

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

PROV. 30:1 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, *even* the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, *even* unto Ithiel and Ucal,

2 Surely I *am* more brutish than *any* man, and have not the understanding of a man.

3 I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy.

4 Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what *is* his name, and what *is* his son's name, if thou canst tell?

5 Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

6 Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

7 Two *things* have I required of thee; deny me *them* not before I die:

8 Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:

9 Lest I be full, and deny *thee*, and say, Who *is* the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God *in vain*.

10 Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.

11 *There is* a generation *that* curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother.

12 *There is* a generation *that are* pure in their own eyes, and *yet is* not washed from their filthiness.

13 *There is* a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up.

14 *There is* a generation, whose teeth *are as* swords, and their jaw teeth *as* knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from *among* men.

NOTES

Humble Wisdom Instructs Prideful Folly

Lesson Text: Proverbs 30:1-14

Related Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 3:9-14; Job 37—39;
Psalms 12:1-8; 14:1-7; Mark 10:17-31

TIME: unknown

PLACE: Judah

GOLDEN TEXT—"I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy" (Proverbs 30:3).

Lesson Exposition

GOD'S WISDOM NOT DEPENDENT ON HUMAN EXPERTISE— Prov. 30:1-2

Proverbs 30:1 introduces Agur, son of Jakeh. He is mentioned only here in Scripture. Many scholars do not believe Agur was of Jewish descent. The original readers must have known of him, or else his words would have had little effect. People do not generally take advice from an unknown person.

Some scholars believe Solomon used a pen name. However, it is unlikely that Solomon, known for his wisdom, would use a pseudonym. His real name would have carried more weight. Although we do not know who Agur was, that does not diminish his reputation to the original readers. The fact that Agur may not have been a Jewish writer emphasizes that God is concerned for all people. Godly wisdom is available to all who seek and call on God.

Two other men are mentioned in this passage: Ithiel and Ucal. Who they were is also not known. Godly wisdom is not dependent on the reputation of people but on God's eternal Word.

Agur's words in this passage are described as a prophecy. Whoever Agur was, he was speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 30:2 states that Agur considered himself to be the most brutish of all people. To be brutish is to be like a beast and lack intelligence. Agur was describing himself as nothing more than a beast.

Why would Agur say this? Perhaps Agur's humble wisdom is displayed by his self-deprecation, for it draws a significant contrast to those who profess to be wise but are not. People of Agur's day believed him to be wise, while Agur humbly deemed himself to be brutish when compared to the wisdom of God.

GOD'S WISDOM COMPARED TO HUMAN WISDOM—Prov. 30:3-4

Human wisdom is learned through observation and experience. Trial and error (or trial and success) is one key way wisdom is generally acquired. A wise person learns from mistakes and successes.

God's wisdom, however, is revealed by God Himself. God's wisdom is demonstrated by a series of ques-

tions that only God can answer. Who knows the path between heaven and earth? Who controls the winds and the waves? Who set the parameters of the earth? Who knows the name of the One who controls all things? These questions are reminiscent of the conversation God had with Job.

Whereas Job initially thought he understood God and His dealings with mankind but repented when He encountered God and understood his own limitations, Agur began with his ignorance. Recognizing that you know little is better than thinking you know something when you do not.

True wisdom understands and admits one's lack of knowledge and seeks God's insight. The questions that Agur listed are unanswerable for those who have only human knowledge and wisdom. The mystery of Creation and the identity of God and His Son are revealed by wisdom and knowledge that come only from above.

This wisdom is far superior to mere human understanding. Only wisdom from God can lead to a proper relationship with one's Creator.

Agur asked a series of rhetorical questions, one of which was, Who knows the Lord's name and His son's name? Agur's language is probably not directly Trinitarian. He is likely imputing the imagery of an ancient Near Eastern monarch who passes on his wisdom to his heir.

While the Old Testament pointed forward to the coming of Christ (cf. Isa. 9:6; Luke 24:25-27), the prophets did not have a complete picture of what Christ would be like but saw the promises as from a distance (cf. Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 1:10-12).

GOD'S WORD, THE SOURCE OF WISDOM—Prov. 30:5-6

God's Word is totally pure. Human wisdom is based on the unstable foundation of our understanding and ability. God's wisdom is revealed in the

Word of God that has been tested and proven repeatedly since Creation.

God never fails. Trusting in God's wisdom (and therefore His Word) results in safety. God is a shield to those who trust Him. To disregard God's Word or to privilege human reasoning above God's Word results in judgment.

AGUR'S PRAYER TO GOD— Prov. 30:7-9

Proverbs 30:7-9 records the only prayer found in Proverbs, though it should be noted that other passages talk *about* prayer (cf. 15:29). Wisdom is known by her children, as Jesus said (Luke 7:35), and a wise person avails himself or herself of the power of prayer.

Some (but not all) scholars think the prayer of Agur assumes that he was nearing death. They believe Agur was an old man and was preparing his soul to meet the ultimate fate of all humanity. Some interpreters suggest that the words "Ithiel" and "Ucal" are not proper names but terms Agur used to describe himself as weary and worn, likely reflecting the condition of an old man (Prov. 30:1). Regardless, wisdom was not often ascribed to young men in Agur's ancient culture. It was sometimes assumed that the elderly attain wisdom, not the young.

