

A Guide To The Reader

Pastor recommends that to obtain maximum benefit from his comments you read in full from the Bible every reference whenever one appears. Otherwise the reading of the comments is simply a skimming over the surface. They are rather designed to make you stop and meditate and even look up further references as the Holy Spirit guides you. Do pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will be your Tutor and that the time you spend will be time spent with Him.

Proverbs 30

30.1. The words of this and the following chapter are described as prophecies. They are not the words of Solomon himself. We do not know who Agur and Lemuel were. Maybe these words were added by Solomon himself from earlier authors as something he particularly appreciated or maybe by the men of Hezekiah (25.1), perhaps from court records of men who lived subsequently to Solomon. We just do not know when they lived.

The prophecy of Agur was passed on to Ithiel and Ucal, perhaps his sons or perhaps his disciples, to be the custodians of them. The passing on of instruction from one generation to another is fundamental to the continuance of the gospel. “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice” (2 Timothy 1.5). “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2.2). Certainly the Holy Spirit has here wonderfully preserved what He has given. The prophecy is not much different in length from that of Obadiah which is preserved in its own right, whereas this is appended. We might say that the Holy Spirit has “rescued” these words from obscurity by arranging for them to be included. It is, in that case, worth observing that the Holy Spirit revealed these precious words to a “holy man of God” (2 Peter 1.21) whose origins are unknown and obscure..

30.2-6. It highlights the heavenly origin of these words when they are prefaced with Agur’s description of himself as untaught and unlearned. It means that he can only have been taught and moved by the Holy Ghost Himself and have meditated on the testimonies given to him (Ps119.99). Amos describes himself, “I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son” and, interestingly, he is moved by the same Holy Ghost to speak in a similar way to later verses of Agur when he used the expression “for three transgressions and for four” a number of times.

“Who hath ascended up into heaven or descended?” Though this is a similar expression to that in Deuteronomy 30.12-13 alluded to in Romans 10.6-8, it is not identical; for the contrast there is between ascending into heaven and descending into the deep. This speaks of heaven only. Rather this is a precious jewel concerning the Lord Jesus Christ who Himself said (John 3.13) “no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” So explicit are these words concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and none other that it seems that the Lord Jesus Christ owned these very words of Agur as the unique description of Himself which He himself takes up. They prophesy of Him as do the words which follow.

Here then is a wonderful revelation of the Saviour; of His coming to earth. He was there in heaven before descending. He was the Creator, and Agur is moved especially to speak of that which displays unimaginable power and skilfulness, the controlling of the wind and the containing of the waters. The entirety of the created order (“all the ends of the earth”) is viewed as His in these few majestic words.

Solomon had spoken of the wisdom which is Christ’s in 3.19; 8.22-31, and sonship could be rightly inferred from 8.30-31, but here it is delightfully clear. He is declaring that Jehovah most certainly has a Son but that His name is not yet revealed. Surely this verse would not have been omitted when beginning at Moses and all the prophets the Saviour expounded unto the two on the Emmaus road in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24.27).

Did Agur pre-date David perhaps and did the statement “every word of God is pure” originate with him by the Holy Spirit? It matters not, but, while these words are often quoted, they do not occur anywhere else in exactly the same form. Look, if you will, at Psalms 12.6; 18.30; 19.8; 119.140. The theme that God is a shield to those who trust Him is frequent, especially in the Psalms, but even in this the Holy Spirit seems to have enabled this prophet to have his own distinctive way of saying it.

It was Moses who first declared, “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4.2). The Bible virtually concludes with this theme, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life...” (Revelation 22. 18-19). Consider also Deuteronomy 12.32. No threat is attached in Moses to failure to keep these words. But there is in Revelation and there is here, so we may observe that the Holy Spirit has introduced a new dimension, that of reproof, into this teaching through Agur.

30.7-9. What follows is cast more in the form of the proverbs to which we have become accustomed. It may be that the prophetic verses at the commencement of the chapter entitle the rest to be likewise called prophecies. It is also true that the word “prophecy” was used not only of foretelling the future but also of forth telling the gospel. However, each prophet had to pass the stringent test of Deuteronomy 18.22. If his prophecies were mainly for a long time in the future then there had to be some that could be verified immediately. Or, if his main ministry was preaching, then to have the name of a prophet the Lord had to have bestowed upon him the knowledge of some verifiable event before its occurrence which he had proclaimed and for which he had been recognised.

This faithful brother now asks the Lord two importunate requests. Though personal to him, the Holy Spirit has caused them to be written and preserved for our benefit. What are these two important things? To be kept from lying and idolatry (vain, empty, powerless figments of man’s imagination). And to be given a kind sufficiency, neither too much nor too little, such as would keep him from sinful pride or sinful disobedience to the commandments.

