

Proverbs 31:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine;
nor for princes strong drink:

Analysis

It is 'not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink.' The Hebrew 'yayin' (wine) and 'shekar' (strong drink/beer) should be avoided by rulers. Alcohol impairs judgment, making it particularly dangerous for those making important decisions. Reformed theology doesn't necessarily mandate total abstinence but warns against alcohol's dangers, especially for leaders. Clear thinking is essential for godly governance. This principle applies to all intoxicants and anything that clouds judgment or creates addiction.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern kings often drank heavily, leading to poor decisions and moral failures. Biblical examples include Noah (Genesis 9:21), Lot (Genesis 19:32-35), and Belshazzar (Daniel 5). God's wisdom protected kings from this trap.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Do you avoid substances or habits that impair your judgment and effectiveness?
2. How does responsibility increase the need for sobriety and clear thinking?
3. What 'strong drink' (literal or metaphorical) threatens to compromise your calling?

Interlinear Text

אַל	לְמַלְכִּים	אַל	לְמוֹאָל	אַל	לְמַלְכִּים	שָׁתוֹ	לְמַלְכִּים	שָׁתוֹ
H408	It is not for kings	H408	O Lemuel	H408	It is not for kings	H408	to drink	wine
	H4428		H3927		H4428		H8354	H3196
שָׁכֶר:	אַיִלְךָ יְמִין	שָׁכֶר:	אַיִלְךָ יְמִין	שָׁכֶר:	אַיִלְךָ יְמִין	שָׁכֶר:	אַיִלְךָ יְמִין	שָׁכֶר:
princes	H176	strong drink	H176	strong drink	H176	strong drink	H176	strong drink
H7336		H7941		H7941		H7941		H7941

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 20:1 (Parallel theme): Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Isaiah 5:22 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink:

Ecclesiastes 10:17 (Kingdom): Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!

Habakkuk 2:5 (Parallel theme): Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

Esther 3:15 (Kingdom): The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

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