

Explore the Bible: August 2

by Laura Leathers

Staying Sober • Proverbs 23:17-21, 29-35



Leathers

"State sees 'unprecedented' alcohol demand; sales up at Meridian stores," was the headline on the Meridian Star website article published on July 15, 2020. The following is a snippet from reporter Erin Kelly: "Mississippi Alcoholic Beverage Control is reporting record liquor sales and a struggle by suppliers to maintain inventory nationwide... compared to the same period of the prior year for an increase of 29%."

COVID-19 has contributed to the record sales of alcohol across the nation. One reason is the closure of establishments where alcoholic beverages are served. Another factor is the stress created by the pandemic. Today's lesson will help us understand the reasons why anyone should not engage in intoxicating drinks.

The Promise (Prov. 23:17-18). Like a hammer hitting a nail, Solomon once again drives home the necessity of fearing the Lord. With this mindset at the core of an individual's belief system, there is continual and zealous awe and reverence for God. Furthermore, He has promised us His presence, and He assures us of the blessed hope. He fulfills His promises!

The Petition (Prov. 23:19-21). Solomon's counsel throughout

the book of Proverbs speaks practically to a wide range of issues. His writings stress relationships with God and humanity. Solomon's petition to his son is to listen, be wise, and choose the right path (v. 19). The referral to "direct your heart" references the thinking process. A mind seeking and filled with the Word of God should lend to making the right choices. An individual's reasoning and justification for doing something should first be weighed by what the Word of God teaches.

In the next verse, he combines and addresses two issues: being a drunkard and gluttony. The petition is not to be among either group. Both will lead to poverty of body and soul. Because of present world events and people choosing not to trust God, alcohol and food continue to be used as numbing agents to deal with the difficulties of life. Following the advice of wisdom means there is disassociation from drinking and eating insensibly. If available, be sure to read the student lesson book and note the additional warnings against gluttony and alcohol on page 86.

The Portrait (Prov. 23:29-32). Solomon asks, "Who has woe, sorrow, strife, complaints, needless bruises, and bloodshot eyes?" The reply, "those who linger over wine" (v. 30). Now notice the picture: the wine is red and sparkles in the cup. It is appealing, inviting, and goes down smoothly – but then the picture suddenly changes.

Have you ever been bitten by a snake? In the end, alcohol bites and stings. In verse 32, Solomon is referencing a hangover and its destructive consequences. "The consequences of alcohol abuse are many and varied: the loss of reason, abusive and belligerent behavior, and even the open demonstration of the physical signs of alcohol abuse. Alcohol over-promises and under-delivers (LifeWay, pg. 88)."

The Problem (Prov. 23:33-35). Outlined in this passage are the effects of alcohol use and the potential abuse. Notice the

descriptive phrases: seeing strange things, the heart uttering perverse things, being struck, and being beaten. Then when the individual awakes ("I must have another drink," v. 35b), the vicious cycle repeats. Annually, people spend billions of dollars seeking help for individuals dealing with the destructive influence of alcohol.

The Gospel should permeate every area of our lives. Believers aren't under the law, but rather His grace. Our freedom is in Christ (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). It's out of our love for Him that we seek others' good, not wanting them to stumble. The ultimate goal is to glorify God in everything. Tomorrow's headline should read, "Sharp decline in liquor sales, because of the transforming power of Jesus Christ!"

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.