30.10. Doeg (1 Samuel 21.7; 22.7-19) in accusing David to Saul is the most high profile Biblical example of this proverb, except that David did not curse him. But the results of Doeg’s actions

were truly terrible and we may certainly observe his moral guilt. Though it does not cover quite the same ground, Romans 14.4 is certainly apposite. “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.”

30.11-14. It is going to be a feature of Agur’s style to speak of three notable matters which he emphasises and makes memorable by augmenting to four. The fourth is not an afterthought and was always intended – it is a way of stimulating memory. But this verse introduces four straight proverbs without any augmentation, of which the first concerns disobedience to one of the ten commandments and the second self-righteousness. Bearing in mind the fact that self-righteousness is one of the greatest hindrances to believing the gospel (for what person thinking he/she is perfectly all right in the sight of God and that in fairness God could have expected no more of them will turn to be saved?) this is of very considerable significance in these subsequent lists of four.

A person guilty of transgressing as per 28.24 will also be guilty of this proverb. It is the link of “curse” which has led to this observation that the cursing even of parents is not beyond what some will stoop to. The constant blessings which our parents bestowed upon us should be the theme of our thankfulness to God for them in every prayer of ours; even after they have gone we should bless the Lord for their memory and for the continuing blessing we enjoy because of their early influences upon our lives.

We are deceived when we think we are pure in the sight of the Lord God. We learned at 20.9, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” Isaiah preaches, “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isaiah 5.21)

The word “generation” does not here mean those who live within, say, a thirty year period (though any given generation might be characterised by many such minded people) but in the sense in which the Lord Jesus Christ used it in Matthew 24.34 of those who have this specific thing generated, created within them and eminently characterising them. The “generation” is then those who have something in common – they are made, generated, that way.

So we have had those who dishonour their parents, and those who, being impure, think they are pure. Next we have the proud; not only proud, but aggressively so in their demeanour. How ill-fitting it is for a believer to be like that when his dear Saviour was Himself humble and taught, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5.5). As an antidote for pride read again Philippians 2.3-11.

Finally in this group of four, attention is drawn to those whose words are cruel, biting instruments to assassinate character. Especially the character of those who cannot answer back, having not the intellectual attainments or the status to reply on their own behalf or the financial ability to sue for defamation of character. Christians are to build one another up in the faith not to destroy them. “The whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4.16).

30.15-16. The horseleach has never sucked enough blood, so this memorable example fitly introduces four other things which are never satisfied with what they have. Death claims thousands daily. Many across the world discover they cannot have children. Earth soaks up water at an alarming rate and fire is difficult to bring under control once it has got a grip. Water (the flood) and fire (the final destruction of the earth) (2 Peter 3.6-7) remind us of total destruction and who wants to be like the horseleach, the grave and the barren womb? “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6.6). The desire for things we do not have and cannot attain destroys our peace of mind, damages our real (not imagined) spheres of usefulness, saps our energies and is unruly, like the fire breaking out periodically, to cause dissatisfaction with our lot.

30.17. It is probable that this is what Ham was guilty of. It certainly looks like that when we compare Genesis 9.22 with verses 24-25. The word “mocking” is explicitly used of Ishmael in Genesis 21 and the results of that mocking were catastrophic for him (Genesis 21. 8-19). That is the earliest mention of mocking in the scripture and the first mention is definitive for the rest. Mocking brings shame (Job 11.3). The proverb is vividly put, declaring the logical conclusion of such an attitude - an ignominious death and the body left to rot.

30.18-19. The Holy Spirit invites us to consider four aspects of God’s creative skill, perhaps if we are untaught in these things, to whet our appetites to look for other examples. Consider the majesty of a bird using the thermals - those invisible currents - and the structure of the wings which enjoy them. The sinuous, effortless ability of even that creature condemned to go on its belly and “eat” dust (Genesis 3.14). The emphasis is not on the skill of man in building the ship but the wonders of the deep it encounters, thinking particularly of the mighty waves. Probably courting (the use of “maid” suggests this) is meant; when delightful courtesies may be expressed, springing up perhaps for the first time in the heart of the young couple and pleasantly observed by an older generation who see that it bodes well. “The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein” (Psalm 111.2). The whole of Psalm 139 is an exposition of the words, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139.6).

30.20-23. Verse 21 speaks of things which disquiet the earth and one cannot help thinking that verse 20 is the thought that sparks off this theme. We live in a fallen world but these things must be odious to the Lord if they disquiet the earth. If it is not enough that adultery is disobedience to the 7th commandment, the attitude which adds insult to injury by claiming that no wrong has been done compounds it all. The rule of a servant implies not that a good, true and fit person might not arise (as Jephthah in Judges 11 or David as he was falsely claimed to be in 1 Samuel 25.11); but it speaks of that usurping by subtle scheming of one with a servant mentality, with no inkling of how to rule. Much is hinted at here. His likely incompetence, self-seeking, pleasure seeking, and promotion of cronies all of which demonstrate his total unfitness for the power his ambition has achieved. Let us seek simply to serve our generation by the will of God (Acts 13.36).

