



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

PROVERBS

LESSON 24

This week we are going to look at Proverbs chapter 30, which will challenge us by using a completely different style than the previous proverbs. This chapter is made up of something called numerical proverbs, which is one that is introduced by a number reference. For example, "There are four things" from 30:24. Jensen wrote, "The purpose of such a device may be simply to indicate that the list is not exhaustive, though specific. Or the purpose may be to emphasize the fourth item on the list." Whatever the reason is, it sure shakes things up a bit.

Another thing that's different is the author, or so it seems. Before studying it this week, I simply thought the author was Agur, like it states. I had no idea that there was more than one theory on who really penned chapter 30. Some think that it was Agur, a wise man who was a contemporary of Solomon and/or Hezekiah. Nothing more is known about him, or his family. His father's name tells us nothing about his family or tribe in Israel. Ironside wrote, "Ithiel, which is taken to mean 'God is with me' and Ucal, 'able,' are apparently his companions, or possible persons who received instruction from him." Their identities are unknown as well. John Phillips, a well-known and respected commentator, is firmly convinced that the author is Solomon himself. He writes, "according to the Talmud, Solomon was called by 6 names: Solomon, Jedidiah, Koheleth, son of Jakeh, Agur, and Lemuel." He goes on to list various reasons why he thinks this is Solomon. Friends, I have no idea, to tell you the truth. So, for our lesson today, I'm going to write it under the assumption that it is written by an anonymous wise man named Agur. I encourage you to study more about it on your own, if you'd like!

First Day

1. Read Proverbs 30:1-33. For starters, simply write your thoughts on this chapter upon first reading. Do you like the author's style? Is it confusing? Fascinating?

2. What are some of the differences you see in the style?
3. What are some of Agur's main points? Do you think his advice on practical living fits in with Solomon's advice throughout Proverbs?
4. It's been said that another purpose of the numerical style of writing is to emphasize the fourth item on the list, and was also used by Jesus in the Beatitudes. Read Matthew 5:3-6 and 5:7-10 and observe the fourth point. Do you agree, or notice anything different?
5. Do you notice any repeated words or phrases?
6. Upon first reading, what application do you see for your own life, or what spoke to you the most?

That's it for today. I pray that you enjoy this chapter and find the new style challenging to study. May the words of the Lord penetrate your heart and find its place down in your soul!

Memory Verse of the Week: "If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, or if you have desired evil, put your hand on your mouth." Proverbs 30:32

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. I love how it's written!

1. Today start by reading Proverbs 30:1-4. The word "utterance" in verse one means "oracle" or "a weighty message." He begins with a confession of some sort. What does he say?

The first mention of the word "man" in verse 2 is literally speaking about a "noble man" while the second mention refers to a "common" man. Agur seems to be expressing his frustration that he isn't as wise as others. The author is showing the kind of humility that we've been discussing all through Proverbs. This is very admirable.

2. What, or who, is the only answer to the 5 questions asked in verse 4?
3. I believe Agur was saying that true wisdom comes from knowing God, and that man is naturally ignorant of Him and needs divine enlightenment. Agur seemed to have a deep sense of his limitations and intelligence in such lofty matters. Read Job's words in Job 11:7-9. How do his words compare?
4. Why is it so healthy to remind ourselves of God's wisdom vs man's ignorance?
5. Are you keenly aware of your limitations, apart from divine enlightenment?
6. What does the phrase "knowledge of the Holy One" mean?

The one referred to as "ascending and descending into Heaven" reminds us of Jesus. Most don't believe he's necessarily referring to Christ because He wasn't seen as the "Son of God" by the Jews, but perhaps he was prophetically! We know that Jesus fits this description (John 3:13, Ephesians 4:9-10) and that Jesus had a part in creation as well (Colossians 1:15-18)! "Gathers the winds" can mean "controls the winds," and the "waters in a garment" may refer to the clouds. Solomon talked previously about God establishing the earth in Proverbs 8:29. When Agur asks the question "What is His name" in verse 4, he's asking about God's true character and attributes, more than God's "specific" name.

7. Agur seems to have a true and earnest desire to know more about the nature of God. What phrase tells us that?

8. Do you have a deep and passionate desire to know more about the attributes and nature of God? How can you learn more?

9. I read once that every time you apply a principle you learn, your retention increases. Do you think this is true and lines up with what Proverbs teaches? How does this work with the principle of gaining wisdom?

