

Dr. August Konkel, Proverbs, Session 18, Contemplation on Wisdom, Proverbs 30:1-17 (Appendix)

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Konkel, Proverbs, Session 18, Contemplation on Wisdom, Proverbs 30:1-17 (Appendix), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This excerpt is from a lecture by Dr. August Konkel on Proverbs 30:1-17, a section he refers to as the "Appendix." Konkel explores the ambiguous authorship attributed to Agur, son of Yahweh, examining differing interpretations across Hebrew and Greek texts. He further discusses the passage's themes of lamenting human ignorance and the limitations of knowledge in understanding God's ways. The lecture also analyzes Proverbs' reflections on wealth, justice, and the dangers of greed, contrasting blessed and unblessed behaviors, ultimately emphasizing humility in the face of life's complexities. Konkel concludes by highlighting the ongoing tension between needs and wants.

2. 11 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Konkel, Session 18 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms & Wisdom → Proverbs).



Konkel_Prov_Session18.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Konkell, Proverbs, Session 18, Contemplation on Wisdom, Proverbs 30:1-17 (Appendix)

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. August Konkell's lecture on Proverbs 30:1-17:

Briefing Document: Proverbs 30:1-17 - Contemplation of Wisdom

Source: Excerpts from Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 18, "Contemplation of Wisdom, Proverbs 30:1-17, Appendix"

Date: 2024

Overview:

This session focuses on Proverbs 30:1-17, which is part of what is often referred to as the "Appendix" to the main collections of Proverbs. Dr. Konkell explores the mystery surrounding the authorship and meaning of this passage, particularly focusing on the words of Agur. He then moves into the themes of lament over human ignorance, the need for humility and reliance on revealed truth, and a warning against greed and various forms of wickedness. The session emphasizes the need for self-reflection and careful discernment between needs and wants.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Mystery of Agur:

- **Author's Identity:** The passage begins with "the words of Agur, the son of Yahweh" (Proverbs 30:1). The identity of Agur is uncertain and mysterious.
- Konkell notes, "It's not altogether sure what the origin and meaning of the words Agur, son of Yahweh, really was."
- He explains, "Usually, it's interpreted as being a king or a wise person, and these are his thoughts and his words."
- He also explores the possibility that these aren't proper names at all: "Some of the rabbis, going back to the medieval period and earlier, pondered these as possibly being just an ordinary noun. So Agur could be one who is a sojourner, or maybe a gatherer, and Yahweh could be someone who is pure."
- **The Sense of Weariness:** The phrase that follows is debated; whether it is a name "Ucal", or divided into two Hebrew words. Konkell interprets it as the statement, "I am weary, I am weary... I am weary, oh God, I am weary, and I have come to an

end." This emphasizes a feeling of exhaustion and coming to the limits of human understanding.

1. **Textual Variance:**

- Konkil discusses the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of Proverbs, highlighting how these variations impact the meaning of the text.
- He notes that in the Greek text, "fear my words, son, and having feared them, repent." This differs greatly from the Hebrew.
- "The form that was adopted as final in the Hebrew that was translated by the Greek was different from the form that came to be considered final in the Hebrew text as it was preserved after the fall of Jerusalem and in the medieval period."
- This difference shows how the book of Proverbs evolved and was finalized in different forms at different times.

1. **Lament and Human Ignorance:**

- Agur's words express a lament over human inability to comprehend the ways of God: "Essentially what he is doing is lamenting our ignorance."
- Konkil says "He says I was like an animal. I was like a beast. I just didn't understand."
- This is compared to the lament of the preacher in Ecclesiastes. The question is: Given that we don't understand everything, how should we live? This links to the book of Job where they struggle with the lack of correlation between actions and justice.

1. **The Importance of Revealed Truth:**

- While acknowledging the limitations of human understanding, the text highlights the availability of revealed truth: "There is revealed truth. God has made his word known."
- Konkil connects this to Moses in Deuteronomy 30, where he emphasizes that the Torah is readily available: "This Torah is revealed... It is here. It is with you. It is truth."
- There is an associated warning against adding to or thinking you know better than the revealed word.

