

# Who needs special government attention? (31:4-9)

**“It is not for kings, O Lemuel. It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink. Lest they drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his troubles no more. Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy.”**

## THE TEXT (NASB)

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*It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. KJV - Proverbs 31:4*

## INTRODUCTION



A position of power and privilege brings extra responsibilities.

Those who govern must be careful to avoid abuse of power through self-indulgence. Instead, they need to help the poor.

Some people's only escape from **poverty** is the bottle or some other mind altering substance. It's the start of a vicious circle. On the other hand the strong and wealthy must learn to serve and protect.



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## COMMENTARY

By definition, those in leadership affect the lives of many others. Hence leaders must live by a higher standard and avoid common personal pitfalls including the abuse of drugs and alcohol.

### Avoid Despair and Escapism



The text does not condone substance abuse. It acknowledges the plight of the **perishing**. It recognizes the temporary relief derived from drunkenness but warns the aspiring king, Lemuel, about liquor. Sadly, those who are poor often look for comfort in a bottle; they **drink and forget**. They escape from the real world only to return in a worse condition. The misuse of alcohol spans the globe, yet is worse in some nations than in others. Since I was born in a communist country I have always had a special interest in communist states. One of the most amazing stories ever written (despite the efforts of Russian authorities to discredit it) is *The Persecutor* by Sergi Kourdakov. He describes the hopelessness in the Soviet Union among the young people and their reliance on vodka for relief. The following quote is taken from the end of Chapter 13:

Vodka is the curse of Russia. It's everywhere. We naval cadets were paid seven rubles at the end of each month and after payday we promptly headed for town and spent our money on two bottles of vodka.... The [communist] party blames vodka as the greatest cause for low production in industry... The steady flurry of directives coming from Moscow to warn us of the problem of alcoholism showed me the great menace it was in the Soviet Union. It was the number one problem of Soviet youth.

### Translation: *afflicted*

The Hebrew word for **afflicted** is translated as *poor* in the KJV and is very similar to the word translated as poor by the NASB in Proverbs 14:21. The poor and **needy** are vulnerable; they are the ones who require extra help. The destitute who crave food, clothing and shelter are the ones who need the king's attention. Perhaps the most vulnerable in any jurisdiction are the unborn babies prior to an abortion.

### Good Authorities Serve and Protect



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Those who are healthy and strong need to keep alert and that includes avoiding substance abuse in order to benefit others. The text commands the following:

- **Open your mouth:** Speak up on their behalf.
- Open your mouth: Repeated for emphasis.
- **Judge righteously** - this needs data collection, investigation and wisdom prior to making an accurate and appropriate decision.
- **Defend the rights** - this requires action and may require force against an aggressor.

## Personal Pleasures or Human Rights

As long as there are evil aggressors, human rights will need to be defended. The downtrodden need champions. Only those who have both power and resources are strong enough to help. Governing authorities must refrain from the pursuit of personal pleasures and discipline themselves to benefit others. A close examination of Proverbs 29:14 underscores this point.

## OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus was the all-time greatest champion of the poor, the afflicted, and the needy.

Yet when Jesus was about to enter His time of greatest personal physical and emotional agony He refused drugs and pain-killers (Mark 15:23). Jesus understood and endured excruciating torment. He is fully qualified to judge every individual on their own use/abuse of personal privilege or position.

Jesus said that on the day of judgement “more” would be expected from those who had been entrusted with “more,” (Luke 12:48).

## APPLICATION



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- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
  - Rather than promoting prohibition, bring justice to those in need.
  - First help those who want help and are willing to accept it.
  - Don't abuse your power in any official position for personal gratification.
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Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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## KEY WORDS

justice, poverty, dignity, government, authority, self-control, social assistance

## ILLUSTRATION

### Who is Prudent Pauline?



Prudent Pauline is a planner. She looks before she leaps, she thinks before she speaks. Her favourite mottos are: “Haste makes waste,” “brains over brawn,” and “don’t jump to conclusions.”

When Pauline first heard that famous maxim: “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step,” she said NO! It begins with a good map. The map must be studied and the best route plotted. Consider road conditions, terrain, rest stops, refuelling, hostile territory, expected weather, travelling companions, clothing, supplies, and many more factors, including (if necessary) a guide.

She has studied the wisdom of Solomon and even helped teach him a thing or two. Solomon wrote these words about 3,000 years ago in honour of Prudent Pauline. “Whatever your hand finds to do (no matter what you are doing) do it with all your might (give it your full ability and energy) for there is no activity or planning or wisdom after you die—it will be too late.” Pauline says, “First comes wisdom, then comes planning (her favourite activity), and then comes activity.”

Pauline makes the time to do tax planning. She does a work plan every day. She uses a day timer or planner to assign priorities to her activities. She and Diligent Daniel are an incredible



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pair. Pauline does all her homework before she starts an activity.

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