

Proverbs 31:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.

Analysis

Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish—The Hebrew shekar (שֶׁכָּר, strong drink) refers to fermented beverages beyond wine. King Lemuel's mother instructs that intoxicants have legitimate medicinal use for those in extremis—**ready to perish** (אֵדָה, 'oved, perishing/dying). This is not license for rulers (v. 4-5) but compassionate palliative care for the terminally ill or those facing execution.

Ancient Near Eastern medicine used alcohol as anesthetic and comfort for the dying. This verse anticipates the mercy shown to Christ on the cross when offered wine mingled with myrrh (Mark 15:23), which He initially refused to maintain full consciousness during His atoning work. The principle: alcohol may dull suffering when no hope of recovery remains.

Historical Context

Written as royal instruction (probably Solomon recording his mother Bathsheba's wisdom), this reflects ancient medical practice where strong drink served as pain relief before modern anesthetics. Wine mixed with gall or myrrh was given to crucifixion victims to ease agony.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does this verse inform a biblical approach to end-of-life palliative care and pain management?
2. What is the distinction between medicinal use of alcohol for the dying versus recreational use forbidden to rulers (v. 4-5)?
3. How does Christ's refusal of drugged wine (Mark 15:23) demonstrate His willingness to fully experience our suffering?

Interlinear Text

תִּנוּ	שֵׁכָר	לְאוֹבֵד	וַיֵּין
Give	strong drink	unto him that is ready to perish	and wine
H5414	H7941	H6	H3196
	לְהָרִי	נַפְשׁ:	
	unto those that be of heavy	hearts	
	H4751	H5315	

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 5:23 (Parallel theme): Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Psalms 104:15 (Parallel theme): And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.