

The Proverbs

Lesson 33

Proverbs 30

INTRODUCTION OF THE PERSONALITIES

Proverbs 30:1a The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle. **1b** The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal:

The identities of Agur, Jakeh, Ithiel and Ucal are unknown. Some commentators argue that Agur is another name for Solomon and Jakeh is another name for David, but this is pure speculation. However, the Hebrew names have meanings that may be more important to the proverb and the English version hides those thoughts. Agur means to collect, Jakeh means to vomit. Therefore, the Latin Vulgate translates in English as, “The words of the collector the son of the vomiter.” Solomon could have been considered a collector with all his wives as an example, but David was definitely not a vomiter. Furthermore, none of the original Hebrew phrases and wordings found in this chapter match any passage found in the previous 29 chapters or Solomon’s books called Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. The most logical position to adopt when considering the identities of Agur, Jakeh, Ithiel and Ucal is that they were real men whom we know nothing about except that they were probably in the service of Hezekiah. Agur was the son of Jakeh and the student of Ithiel and Ucal as will be revealed within the chapter.

Additionally, the content of this chapter is not constructed like proverbs. Verse 1 indicates that this chapter is meant to be an oracle. An oracle is a Divine communication directly from the LORD to the Jewish nation through a prophet, priest, king or, as in Proverbs Chapter 31, a mother. Oracles occurred in different ways. The LORD spoke directly to Abraham, Moses and most of the prophets. Sometimes the prophets received the oracles through dreams or visions. At other times, as with Gideon, the oracle came through signs. The strangest and most mysterious to modern Bible students is the Old Testament Hebrew use of the Urim and Thummin, a breastplate with colored gemstones that the High Priest wore around his neck while in service in the Temple. Therefore, this chapter is an oracle divinely delivered to Agur in some fashion and is recorded as a word from the LORD. As we will see, the purpose of this oracle is to expose the evil of man for what it is and exalt the LORD God above all others.

HUMILITY OF THE FAITHFUL MAN

Proverbs 30:1b The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: ²surely I am more stupid than any man, and I do not have the understanding of a man. ³Neither have I learned wisdom, nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. ⁴Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His

garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!

“The man” in Hebrew actually says, “The faithful man.” Therefore, it is the faithful man who is declaring this oracle to Ithiel and Ucal. He is faithful and yet he admits his miniscule knowledge about the Holy One. He admits that he does not have the knowledge of the common man. This could mean that Agur was unlearned and yet being used by the LORD in the same way that Amos, the ignorant prophet was used by Him. But with Agur’s questions that follow his acknowledgment of the lack of his understanding, it is quite possible that he is simply confessing that his knowledge in no way compares to the LORD’s and actually shows his godly brilliance. The fool says there is no God, yet, the wise acknowledge his lowly position before the true and living God.

Agur’s first question is “Who has ascended into heaven and descended?” No human has ever ascended into heaven and then returned to earth. The LORD did a greater thing when He descended to earth and then ascended back into heaven.

The second question is “Who has gathered the wind in His fists?” It is impossible for a human to gather the winds in his fists. Only the LORD has this ability.

The third question is “Who has wrapped the waters in His garment?” What human has a garment large enough to hold all the waters of the earth in one place? Once again, it is only the LORD.

The fourth question is “Who has established all the ends of the earth?” Did any human make the earth and the heavens? Surely not! They are a creation of the LORD alone.

The fifth question is “What is His name or His son's name? Surely you know!” Agur asks, “What is the name of the Person Who ascends and descends from heaven to earth, Who holds the winds in His fists, Who holds the waters in His garment and created the ends of the earth?” Do Agur’s questions leave any doubt that the LORD God, the Holy One, is the only One Who fills this bill?

RECOGNITION OF THE WORD OF GOD

Proverbs 30:5 Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. ⁶
Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.

Agur argues that the proof of God is found in the “word of God”. The original actually says, “Every oracle of God is purified.” His Word has been purified in the fire and found to be without error. The pure gold of the Word of God can be melted down and when it cools off, it is still pure gold with the same flawless integrity, luster and weight.

Within the Word of God, Agur finds the promise, “He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.” God will defend everyone who belongs to Him. God will defend everyone who trusts in His Word; however, Agur give a warning, “Do not add to His words lest He reprove you, and you be proved a liar.” Nothing should be read into the Word of God that is not there! Nothing should be added; nothing should be taken away. For example, in Genesis 18:21 we discover that the angels are going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because their sin is exceedingly great. It is a single sin, not a conglomerate of sins. In Genesis 18 we do not know what that sin is but it is one specific sin for which the towns will be destroyed. In Genesis 19:5-8 the sin is revealed.

