

Proverbs 30:1–17: Contemplation of Wisdom

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. August Konkel explores Proverbs 30:1–17 as part of the appendix to the book of Proverbs, focusing on the mysterious words of Agur and the textual differences between the Hebrew and Greek manuscript traditions. He highlights Agur's lament over human ignorance and limitation regarding divine ways, contrasting human fragility with the necessity of relying on God's revealed truth. Agur's famous prayer for moderation is presented as a call to humility, urging believers to seek contentment rather than the spiritual hazards of extreme wealth or poverty. Finally, Konkel analyzes the insatiable nature of greed—illustrated through numerical proverbs, the leech, fire, Sheol, and contempt for parents—warning against the destructive power of material obsession.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Appendix of Proverbs (Proverbs 30:1–17)

- A. Context within the Book of Proverbs
 - 1. Conclusion of major collections ending with the men of Hezekiah
 - 2. Introduction to shorter concluding pieces (the Appendix)
- B. The Mysterious Opening of Proverbs 30:1
 - 1. Identification of Agur, son of Jakeh (or Yahweh)
 - a. Traditional views: a king or ancient wise person
 - b. Rabbinic interpretation: descriptive nouns ("sojourner/gatherer" and "pure")
 - 2. Textual problem of Ithiel and Ucal
 - a. Traditional translation as proper names
 - b. Hebrew verbal reinterpretation: la'iti ("I am weary") and ukal ("I am consumed / I have come to an end")
- C. Textual Traditions and Manuscript Differences
 - 1. Differences between the Masoretic Hebrew Text and the Septuagint (Greek)
 - 2. Distinct order and arrangement of collections in the Greek version
 - 3. Evidence of the organic growth and canonical finalization of Proverbs

II. Agur's Lament: Human Ignorance and Divine Revelation

- A. The Recognition of Human Limitation
 - 1. Lamenting human incapacity to comprehend God's ways

2. Comparison to a beast or unreasoning animal lacking understanding
3. Philosophical parallel to the questions posed in Ecclesiastes

B. Divine Revelation as the Ground for Faith

1. Contrast between human ignorance and revealed divine truth
2. Parallel to Moses in Deuteronomy 30 (the accessible, revealed Word)
3. Warning against adding to God's revealed words

III. The Prayer for Humility and Moderation (Proverbs 30:7–9)

A. The Twofold Request

1. Deliverance from falsehood and lies
2. Request for neither poverty nor riches (daily bread)

B. The Hazards of Extremes

1. The danger of wealth: self-sufficiency and denying God
2. The danger of poverty: temptation to steal and dishonor God's name

C. The Virtue of Contentment

1. Parallels to Psalm 73 and the vanity of envy
2. Misery associated with worldly wealth and power

IV. Characteristics of the Unblessed Generation (Proverbs 30:10–14)

A. Social and Relational Transgressions

1. Slandering a servant to their master
2. Contempt for parents and failure to honor father and mother

B. Moral and Spiritual Blindness

1. Self-righteousness and moral hypocrisy
2. Arrogance and haughty looks
3. Ravenous greed that exploits the poor and needy

V. The Insatiable Nature of Greed (Proverbs 30:15–17)

A. The Metaphor of the Leech

1. Two daughters crying "Give! Give!"
2. Greed as an all-consuming, unquenchable desire

B. Four Things That Are Never Satisfied

1. Sheol (the grave)
2. The barren womb
3. The dry land thirsty for water
4. The fire that never says "Enough"

C. The Destruction of Disdain and Material Obsession

1. Disdain for parents linked to material greed for inheritance
2. The "greedy eye" (Deuteronomy 15 and Matthew's Gospel)
3. The terrible judgment on the greedy eye (plucked by vultures)

D. Conclusion: Living with Limitations and Seeking Contentment