through the stress of daily life, often turn to alcohol to help them. That can lead to alcoholism that prevents people from operating at an effective level. Also, alcohol is a depressant. Although it may seem to help in the short term it leads to even greater psychological problems in the end for most people.

- 8 Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute.
- 9 Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak out for those who cannot speak. The idea is that there are those who cannot speak for themselves, to defend themselves in a court of law or in less formal circumstances. The wise and godly man or woman will speak for the speechless, and take up the cause of the defenceless, those who are destitute.

As a unit, vv.1-9 raises an important question. Being a leader means some level of position and power. Will the Christian leader use it to indulge themselves, here the indulgence is women and wine (vv.3-7), or will they use their position and power to protect and benefit those they lead and serve, as in vv.8-9?

Speak out, judge righteously. This was especially important for a king like Lemuel, but applies to everyone. If a Christian has the opportunity to right a wrong or see that a wrong is punished, they should speak out and judge righteously. They are called to defend the rights of the poor and needy who have trouble properly defending themselves.

IX Proverbs 31:10-31 - Ode to a Capable Wife

This wisdom poem is an acrostic, in which each verse begins with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The poem begins and ends with mention of the woman's excellence. The probable intention of putting this together with the acrostic pattern is to show that this woman's character runs the whole range of excellence. The woman is married, as expected in that culture, and she is devoted to the well-being of her household to which she contributes by her participation in outside economic concerns. At the same time she makes her home the centre of ministry by giving generously to the poor and by instructing her children and household workers in true kindness; neighbours may also be included in this audience. So her husband and children enjoy their lot and honour her for her industry.

This lofty portrait of excellence sets such a high standard that it can be depressing to godly women today until its purpose is understood. First, the woman embodies in all areas of life the full character of wisdom commended throughout this book. This shows that even though the concrete situations up to now have generally envisioned a cast of males, the teaching of the entire book is intended for all of God's people. Second, as with other character types, this profile is an ideal: a particular example of full-scale virtue and wisdom

toward which the faithful are willing to be moulded. It is not expected that any one woman will look exactly like this in every respect.

¹⁰ A capable wife who can find?

She is far more precious than jewels.

Proverbs 31:10

In this last section of Chapter 31, Lemuel's mother spoke to him about the qualities of a capable or virtuous wife. The following verses speak of her character and activity, giving Lemuel an idea of the woman to search for, to prize and to value. This passage is traditionally understood as being addressed to women, but is more accurately spoken by a woman to a man so he could know the character and potential character of a good wife before marriage, and value and praise his wife for her virtuous character once married. It is primarily a search list for a man, and only secondarily a checklist for a woman. This passage:

- Describes the kind of wife the Christian man should pray for and seek after.
- Gives a guide, a goal for the Christian woman, showing the kind of character she can have as she fears and follows the Lord, guided by his Holy Spirit.
- Reminds the Christian man that he must walk in the fear and wisdom of God so that he will be worthy of and compatible with such a virtuous woman.

A capable wife who can find? She is called a capable, literally virtuous wife, not because only married women can have these qualities, but because this is marriage guidance from a mother to a son. The virtuous woman can be single or married, but each will have particular ways the virtue is expressed, either in their singleness or as family. This also reminds the reader that a good wife is from the Lord: <<*A good wife is the crown of her husband*>> (Proverbs 12:4a), <<*He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord*>> (Proverbs 18:22), and: <<*House and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord*>> (Proverbs 19:14).

Clarke explained, "She is a virtuous woman - a woman of power and strength. *Esheth chayil*, a strong or virtuous wife, full of mental energy."

The qualities of this capable wife as described in vv.11-31 are often mentioned in previous proverbs. As a whole, the proverbs have much to say about wisdom, diligent work ethic, wise business practices, honourable speech, compassion for the poor, and integrity; here those same qualities are explained in connection to a capable wife. Coming at the end of the collection of proverbs,

one might say that this is a strong woman - and her greatest strength is her wisdom, rooted in the fear of the Lord.

She is far more precious than jewels. The word for jewels is often associated with rubies. Precious gems like rubies are both valued and rare. In a sense, the complete profile of the 'Proverbs 31 Woman' is an ideal goal, much as the listing of the character of the godly man for leadership in both 1 Timothy Chapter 2 and Titus Chapter 1. It would be rare to find a woman who excels in every aspect of the list, so it should not be used to compare or judge either one's self or another woman. Rather, this character should reflect the values and aspiration of the woman who walks in the fear of the Lord and godly wisdom.