1. **Prayer for Humility:**

- Agur asks for neither poverty nor riches. He wants an understanding of his place in the world: "Don't let me be too rich. Don't let me be too pure, too poor. Help me to understand my place."
- Konkel compares this to Psalm 73, where the psalmist initially envies the wicked, but ultimately realizes the emptiness of their lives.

1. **Warning Against Wickedness and Greed:**

- The passage shifts to discuss those who are "not blessed."
- This includes those who mistreat the vulnerable: "Those who refuse to recognize the dignity of a slave."
- Konkel states, "to criticize a slave to his master or a servant to his master, not a slave in our contemporary sense of the word, do that, that's not going to prove to be good."
- Other forms of wickedness are contempt for parents ("worthy of death"), self-righteousness, arrogance and greed.
- Greed is compared to a leech that constantly wants more: "The leech has as it were two mouths...they're always needing more." This metaphor illustrates the insatiable nature of greed.
- "And so, the wise writer here, wisdom writer here, gives us examples of things that never say enough. Greed never says enough, just like Sheol never says enough."

1. **Examples of Insatiability:**

- The passage lists things that are never satisfied: "Sheol never says enough. No matter how many people die, it's not enough. Fire never says enough...Barrenness is a pain that simply can't be satisfied. It never says enough."
- Konkel emphasizes the pain of childlessness, relating that, "as a pastor, I have always found the hardest thing to deal with."
- Disdain for parents and the greedy eye (a reference to Deuteronomy) are also linked to this theme of insatiable desire. "That greedy eye will get plucked out by the vulture that soars over the valley."

1. **The Challenge of Discernment:**

- The proverbs are challenging because it is difficult to discern between needs and wants.
- Konkel says "it is so difficult to determine what I need as opposed to what I just want."
- Needs change with the world around us, and wants can feel just as essential as needs.
- The passage emphasizes that we must be careful to avoid being controlled by our desires.
- "These proverbs are a reminder that we constantly need to be careful that we are not being controlled by those things we want."
- Konkel concludes by reflecting on the frailty and limitations of human understanding, emphasizing the truth of Agur's initial statement, "there's so little that we know".

Conclusion:

Proverbs 30:1-17, as explained by Dr. Konkel, is a complex passage that underscores human limitations and the importance of revealed truth. It serves as a warning against greed and other forms of wickedness while also emphasizing the need for humility and careful self-reflection. The passage encourages believers to seek wisdom from God and to be mindful of the dangers of unchecked desires.

4. Study Guide: Konkel, Proverbs, Session 18, Contemplation on Wisdom, Proverbs 30:1-17 (Appendix)

Proverbs: Contemplation of Wisdom, Session 18 Study Guide

Quiz

1. According to Konkel, what is the main mystery surrounding the first verse of Proverbs 30?
2. How does the Greek version of Proverbs 30:1 differ from the Hebrew version, and what does Konkel say this reveals about the book's development?
3. What does Agur lament in the opening verses of chapter 30, and what does this lament reveal about the limitations of human understanding?
4. How does Konkel relate the book of Job to the themes of wisdom and justice as discussed in the Agur section of Proverbs?
5. What is Agur's prayer for humility, and how does it relate to the ideas expressed in Psalm 73?
6. According to Konkel, what are some examples of behaviors that indicate a person is "not blessed"?
7. How does the writer use the image of the leech to describe greed, and what are some things that are compared to the leech's insatiable nature?
8. Why does Konkel consider the pain of childlessness to be a particularly difficult pastoral issue?
9. According to the lecture, what is the significance of the "greedy eye" proverb, and how does it relate to the sabbatical year from Deuteronomy 15?
10. Why does Konkel find these particular proverbs challenging and how do they tie back to the opening themes of the text in the lecture?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The mystery surrounding Proverbs 30:1 involves the identity and meaning of the names "Agur, son of Yahweh," as they are not known historical figures, leading to speculation that they may be symbolic or metaphorical representations of a collector of proverbs who is also pure.