The earth is disquieted and its gracious provision depleted by those who live to eat. The fool, whether he be a court jester, or the one who says, “There is no God” (Psalm 14.1), or some

position in between, who is satisfied in his folly and seeks no manner of improvement is unbearable.

An odious woman has no regard for her husband's best interest, being hateful towards him and his affairs. The exact opposite is what we shall be studying in chapter 31. Peter spells out the wifeliness that is a blessing, so far from being odious. "Whose adorning...let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands..." (1 Peter 3.3-5).

Look how Hagar behaved (Genesis 16. 4-5) when she thought she had power.

30. 24-28. It is an encouragement to little, unimportant people like ourselves that by the gifting of our heavenly Father we may have wisdom like these small creatures. Theirs is a wisdom of instinct whereas ours is the gift of the Saviour to His people who ask Him (1 Corinthians 1.30; James 1. 5-6). The ants have wisdom to prepare in advance and lay up stores in case of scarcity. They use their time well. This is a believer's first wisdom.

Secondly, It does not matter how feeble we are if we make the Lord Jesus Christ our hiding place, and build on Him as our foundation (Psalm 61.2; 78.35; 89.26; Isaiah 32.2; 1 Corinthians 10.4). Our King Jesus is in heaven and is invisible but we venture into the world as those with sure guidance, individual by individual to our daily work; church by church to the preaching of the gospel.

Once or twice in scripture the spider is an example of a bad thing yet it also provides here a good example. Like the swallow who has made her nest (Psalm 84.3) on the altars in God's house, a spider may take its hold in positions where no man would be so daring. So may the little ones (John 13.33) of the Saviour's kingdom make a bold, even daring, stand in high places of authority and the corridors of power as did Moses with Pharaoh and the apostle Paul of whom the Lord said, "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9.15).

30. 29-31. In an elegant transition we move from the little, insignificant things to the "kings" of their sorts, illustrative of how the Lord's people, kings as they are unto God (Revelation 1.6), may exercise four important characteristics in their lives unto the Saviour.

Firstly, the strength of a lion. We have already had (28.1), "the righteous are bold as a lion", in contradistinction to the wicked who "flee when no man pursueth." Let us continue our Christian life as Abraham who "was strong in faith, giving glory to God...being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4.20-21).

Secondly, speed. "Study to show thyself approved unto God" (2 Timothy 2.15) where the word "study" translates "hasten, give all speed" in the sense of give diligence. In 2 Peter (verses 5 & 10) we have "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue..." and "give diligence to make your calling and election sure" and often where "diligent" and "diligence" appear in the New

Testament it is this same word “hasten” which is being translated. Let us attend speedily to the pursuit of our faith.

We turn to the words of the Lord in Job 39.1-4 for help in understanding the significance of goats here, when, as we know goats are also used to illustrate something bad (Matthew 25.32). What is being illustrated is the believers’ independence of man and dependence upon God. The wild goats, like the wild ass (Job 39.5) are free, untrammelled and unrestricted. “If the Son...shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8.36). Read Job 39.1-11 to drink in the sense of freedom and independence which the Lord hath bestowed upon beasts which have no soul. How free therefore are believers to serve the Lord from the heart, being constrained by grace, through pardon by the blood of the atonement, to be utterly devoted to Him and to serve Him without fear.

Fourthly. In Proverbs 16.32 we had, “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” Believers rule over their own spirits by the power of the Holy Spirit and constantly exercise self-control in all matters.

So, the four comely things that are illustrative of the lives of Christians in verses 29-31 are strength of faith, diligence in pursuing single-mindedly our calling, dependence upon God alone and therefore no fear of man and self-control.

30.32-33. Finally, Agur’s words by the Holy Spirit conclude with two frequently met with situations and direct our meditations as to our reactions. One concerns our own behaviour and the other that of others.

If we have caught ourselves acting proudly or thinking evil thoughts immediate repentance is what is required before the matter goes any further. “So foolish was I and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee” (Psalm 73.22). To avoid adding to our folly let us cease immediately, pull ourselves up with a start and humble ourselves in repentance.

Two vigorous illustrations, the churning to make butter and the deliberate causing of nosebleed, churning and wringing, powerfully remind us of the life changing, or at least painful, consequences of the wanton stirring up of trouble which we may come across in life. Let the Lord Jesus have the last word. “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5.9).