That's it for today. May your desire to know God in a deeper way increase every time you read and apply the Word of God!

Third Day

What's your memory verse? Are you practicing it?

1. Read Proverbs 30:5-6. What principle is he teaching?

2. Can you share any previous Proverbs that support these verses?

I LOVE talking about the Word of God! I love these two verses because they show the perfection and the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. Verse 4 reminded us of the inability to know God by ourselves, and now verses 5-6 show us how God may be known! The word "pure" in verse 5 means "tried in a furnace" and describes something that has no alloy in it. It is "free and uncontaminated."

3. What did David say about this concept in Psalm 12:6?

God has chosen to reveal Himself to man through His Word. It's vital to your relationship with God to study and know His Word. If that's the way God chose to reveal Himself to us, why do we often fail to make studying it a priority?

4. David had a lot to say about God's Word in Psalm 119. Read the following verses and write what they have to say about His Word.

- A. Psalm 119:9
- B. Psalm 119:25
- C. Psalm 119:28
- D. Psalm 119:32
- E. Psalm 119:50
- F. Psalm 119:89
- G. Psalm 119:98
- H. Psalm 119:105
- I. Psalm 119:128
- J. Psalm 119:165

5. How is God a "shield"? (vs 5)

I love what Phillips said about this; "Proverbs 30:5 continues to draw our attention to the Word of God and refers to its purpose: to introduce us to the One who 'is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him.' The great purpose of the Spirit of God is to use the Word of God to bring us to the Son of God, who imparts to us the salvation of God. The Bible, wise and wonderful as it is, does not save us. It directs us to the One who can. It is impossible to separate the inspired Word of

God from the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1, 14). From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, the whole Bible points to Him."

6. Do you see God as a shield? Have you placed your trust in Him? Do you often fail to trust or forget that He wants to be your shield?
7. God's Word is perfect. What warning do you see in verse 6?
8. Where else do we find similar words? Read Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 12:32, and Revelation 22:18-19. What do they say?
9. Practically speaking, what do you think this means today, for us? How do people still attempt to do this?

God does not permit people to alter His Words. When I think of what this means, I automatically think of "religions" that add to God's Word by using other writings to supposedly "override or add to" God's Word. It also means we aren't to "delete" portions of Scripture that we perhaps don't care for, or believe. We can't tamper with it. We take it as a whole; we believe in every jot and tittle. We don't "decide" which parts we like and which we don't. One writer tried to bring it closer to home by saying, "Perhaps this refers to the danger of adding human speculation to divine revelation. Man should not derive his understanding and theology of God from human ideas but from God's Word. God rebukes those who think they can know more of God than what He has revealed about Himself." He calls them liars.

10. Are you guilty of this? Do you think you can decide which parts you can believe or not? Do you ignore parts of Scripture because it's "too hard to follow" or doesn't "apply" to you? Think about this one. There's no such thing as "Kelly 1:1" or whatever your name is. Don't get confused between God's opinion of things and your own.

Fourth Day

Work on your memory verse.

1. Read Proverbs 30:7-9. This has been called the "only prayer" in Proverbs. What two things does the author pray for? (Notice that one is dealing with the moral side of life, and one is dealing with the material side of life.)
2. Why is this prayer really a sign of wisdom? (Would it be considered wise in the world's view? What are your thoughts?)

Agur reveals more of his humility in his earnestness and his prayers. He could have asked for anything, yet he chooses two of the things he sees as most important to God, knowing that when he dies, he will answer to God for them. What two things would be on your list of things to pray for?

3. Why do you think "falsehood and lying" are such a big deal? How are they pretty much the root of many sins?
4. What are the dangers of both poverty and riches, according to verse 9?
5. How is this prayer similar to Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:11, 13?
6. How do you balance this philosophy with the philosophy of working hard to secure the future for yourself and your family?
7. Are you comfortable with praying for your "daily bread" as Jesus did? What does that mean?

Verse 10 is an interesting one. It seems to be a warning about getting involved in someone's domestic affairs, or making a false accusation against a servant to his master, because the servant can't offer any defense. Perhaps we can apply this today by not speaking ill or taking advantage of those who are disadvantaged and can't offer a defense, or judging others when we don't know the whole story. It seems like he's basically saying to mind your own business.