Genesis 19:⁴ Before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, surrounded the house, both young and old, all the people from every quarter; ⁵and they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have relations with them.” ⁶ But Lot went out to them at the doorway, and shut the door behind him, ⁷and said, “Please, my brothers, do not act wickedly. ⁸” Now behold, I have two daughters who have not had relations with man; please let me bring them out to you, and do to them whatever you like; only do nothing to these men, inasmuch as they have come under the shelter of my roof.”

The men and boys, young and old, demand that the men be given to them so they can have relations with them. Their crime is the deepest disgrace to human nature under God’s heaven. The males did not want female flesh, they wanted male flesh. The NASB word “relations” is “intercourse” in the Hebrew. Men with men, boys with men, boys with boys in sexual intercourse is sodomy, named after one of the towns destroyed for this sin. The town was not destroyed for sins in general, it was only for sodomy. Peter says, **2 Peter 2:**⁶ “and He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing *them* to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter.” People who want to live a religious life and participate in sodomy add to the Scripture by saying the cities were destroyed because of the general sins of the people, but that is not the plain sense of the passage. The people of the town did not have a Bible to use to direct them and they were still destroyed because of this disgraceful sin. We are without excuse. We have the Word of God that explains the depth of depravation in God’s eyes for those who practice sodomy. Do sodomites ever have a chance with God? Absolutely! Jesus addressed that directly when He was addressing the people in Capernaum.

Matthew 11:²³ And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

Peter’s home in Capernaum was Jesus’ headquarters when He was in Galilee. Most of the Galilean miracles occurred in or near Capernaum and yet very few of the citizens of the city believed in Jesus as LORD. They had seen His miracles, they had eaten His food at the feeding

of the 5,000, they had watched Him heal the blind and raise the dead, yet the acts were not enough for them to truly believe in Him as a personal LORD. Had the city of Sodom seen His miracles, they would have repented, turned from sodomy, and the city would not have been destroyed! Sodomites can turn from their wicked ways and the LORD will forgive, redeem and receive them into His family.

TWO REQUEST OF THE FAITHFUL MAN

Proverbs 30:7 Two things I asked of Thee, do not refuse me before I die: ⁸ Keep deception and lies far from me, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion, ⁹ lest I be full and deny *Thee* and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be in want and steal, and profane the name of my God.

Agur addresses the LORD and asks for two things before he dies. He wants the LORD to address two areas of weakness in Agur's life. In short, Agur asks for protection from deception and lies and protection from poverty and wealth in his life. He desires that the LORD answer his requests now so he may live the rest of this life under their protection. He does not want too much, only enough to take care of his daily needs. He does not want to put on false appearances or tell falsehoods. He does not want to be so wealthy that he is tempted to think that he does need God, yet, he wants enough for his needs. He does not want to be so poor that he covets that of others; he does not want to have so much that he is enthralled with luxurious living and thinks nothing of God.

FIVE GRAND EVILS OF HUMANITY

Proverbs 30:10 Do not slander a slave to his master, lest he curse you and you be found guilty.

This verse introduces the subject of verses 10 through 14 and the topic is the five grand evils found in humanity. First is the slanderer who maliciously attempts to harm someone with words. In this passage, the slanderer attempts to harm the slave in the eyes of his master. The outcome of such an attack can be successful or disastrous for the slanderer. If the slave is new and untested by the master, the slanderer may be successful in his attempt. But if the master has known the slave for many years, given the slave life and liberty to live with his family in peace under the master's care, then the master knows the true character of the slave and recognizes the intent of the slanderer immediately. In such cases, the master will defend his slave and curse the slanderer. Slandering is the first of the grand evils among men.

Proverbs 30:11 There is a kind of *man* who curses his father, and does not bless his mother.

The second grand evil of the world is the person who fails to honor his father and bless his mother. Even adult children are to bring honor and blessing to their parents by the way they live their lives, conduct business in the world, treat other people and love one another. Even if the father and mother are murdering thieves, their child should not continue in the family ways but should set himself apart as a good and righteous person and therefore bring honor and blessing to

his parents who do not deserve such but are bestowed with these blessings because it pleases the LORD God. An evil person may continue to beget evil in his own life but his offspring can make a choice to be a person of good. The cycle can be stopped in one generation; the cycle can be changed by one godly decision.

Proverbs 30:12 There is a kind who is pure in his own eyes, yet is not washed from his filthiness.

Self-righteousness is a sickness as well as a sin. Self-righteousness is the third grand evil in this world. Such a person will put himself above God. Such a person thinks himself to be holy, yet his heart is full of sin which he practices in secret. Such were those people of the 1920's who outwardly supported prohibition, attended church regularly, raided the liquor production businesses yet demanded a drink from the host at the Saturday night party; they were pure and holy publicly but filthy privately.