Agur's prayer consists of two parts. Part one was a plea to know the truth and not be fooled by lies. A prayer like this should accompany one's whole life, not just old age. Age alone will not produce wisdom if one has not sought wisdom from God. Contrary to our expectations, sometimes the young may be wiser than the old (cf. Ps. 119:99).

Part two of Agur's prayer was a desire to be satisfied with a life of balance and moderation. Wealth may lead to a sense of self-sufficiency and a lack of dependence on God. Poverty may result in actions that go against God's law and bring reproach to the name of God.

A wise person values God's honor above riches. Jesus instructed His followers to pray for daily bread. While riches are not inherently sinful (cf. Gen. 13:2), they are a serious temptation and a danger for many (Matt. 19:24). To make this request with Agur would likely be good for many of us!

A wise person understands every day's provision to be a gift of God. Wisdom also recognizes God's provision to be sufficient. God's love is new every morning.

GOD'S RESPONSE TO AGUR'S PRAYER—Prov. 30:10-14

Verses 10 through 14 contain admonitions that Agur offered for proper behavior. Perhaps these verses represent God's answer to Agur's prayer. Agur asked, and God responded.

Agur's admonition not to accuse a servant to his master deals with slander. Slander will not be taken lightly when God evaluates one's actions. The seemingly insignificant person has a Master who is concerned for the poor. Godly wisdom recognizes that all people are created in the image of God and are worthy of respect. How one treats those who are supposedly inferior is a window into one's understanding.

Verses 11 through 14 all begin with "There is a generation." This generation consists of those who ignore God's wisdom. This generation disregards parents, which is a grievous sin (cf. Lev. 20:9). How often do people today blame all their flaws on their parents? Although we can acknowledge the sins of our parents, to blame them for everything wrong with us is akin to cursing them.

People of the sinful generation consider themselves sinless, which is a delusion. They are proud and arrogant. Pride inevitably leads to failure because it refuses to repent or make necessary changes.

Finally, they are vicious oppressors of the poor. This is a serious offense because the Lord holds the poor in high esteem.

Who was that generation? It is *every* generation that rejects the wisdom that comes from God—our present generation included. The generation is reminiscent of Paul's description in Romans 1:28-32, and includes all who profess themselves to be wise but are fools in God's eyes.

The only remedy is the wisdom that comes from recognizing God.

The insights of this passage should result in a life based on truth. Godly wisdom is discernible by our actions and attitudes. One cannot profess to know the wisdom of God and disregard God's Word. True wisdom is demonstrated by righteous living.

—Lattis R. Campbell

QUESTIONS

1. Is Agur mentioned anywhere else in Scripture?
2. How did Agur describe himself?
3. What is the point of the questions Agur listed?
4. How much did Agur know about God's Son?
5. Why is a life built on God's Word secure?
6. What was the first part of Agur's prayer?
7. What was the second part of Agur's prayer?
8. Should we make the same requests that Agur did in his prayer? Why?
9. Who was the generation Agur referred to?
10. How is wisdom demonstrated?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Even the most ignorant of people can gain wisdom if they have humility (Prov. 30:1-3).
2. Humanity's knowledge will never equal God's knowledge (vs. 4).
3. Seek the wisdom of God's pure Word, and He will take care of you (vss. 5-6).
4. Pursue truth and trust God for your daily needs to have a satisfying life (vss. 7-9).
5. Treat all people properly, regardless of their station in life (vs. 10).
6. Honor your parents (vs. 11).
7. Perform an accurate self-evaluation of your life, and repent of wickedness (vs. 12).
8. Arrogance is abhorrent to God and people (vs. 13).
9. The poor are often the target of exploitation, but they are precious to God (vs. 14).

—Glenn Weaver

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why is our culture enamored by the opinions of well-known young people (Prov. 30:1-3)?
2. Is there some knowledge that is reserved for God alone (vss. 3-4)?
3. What are some ways in which we are guilty of adding to God's words (vs. 6)?
4. Why is it so difficult to be satisfied with the possessions that God has given us (vss. 7-9)?
5. What would be a proper application of verse 10 in the workplace?
6. Is it significant that Agur listed the categories of wicked people by the word "generation" (vss. 11-14)?

—Glenn Weaver

Golden Text Illuminated

"I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy" (Proverbs 30:3).

Few confessions are as humble as that of Agur in our golden text. True wisdom begins with recognizing our limitations before a limitless God. We cannot seek after God's wisdom unless we recognize our limited wisdom.

Divine knowledge is beyond full human comprehension. As we read in Ecclesiastes 3:11, God "hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." Just as we could not fit the ocean in a thimble, we should not expect to fit the infinite God into our finite minds and fully comprehend Him.

Agur expressed the limitations of human wisdom in grasping divine realities. His questions underscore the gulf between human understanding and divine wisdom. There are mysteries far beyond our understanding.

Yet, far from discouraging the pursuit of God, our limitations should spur us on to seek Him more earnestly. As Jeremiah 29:13 promises, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." God is not far. He is near to us (cf. Acts 17:27) and He *wants* to be found.

However, there are significant barriers to acquiring this knowledge. Pride and self-sufficiency can blind us to our need for divine wisdom (cf. Prov. 30:12-14; John 9:41). The distractions and priorities of the world can also divert our attention from pursuing the knowledge of God. Knowing God is a lifelong journey requiring humility and a willingness to learn.

—Gene Kissinger