The woman described in the rest of the chapter is rare and valuable, but her value is greater than what she does as explained in the following verses. Her value should not be reduced to the performance of these qualities; she will be virtuous before she acts in a virtuous manner.

¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.

¹² She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.

Proverbs 31:11-12

The heart of her husband trusts in her. The capable wife not only has the trust of her husband, but it is safely given to her. Her character is trustworthy, filled with integrity. She will speak, act, and live with wisdom - and therefore God's blessing will be on their home, i.e. he will have no lack of gain. A foolish woman who cannot be trusted, takes some measure of blessing away from the home, and this is often seen financially or materially.

He will have no lack of gain. Some think a wife as a burden or hindrance to gain and a better life. This is not so in God's plan and with the presence and influence of a virtuous wife. She brings gain to her husband on many levels, and in great measure for he has no lack.

She does him good, and not harm. The diligence of the good wife (vv.13-19) is not for herself alone but also for her husband, her children and the entire household. Several previous proverbs explained the bad effect of a bad wife. The opposite is also true; a virtuous wife does her husband good and not evil, and she continues being a blessing all the days of her life. The sense is that her goodness and faithful character becomes deeper and greater through the passing years. Clarke added, "Her good is not capricious; it is constant and permanent, while she and her husband live."

- 13 She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.

Proverbs 31:13

She seeks wool and flax. Using wonderful poetic images, King Lemuel's mother described not the résumé of a godly woman, but life-like examples of the busy, hard working, and creative character of the virtuous wife. A woman who felt burdened to complete each of these tasks in a day, week, or even month would be exhausted and probably discouraged. Yet the character poetically described can be evident in a wise and godly woman's life in its own way. The flurry of activity described in these verses does not mean that she does all these things in a day or even a week, but it does point to how much work and how many different kinds of tasks are involved in wisely and properly managing a home. Women today can take comfort and confidence in God's recognition here of just how big their job is.

She works with willing hands. The capable woman knows how to seek and find things that are necessary resources for her family and home. She is not proud or haughty, and does not think that working with her hands is beneath her. She works in simple and practical ways for her family and home.

- 14 She is like the ships of the merchant,
she brings her food from far away.

Proverbs 31:14

She is like the ships of the merchant. The virtuous wife provides food for her family and home after the pattern of a merchant ship, which operates with regularity and effort. If required, she even rises while it is still night to either get or prepare food for her household (v.15).

Trading ships is a poetic analogy; she does not literally sail the seas. She goes out of her way to secure fine food for her family. Prudent shopping is a gift often found in capable women.

- 15 She rises while it is still night
and provides food for her household
and tasks for her servant-girls.

Proverbs 31:15

By providing for her household and her servant-girls before the day begins, the 'excellent wife' multiplies the effectiveness of her work, because her planning

enables everyone else in her household to be productive throughout the day. She does not lie in bed and wait for servants to attend to her.

- 16 She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

Proverbs 31:16

She is not confined to the home but is engaged in business. This verse demonstrates remarkable financial independence for a woman in the ancient world: she herself considers a field (indicating wise judgement) and buys it (indicating control of a substantial amount of money). Isaiah 5:2 describes all that was involved in planting a vineyard in ancient Israel and making it productive. It was a lot of work. However, it should also be considered that good management of the household budget is just as important as any business or work opportunities that bring revenue into the household.

Clarke noted, “She does not restrict herself to the bare necessities of life; she is able to procure some of its comforts. She plants a vineyard, that she may have wine for a beverage, for medicine, and for sacrifice. This also is procured of her own labour.”

- 17 She girds herself with strength,
and makes her arms strong.
- 18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.

Proverbs 31:17-18

She girds herself with strength. The capable wife is noted for her strength, and it is strength in action, i.e. her arms. She uses her strength for productive purposes. Clarke commented, “She takes care of her own health and strength, not only by means of useful labour, but by healthy exercise. She avoids what might enervate her body, or soften her mind - she is ever active, and girt ready for every necessary exercise. Her loins are firm, and her arms strong.”

She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Profitable indicates that she is able to realise economic gain from the diligence of her labour, which she uses to purchase a field (v.16) and provide for her household (v.15).

Her lamp does not go out at night. Verse 15 stated <<*She rises while it is still night*>>; if the verses are taken to a literal extreme, they would imply that she never sleeps at all! Surely that is not true, nor is it intended: <<*It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he*

gives sleep to his beloved>> (Psalm 127:2). Rather, this is an idealised picture of a woman who is diligent to complete her work both in the morning and in the evening.

¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.

Proverbs 31:19

A **distaff** is a staff with a fork at the end that holds flax or wool that has yet to be spun, from which thread is drawn when a person is spinning thread or yarn on a spinning wheel.

A **spindle** is a rod with tapered ends on which thread is wound once it has been spun by hand. The point of this and several other verses is the remarkable range of manual, commercial, administrative, and interpersonal skills at which this woman demonstrates excellence.

The capable wife knows how to use the tools and technology available to manage the home well. Clarke explained, “The spindle and distaff are the most ancient of all the instruments used for spinning, or making thread. The spinning-wheel superseded them in these countries; but still they were in considerable use till spinning machinery superseded both them and the spinning-wheels in general.”

²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor,
and reaches out her hands to the needy.

Proverbs 31:20

She opens her hand to the poor. The capable wife is much more than a skilful manager or homemaker; she is also a woman of great compassion. She cares for and helps both the poor and the needy, doing more than throwing money to them, but she actually draws near to them and extends her hand and reaches out to those in need. Active concern for the poor is a cardinal virtue of all wisdom literature: <<*When the ear heard, it commended me, and when the eye saw, it approved; because I delivered the poor who cried, and the orphan who had no helper. The blessing of the wretched came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy*>> (Job 29:11-13), and: <<*Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble*>> (Psalm 41:1).

This concern for the poor is reflected in the work of the apostles, for example: <<*On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to*

the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do>> (Galatians 2:7-10).

²¹ She is not afraid for her household when it snows,
for all her household are clothed in crimson.

Proverbs 31:21

She is not afraid for her household when it snows. Her careful preparation of necessary clothing in advance means that she is not afraid of sudden changes in weather, for they will not catch her unprepared.

²² She makes herself coverings;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.

Proverbs 31:22

Fine linen and purple indicates clothing of beauty and considerable expense, appropriate visual indications of the excellence of her work and character. Such clothing was offered to Daniel by King Belshazzar: <<*But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you are able to read the writing and tell me its interpretation, you shall be clothed in purple, have a chain of gold around your neck, and rank third in the kingdom*>> (Daniel 5:16). Daniel interpreted the writing but declined the gift!

Some wonder why scarlet clothing would be connected to the fact that she is not afraid of snow for her household. It has been suggested that the scarlet colour of the clothing makes her children easy to find in heavy snow, but given the relatively light snowfall in that part of the world, this is unlikely. It is possible that this does not describe a colour, but doubly thick garments. Derek Kidner commented, “The word has a plural ending, which is abnormal for ‘scarlet’; so that both form and sense arouse suspicion. The consonants allow the reading double (AV margin), i.e. double thickness, which is supported by Vulgate and LXX.” Clarke added, “But *shanim*, from *shanah*, to iterate, to double, signifies not only scarlet, so called from being twice or doubly dyed, but also double garments, not only the ordinary coat but the *surtout* or great-coat also, or a cloak to cover all. But most probably double garments, or twofold to what they were accustomed to wear, are here intended.”

- 23 Her husband is known in the city gates,
taking his seat among the elders of the land.

Proverbs 31:23

Her husband is known in the city gates. The gates were the centre of civic and economic life in an Israelite city, where the leading men gathered: <<*No sooner had Boaz gone up to the gate and sat down there than the next-of-kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came passing by. So Boaz said, ‘Come over, friend; sit down here.’ And he went over and sat down. Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, ‘Sit down here’; so they sat down*>> (Ruth 4:1-2). The wife’s excellent work and noble character have contributed significantly to her husband’s success and reputation when he sits among the elders of the land.

Clarke commented, “She is a loving wife, and feels for the respectability and honour of her husband. He is respected not only on account of the neatness and cleanliness of his person and dress, but because he is the husband of a woman who is justly held in universal esteem. And her complete management of household affairs gives him full leisure to devote himself to the civil interests of the community.”

- 24 She makes linen garments and sells them;
she supplies the merchant with sashes.

Proverbs 31:24

She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes. Making linen garments and sashes, which she sells to the merchant, indicates skill in creating clothing of beauty and value. Such activity exemplifies a high degree of entrepreneurial skill and responsibility in making financial decisions and undertaking commercial activity.

- 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.

Proverbs 31:25

Strength and dignity are her clothing. The fact that she is willing to distribute and sell linen garments she makes and has shows that her first priority is not in what is in her closet or what she wears. She cares even more about the display of her character than the outward display of her clothing: <<*Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair, and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God’s sight*>>

(1 Peter 3:3-4). When it comes to character, she is one of the best dressed, clothed with strength and honour, so that she shall rejoice not only in the present day, but also in time to come.