2. The Greek version of Proverbs 30:1 is a call to "fear my words, son, and having feared them, repent," bearing no relation to the Hebrew text, which underscores the idea that Proverbs evolved over centuries, with different versions of the text becoming "final" at different points.
3. Agur laments human ignorance and the inability to fully comprehend God's ways and the complexities of life, comparing himself to an animal that cannot make sense of the world around them.
4. Konkel relates the book of Job to Agur's lament by highlighting how Job's experience of suffering challenges conventional notions of justice, leading to the realization that human wisdom is limited when trying to comprehend God's actions in the world.
5. Agur prays not to be excessively rich or poor but to understand his place, echoing the sentiments of Psalm 73, which demonstrates the psalmist's changed perspective after initially envying the wicked and their apparent success.
6. According to Konkel, some examples of those "not blessed" include those who despise parents, are self-righteous, arrogant, greedy, or refuse to recognize the dignity of a slave or servant by speaking ill of them to their master.
7. The leech is used to illustrate greed because it has two mouths, is insatiable, and the "daughters of the leech" are also greedy. Sheol, fire, and barrenness are examples used to highlight the insatiable nature of greed.
8. Konkel finds the pain of childlessness particularly challenging as a pastor because it is a deep and unique pain that is not the same as death, even the death of children, and seems harder to deal with in his pastoral experience.
9. The "greedy eye" proverb warns against hoarding and not being generous, and relates to the sabbatical year in Deuteronomy 15, which calls for the forgiveness of debts. It connects greed to the tendency to want to avoid lending near a sabbatical year because the debt will soon be cancelled.
10. Konkel finds these proverbs challenging because they highlight the difficulty in distinguishing between needs and wants, especially given the shifting nature of needs in a changing world, and how to control personal desires and overcome greed in the pursuit of wisdom.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the significance of the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of Proverbs 30:1, discussing their implications for understanding the development of the book and its message.
2. Explore the relationship between the themes of lament, humility, and the limitations of human understanding as presented in the Agur section of Proverbs 30, and explain their role in seeking wisdom.
3. Discuss how the concepts of justice and wisdom are presented in the Agur section of Proverbs and the book of Job, and analyze how these texts challenge traditional understandings of God's ways and the nature of suffering.
4. Evaluate the role of the "not blessed" in Proverbs 30, analyzing how the text connects specific negative behaviors to a life that is lacking and how this contributes to the larger themes of the book.
5. Examine the use of the leech metaphor and other examples of insatiable desires as described in Proverbs 30. How does this highlight the dangers of unchecked greed, and how might this section help modern readers understand their relationship to possessions and desires?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Agur:** The author or figure associated with Proverbs 30, whose identity and meaning are debated, possibly a wise person, king, a sojourner, or a gatherer.
- **Yahweh:** Often interpreted as a divine name; in this text, Agur is identified as "son of Yahweh" which could be literal or figurative
- **Ucal:** A term in Proverbs 30:1 that is likely to be the verb "I am weary," instead of being a name.
- **Ithiel:** A term in Proverbs 30:1 that is likely a way to refer to "God".
- **Oracle of Agur:** The section of Proverbs 30 attributed to Agur, characterized by a lament for human ignorance and a prayer for humility.
- **Torah Zot:** The Hebrew phrase meaning "this Torah" in Deuteronomy, emphasized by Moses as a divinely revealed truth accessible to all.
- **Sheol:** A Hebrew term often translated as "the grave" or "the underworld," used here to represent an insatiable hunger for death.
- **Sabbatical Year:** A concept from Deuteronomy, where every seventh year, debts were to be forgiven; discussed in Proverbs 30 in relation to the dangers of greed.
- **Greedy Eye:** A metaphor for covetousness and a desire for possessions that leads to negative actions or behaviors, discussed in relation to the sabbatical year and as something to avoid in one's own behavior.