Proverbs 30:13 There is a kind-- oh how lofty are his eyes! And his eyelids are raised *in arrogance*.

The fourth grand evil is found in the person who is full of pride and vanity looking down on others who do not meet their standards or possess their status. They are haughty and the LORD despises such people. They are conceited and condescending to those who do not meet their expectation of the right walk, talk and life.

Proverbs 30: 14 There is a kind of *man* whose teeth are *like* swords, and his jaw teeth *like* knives, To devour the afflicted from the earth, and the needy from among men.

The fifth grand evil is a man who is cruel, oppressive and greedy toward those who are already struggling to provide for their family with the basics of life.

Proverbs 30:15a The leech has two daughters, "Give," "Give."

Any person who lives a life consumed with one of the five grand evil sins is like a leech. The Hebrew word for "leech" is better translated "blood-sucker". Such a person with any of the five grand evils will be self-centered with no regard for others. "Give," "Give" is their motto and it does not mean that they are givers; it means that they expect to be given to even when others are in greater need. They care for only themselves. The more they slander a slave and get away with it, the more they are fueled to slander more slaves; the more they curse their parents, the deeper and broader that cursing becomes; the more they exalt themselves as the standard while wallowing in the filth, the filthier they become; the more arrogance they exude, the more arrogance they crave; the more they prey on the poor for their own benefit, the more schemes they dream up to prey on the poor. Each is like the leech that sucks the blood of the innocent to

whom it has become attached; each draw of blood leads to another and another as long as the blood will flow.

FOUR THINGS THAT CANNOT BE SATISFIED

Proverbs 30:15b There are three things that will not be satisfied, four that will not say, "Enough": ¹⁶ Sheol, and the barren womb, earth that is never satisfied with water, and fire that never says, "Enough." ¹⁷ The eye that mocks a father, and scorns a mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it.

The wording in the beginning of this passage is better understood if read, "There are three things that will not be satisfied, *and a fourth* that will not say, "Enough". The four things are characterized as being able to desire more. For instance, the grave (Sheol) constantly longs for more dead, the empty womb incessantly aches to give birth and the vegetation of the earth continuously yearns for water. The fourth cannot say, "Enough." Fire relentlessly craves to consume and reaches out for another piece of combustible material. The grave and fire destroy life, the womb and earth give life. All four are greedy, wanting more for themselves.

Disrespectful children are just as greedy as the four examples just given. They often desire more from their fathers and mothers than they can give and therefore they mock and scorn them. Here is the beginning of the grand evil ways of children doomed for eternal damnation. They bring no honor to their parents, no gifts to the needy, no worship of the LORD. In Hezekiah's day, when such a person died, he was not buried but cast into the valley of Hinnom where the birds would pluck out the still tender eyes first and the eagles would eat the remains.

FOUR THINGS THAT CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD

Proverbs 30:18 There are three things which are too wonderful for me, four which I do not understand: ¹⁹ The way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the middle of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid. ²⁰ This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth, and says, "I have done no wrong."

For clarity, the wording in the first sentence of this passage should read, "There are three things which are too wonderful for me, *and a fourth* which I do not understand." Even though we are taught in science the means by which the first three move, the wonder of their travel is still difficult to comprehend when viewed. We understand how an eagle flies, but that does not diminish its majesty. We marvel at how a snake moves on the ground with no limbs, yet we are enamored by the phenomenon. We see how a monstrous ship of steel floats on the water and, at the same time, we wonder why such weight does not sink. The fourth has to do with life. We are amazed how a man and a woman can marry and bring forth life but still we are astonished when the child arrives. We think we know how these things work yet we cannot replicate what the LORD has created.

In contrast to all the good that has been stated in the four things, Agur takes the last and turns it around from the good and perfect union of a man with a wife to an immoral woman and her life style with men. He says, "She eats and wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done no wrong.'" Everything she has just done is wrong. First, she is an adulteress because she is a married woman having sexual relationship with a man who is not her husband. Second, she devours the man like a meal and then confesses that there is nothing wrong with what she has just done. Nothing is majestic and awesome about this act; it is one of the most disgraceful acts committed by humans.

FOUR THINGS THAT SHOULD BE FEARED

Proverbs 30:21 Under three things the earth quakes, and under four, it cannot bear up: ²² under a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is satisfied with food, ²³ under an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she supplants her mistress.