Strength and dignity are so much a part of her character and conduct that they seem to be almost like her clothing.

She laughs at the future, in contrast with being worried or fearful about it. This is something that Jesus would teach many generations later: <<*Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today*>> (Matthew 6:31-34).

²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Proverbs 31:26

She opens her mouth with wisdom. Although Proverbs has often used men as concrete examples of wisdom, the proverbs apply equally well to women, and the wisdom that God teaches in Proverbs can be well understood by both men and women; refer to the comment made on Proverbs 1:8.

On the teaching of kindness is on her tongue Clarke explained, "This is the most distinguishing excellence of this woman. There are very few of those who are called managing women who are not lords over their husbands, tyrants over their servants, and insolent among their neighbours. But this woman, with all her eminence and excellence, was of a meek and quiet spirit. Blessed woman!"

²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Proverbs 31:27

She looks well to the ways of her household focuses on this woman's diligence in caring for her home and her children and servants. Her rejection of idleness embodies one of the chief virtues of Proverbs.

²⁸ Her children rise up and call her happy;
her husband too, and he praises her:

²⁹ 'Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all.'

Proverbs 31:28-29

Her children rise up and call her happy. A woman of such character and wisdom rightfully receives the blessings and praises of her family. Both her children and her husband not only see, but also speak of the blessedness of the woman who brings such blessing to their household. This is not only a description of the virtuous wife, but also an exhortation to children and a husband to bless and praise the mother and wife of godly character.

Happy or, more commonly **blessed**, translates the Hebrew word *esher* meaning also contentment. The truly happy person is happy because God showers him with favour and blessing. Jesus uses the Greek equivalent in Matthew 5:3-11; as confirmed by: <<***Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him***>> (James 1:12). The Latin translation, *beatus*, is the source of the word beatitude.

In a loving family, the members recognise the value of each other. Here the children and husband offer their praise. Verse 29 gives the words of the husband, or perhaps of both husband and children.

Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all. These are the words of the husband as he praises his wife, with words that encourage, reward, and nourish her. In a completely literal sense, this could only be true of one woman in any given community at any given time. Yet, the sense of this can be perfectly understood. Every home can have a wife and mother that does excel them all; every husband can legitimately feel “I’ve got the best wife” and children feel, “We have the best mum.”

In his remarks on this verse, Adam Clarke thought of a woman who perhaps truly did excel them all - Susanna Wesley. “But high as the character of this Jewish matron stands in the preceding description, I can say that I have met at least her equal, in a daughter of the Rev. Dr. Samuel Annesly, the wife of Samuel Wesley, sen., rector of Epworth in Lincolnshire, and mother of the late extraordinary brothers, John and Charles Wesley. I am constrained to add this testimony, after having traced her from her birth to her death, through all the relations that a woman can bear upon earth. Her Christianity gave to her virtues and excellences a heightening, which the Jewish matron could not possess. Besides, she was a woman of great learning and information, and of a depth of mind, and reach of thought, seldom to be found among the daughters of Eve, and not often among the sons of Adam.”

³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Proverbs 31:30

The mention of a woman who fears the Lord at the end of this long list of excellent qualities brings back the theme of the Book of Proverbs stated in 1:7; refer to the comment made there. It reminds readers that this woman excels in her fear of the Lord, and therefore that she is a model of the character traits and wisdom taught throughout the book's 31 chapters. The appearance of this woman's fear of the Lord at the end of this list is also a reminder that this quality is more important than even great skill and talent, and is foundational to the wise and right use of all activities and skills. A godly woman may well have outward charm and beauty, but these are of secondary importance to her godliness.

³¹ Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Proverbs 31:31

Give her a share in the fruit of her hands means that she should be given some personal reward for her excellent work. This capable woman will be rewarded by the God she fears, and rewarded by what she has accomplished for her family and herself, as they publically speak of her godliness and wisdom, i.e. let her works praise her in the city gates. For the woman (and man) of wisdom, this reward is not their primary motivation, but the fitting result of their life lived in fear of the Lord. This is what Jesus also teaches: *<<Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also>>* (Matthew 6:19-21).

Let her works praise her. The excellent character and work of such a woman calls for public honour. Although it is the husband, and not the excellent wife, who sits among the elders (v.23), the wife's works are known and appreciated in the city gates, and therefore throughout the town.

This excellent tribute to the godly woman concludes the Book of Proverbs.