8. Read Proverbs 30:11-14. It appears that Agur is referring to four kinds of behavior that God disapproves of; four types of people whose example should not be followed by the wise. Write which verse fits each category and what it says about it:

A. The disrespectful

B. The hypocrite

C. The arrogant

D. The oppressive

"There is a generation" simply means "there are those." All four of these types of people have been warned against in the proverbs previously. We know the value that Solomon put on honoring our parents, but he also frequently warned us against being a hypocrite. Those who are arrogant and filled with pride are an abomination to Him. What he says about the oppressed is particularly unnerving to me. Agur says that those who oppress the poor and needy are like vicious beasts whose sharp teeth rip and tear apart their prey. Yikes! Those who are proud often live

off the poor and needy, the weak and the timid. Without the grace of God, those words could describe us!

9. We all want to think we don't fit in ANY of those four categories, but allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart once again. Do you honor your parents? Are you puffed up in pride in some area of your life? Are you a hypocrite, trying to pretend you're either more spiritual than you are, or better in some area than you are? Do you take advantage of the poor or needy?

10. Read 30:15-16. The "leech" in vs 15 is a "Horseleach" which is a blood sucking worm and parasite that is never satisfied. Also, leeches depict the attitude of greed, wanting more and more. How are the following never satisfied?

- A. The grave (Proverbs 27:20):
- B. The barren womb (Genesis 30:1):
- C. The land:
- D. Fire:

These verses show us that human nature, without God, is insatiable. The soul without God will always want more and never have enough.

11. Do you feel that you deal with the sin of greed at all? Do you always want more? Are you never satisfied with what you have as far as material wealth, business success, or anything else? What do you think?

12. Read verse 17. Why do you think this verse is placed here?

We'll end here for now. This is pretty interesting language, isn't it? Agur sure paints a colorful picture of sin! I pray that you are taking each verse to heart personally, rather than seeing how it relates to "so and so."

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. Let's finish up today by reading Proverbs 30:18-33. Then go back and reread verses 18-19. List the four amazing things Agur refers to.

2. Why do you think each of these things are amazing? How are they a wonder and a mystery?
 - A. The way of an eagle in the air

 - B. The way of a serpent on a rock

 - C. The way of a ship in the midst of the sea

 - D. The way of a man with a woman

Some wonder what these 4 things have in common. Zuck wrote, "Some writers say the ways of these four are mysterious; others say their ways are nontraceable; others suggest that they easily master an element that is seemingly difficult. Another suggestion is that they each go where there are no paths. The way of a man with a maiden refers to a man's affectionate courting of a woman." We all love a romantic story, right?

3. What other things in nature cause you to wonder? Why?

4. Read John 3:16. What is the most amazing thing of all?

5. Read verse 20, which is a contrast to the woman in verse 19. How does this verse show us that the adulteress woman takes a completely casual approach to sin?

6. Read verses 21-23. Agur now gives us four unbearable, unfair things. Can you list them? What do they have in common? (I read that these four things show us how harmony in society is encouraged when people maintain their proper roles and do not assume positions they are incapable of handling.) Does that help?

7. The word "hateful" in verse 23 is better translated as "hated." Why is it so sad when a "hated" woman is married, or when she is replaced by her mistress?

8. Read 30:24-28. Agur uses the animal kingdom to describe how small, insignificant creatures can overcome their limitations, teaching us lessons in wisdom. What can we learn from the:
 - A. Ant?
 - B. Rock badgers?
 - C. Locusts?
 - D. Spider?

9. Which lesson speaks to your heart the most today, and why?

10. Read Proverbs 30:29-31 and list the four things which are majestic and stately. List them and see if you can figure out what they have in common.

These four "things" are called "stately" which means "in a manner that is graceful and yet weighty and dignified." It also can be defined as "strength under control" which is quite similar to meekness, actually. These creatures "stand in a dignified way," which totally amazes the author. There are small created creatures like ants that have purpose, and there are prominent creatures like lions that serve their purpose as well. They all have a role in society, and it's a beautiful part of God's design for the earth.

11. Read 30:32-33. Agur ends with some interesting advice, painting a contrast between the creatures who stand in pride and "man" when he tries to do the same thing. What does he say about exalting yourself and keeping quiet?

According to these verses, certain actions produce certain results. If you want to start a fight, keep provoking someone until they lose their temper. That will surely be the end result, just like wringing someone's nose will draw blood.

12. Are you "doing" some action that will inevitably produce certain results, yet "blaming" the person for their response, or worse than that, blaming God? Think about it. Have you been "wringing someone's nose"?

See you next week! One more chapter to go!