Agur uses hyperbole in the first sentence of this passage. The earth does not mean the physical earth but refers to humans and how they tremble at the first three things mentioned in this passage. When an untested and unprepared slave becomes king, history proves that the people should tremble. When the fool is completely satisfied with a full stomach and that is all he cares about, the people should tremble. When an unloved woman is married and she knows the husband does not love her, grief comes to the marriage and the people should tremble. The first three only cause trembling but the fourth should break the hearts of the people and that is when a servant woman ousts her master's wife and takes her place. It is not her place to be his wife.

FOUR THINGS THAT ARE SMALL BUT WISE

Proverbs 30:24 Four things are small on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: ²⁵ The ants are not a strong folk, but they prepare their food in the summer; ²⁶ The badgers are not mighty folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks; ²⁷ the locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks; ²⁸ the lizard you may grasp with the hands, yet it is in kings' palaces.

It is interesting that Agur includes these four small animals in this passage but he does it to prove that they are often wiser than man because they faithfully follow their God-given instincts. The ant is the smallest of the four. It survives because it is wise enough to store food all summer long in preparation for the fall, winter and spring when food becomes plentiful again. ⁶⁴ The ant is wise because he takes care of the business of life in a proper way in the proper time.

⁶⁴ In Proverbs 6:6, Solomon directs Rehoboam to learn a wise lesson from the ant. It is quite possible that Solomon learned this concept from the Book of Job which was available to him. Job says, "but now ask the beasts, and let them teach you; and the birds of the heavens, and let them tell you." In other words, animals take care of their daily business. The ant knows what needs to be done to survive every day. When he does his part, it helps the colony. In the ant world, no one co-signs for another ant to borrow anything. Every ant does his business without training,

The badger dwells in the clefts of the rocks in Israel and are about the size of our rabbits. This animal has no way to protect itself from other animals so it uses its wisdom to hide and live in the cracks. Without a rock fortress, the birds of prey would bring extinction to their kind.

The locust has no apparent leader yet he flies and works with other locusts in a seemingly exact formation sometimes stretching for miles across the skies and fields.

The lizard lives where he wishes in and around the homes of the poor and the wealthy. Even in the palaces of the kings, the lizard roams as he pleases.

FOUR THINGS THAT ARE LARGE BUT STATELY

Proverbs 30:29 There are three things which are stately in *their* march, even four which are stately when they walk: ³⁰ the lion *which* is mighty among beasts and does not retreat before any, ³¹ the strutting cock, the male goat also, and a king *when his* army is with him.

Moving from the four small creatures, Agur addresses three more large animals and a king. The lion roams the land with confidence and all other animals retreat instinctively.

The NASB addresses the next animal as the rooster; the exact translation is not known. Some commentators of old recognize this animal as a greyhound because the Hebrew means “girded in the loins” and the rooster does not fit that description in physical design. The greyhounds in the east are well known and what other animal skims across the land with such grace in full chase?

The goat in this case is the male goat that leads the flock. He is the natural leader of the flock that all the rest of his kind follow. He has earned this position through fierce battle with all male competitors and from time to time, he is challenged again. Even the novice can identify him by the way he stands, walks and assumes his position in the flock.

The king is just a man like all others except when he is surrounded by his court and his army. As a young king he struts around with all his men, scurrying to keep up and provide for his every request; he is easy to identify as the king. As an old king, all movements and actions are much slower, yet there is no doubt who is king because of all the pampering that is taking place.

without instruction and without borrowing. The ant is a remarkable creature. It gathers its food in the proper season, at the proper time, in the proper amount for his own consumption. What a wonderful example for Rehoboam and the friend for whom he co-signed!

A FINAL WARNING TO THE EVIL PERSON

Proverbs 30:32 If you have been foolish in exalting yourself or if you have plotted *evil*, *put your hand on your mouth*. ³³ For the churning of milk produces butter, and pressing the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of anger produces strife.

Honestly, who in this life has not exalted himself and plotted evil against someone? The issue is not the act itself but the habitual unrepentant nature. Agur expressed in the beginning of this chapter that he was not God or capable of knowing all the things of God. He knew that he needed God and asked for two things in his life. He recognized the five grand evils of humanity that cannot be satisfied and yet he sees how animals created by the LORD God live and operate the way they were designed. He acknowledges that evil abounds in the world and should be feared. Here, he asks if we are part of the evil in the world.

If this oracle from the LORD through Agur has illuminated the sin in your life, “*put your hand on your mouth*.” Universally, in all of humanity, throughout all generations, throughout all time, most likely a person will instinctively put his hand over his mouth when his evil is exposed. Evil cannot be allowed to develop to its full maturity. As sure as the churning of milk makes butter, the beating of the nose draws blood and the stirring of anger brings trouble, so too, evil produces more evil. An evil man is in a precarious position with God! He must change to meet God’s standards which requires humility before Him.