5. FAQs on Konkel, Proverbs, Session 18, Contemplation on Wisdom, Proverbs 30:1-17 (Appendix), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Proverbs 30:1-17 and Related Themes

1. **Who is Agur, the author of Proverbs 30:1, and what is the significance of his words?**
2. The identity of Agur, son of Yahweh, is mysterious. Some interpret it as a name, perhaps a king or wise person, but no such individual is known historically. Alternatively, some rabbinical interpretations suggest that "Agur" might be a common noun referring to a sojourner or gatherer of proverbs and "Yahweh" to one who is pure. Regardless of the specific identity, Agur's words in this section of Proverbs are considered an "oracle," a profound lament on human ignorance and the limitations of human understanding.
3. **How does the Greek version of Proverbs 30:1 differ from the Hebrew text, and why is this significant?** The Greek version of Proverbs 30:1 is drastically different, reading, "Fear my words, son, and having feared them, repent." This contrasts sharply with the Hebrew text, which expresses weariness and a sense of being consumed. This difference highlights the fact that Proverbs grew over time and had different final forms in the Hebrew and Greek traditions. The differing arrangements and content in the Greek text suggest the fluidity of the book's composition and provide a different perspective on how the wisdom tradition was understood.
4. **What is the main theme of Agur's lament in Proverbs 30:1-4?** Agur's lament centers on his profound ignorance regarding the ways of God and the mysteries of life. He expresses feeling like an animal, lacking understanding of the complexities of the world and why things happen as they do. This sense of limited knowledge and frustration is similar to the lament of the preacher in Ecclesiastes. Agur's lament serves as a reminder of our human limitations and dependence on revealed truth.

5. **What does Agur's prayer for humility in Proverbs 30:7-9 teach us about wisdom and contentment?**
6. Agur prays neither for extreme wealth nor extreme poverty, but for a balanced life, recognizing the dangers of both. His prayer reflects an understanding that true contentment and wisdom come from understanding one's place and avoiding the extremes of arrogance (associated with wealth) and despair (often associated with poverty). This echoes themes in Psalm 73, where the Psalmist envies the wicked until he sees the bigger picture of their ultimate misery. It stresses humility and trusting in God's provision.
7. **What does the passage say about the importance of respecting others, especially those in positions of servitude?** The passage condemns those who criticize servants or slaves to their masters, emphasizing the dignity inherent in all people, regardless of their social status. This reflects the values of the Torah, which stress the fair and just treatment of all members of society, and is part of what is meant by living a "blessed" life. In effect, this passage says that mistreating or demeaning those in servitude is both morally reprehensible and against wisdom.
8. **How does the passage characterize the wicked, and what sins are highlighted?** The passage describes the wicked as those who display contempt for parents, are self-righteous and arrogant, and are driven by greed. These sins are portrayed as deeply destructive and reflect a failure to live in accordance with wisdom and divine guidance. The writer warns against the destructive nature of such attitudes and behaviors, emphasizing their detrimental impact on both the individual and society.
9. **What does the imagery of the leech in Proverbs 30:15-16 illustrate, and what other things are compared to it?** The leech, with its insatiable thirst, symbolizes the never-ending nature of greed. The "daughters of the leech" further emphasize that greed constantly demands more and is never satisfied. Other things compared to this insatiability include Sheol (the grave), fire, and barrenness – all represent a desire that cannot be quenched. This imagery highlights the destructive and self-perpetuating nature of greed.

10. **What is the central tension the author of Proverbs identifies with "wanting" versus "needing", and how does this relate to the theme of wisdom in the passage?**
11. The author grapples with the difficulty of distinguishing between legitimate needs and mere wants. The author points out that societal changes can make something like owning a car a legitimate need, while other wants may seem equally essential. The passage emphasizes the need for self-awareness and constant vigilance against being controlled by desires, as they are insatiable, and to remember that as humans we are limited in our knowledge and understanding of the world. This aligns with the overall wisdom theme of the Proverbs, where a wise life is marked by humility and by the ability to discern true priorities and needs from passing wants.