

PROVERBS

Chapter 30

The Words of Agur

The words of Agur son of Jakeh. The oracle. The man declares, I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and worn out. 2 Surely I am too stupid to be a man. I have not the understanding of a man. 3 I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One. 4 Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Surely you know! 5 Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. 6 Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar. 7 Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: 8 Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, 9 lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God. 10 Do not slander a servant to his master, lest he curse you, and you be held guilty. 11 There are those[c] who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers. 12 There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth. 13 There are those—how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift! 14 There are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind. 15 The leech has two daughters: Give and Give. Three things are never satisfied; four never say, "Enough": 16 Sheol, the barren womb, the land never satisfied with water, and the fire that never says, "Enough." 17 The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be picked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures. 18 Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: 19 the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin. 20 This is the way of an adulteress: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have done no wrong." 21 Under three things the earth trembles; under four it cannot bear up: 22 a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food; 23 an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress. 24 Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise: 25 the ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer; 26 the rock badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the cliffs; 27 the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank; 28 the lizard you can take in your hands, yet it is in kings' palaces. 29 Three things are stately in their tread; four are stately in their stride: 30 the lion, which is mightiest among beasts and does not turn back before any; 31 the strutting rooster, the he-goat, and a king whose army is with him. 32 If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth. 33 For pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, and pressing anger produces strife.

Ch 30 We do not know who Agur son of Jakeh was, nor do we know when he spoke these words or when they were recorded. The words of Agur feature "numerical sayings" (seven sayings in vv 11–14, 15–16, 18–19, 21–23, 24–28, 29–31, 32–33). These sayings involve a list of examples that stand together to illustrate a truth. The sayings often appear in a formula stating a number for the list and then adding one. The sayings also have the feel of a riddle, inviting the listener to guess what the uniting point of the list is or what items might appear in the list. Other such sayings appear in 6:16–19; Jb 5:19; Am 1:3–15; 1Sm 18:7; 21:11; 29:5. (TLSB)

30:1–33 The first of two chapters that serve as an appendix to Proverbs. (CSB)

30:1 This verse has been called “the most difficult” in the entire Book of Proverbs. Who is “Agur son of Jakh”? And as for Ithiel and Ucal, these Hebrew terms can be translated in another way instead of a proper name: “I am weary, O God; I am weary, O God, and I am worn out.” (PBC)

Agur son of Jakeh. Probably a wise man like Ethan and Heman (1Ki 4:31). (CSB)

Agur. In vv 1–3, he confesses his weariness and inherent weakness in trying to attain true wisdom, understanding, and knowledge of the Holy One by his own reason and strength (cf 9:10). (TLSB)

oracle. Usually the message of a prophet. If “oracle” is taken as the place name “Massa,” Agur would then be associated with an Ishmaelite people (cf. Ge 25:13–14). (CSB)

Prophetic message. (TLSB)

30:2-4 These verses are reminiscent of the book of Job. There God challenges Job with a series of questions designed to show the greatness of God compared with man’s limited mind and abilities. In our humanistic age, people are sometimes overly impressed with human intellect and accomplishments. It is good, along with Agur, to recognize our smallness – both in knowledge and in power – compared with our Creator’s omniscience and omnipotence. This helps put a proper perspective on life and shows us how completely dependent we are on God. (PBC)

30:2 *I am too stupid to be a man.* Paul described himself as the “worst of sinners” (1Ti 1:16). (CSB)

understanding – *binah* – The emphasis in this word is on understanding and the ability to distinguish. – This word is related to the concept of “between” and refers to the ability to make distinctions. Young King Solomon prayed for this type of wisdom early in his reign. (1 Kings 3:9) – Life constantly calls on us to distinguish between what is good and bad, or between what is a wise choice and what is an even better choice. How we make such choices does much to determine in the course of our life. When we face important decisions in life, how do we distinguish between the options? Do we merely act on impulse? Do we follow the advice of friends? Do we read books to gain insight? All these are important factors in life’s choices. But it is even more important that we consult God’s Word (including the scriptural advice of wise Christian friends, counselors and pastors) and that we ask God’s guidance in prayer. (PBC)

30:3 *wisdom* – *hokmah* – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

knowledge of the Holy One. “Holy One” occurs elsewhere in Proverbs only in 9:10. (CSB)

dah'-ath knowledge:—cunning, know(-ledge), awares (wittingly). (QV)

30:4 The use of rhetorical questions to express God’s greatness as Creator occurs also in Job 38:4–11; Isa 40:12. (CSB)

Agur’s questions challenge his audience to acknowledge their total reliance on God for the attainment of wisdom, just as God challenged Job (Jb 38:4–39:30). (TLSB)

gathered the wind. Cf. Ps 135:7. (CSB)

wrapped up the waters in a garment. See Job 26:8; 38:8–9. (CSB)

surely you know! God similarly challenged Job (Job 38:4). (CSB)

what is his name – To know God’s name is to know God Himself, for His name expresses the sum of His attributes. (CB)

what is his son’s name – A very remarkable expression, in which the Spirit of prophecy seems to point to the future revelation of God’s only begotten Son. John 3:13; Eph 4:9,10 (CB)

Chemnitz: “The clearest passage where He is called the Son of God without respect to His human nature” (*LTh* 1:92). (TLSB)

Each of the above questions implies the answer: God. (PBC)

Surely you know! Agur even uses the very same words that God used (Jb 38:5). (TLSB)

30:5 Almost identical to Ps 18:30. (CSB)

Having demonstrated to his audience their inability to attain true wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, Agur points them to the source and purveyor of all these things. God’s Word is the only tried, tested, and proven shelter from false wisdom that leads, ultimately, to damnation. Chemnitz: “These mysteries are known from the Word and we must believe nothing else about God than what He has revealed” (*LTh* 1:92). May our gracious Lord, through the Holy Spirit, increase our reliance on His Holy Word! (TLSB)

Since this verse is almost a direct quote of Psalm 18:30, a psalm of David, it seems Agur was familiar with the psalm. The psalm says God’s “way is perfect.” The proverb says His Word is “flawless” Both of course are true. And both are of great comfort. In God’s Word, the Bible, we have a flawless guide through life and death. (PBC)

30:6 *Do not add to his words.* Cf. Moses’ warning to the Israelites in Dt 4:2. (CSB)

Do not change God’s Word. (TLSB)

Because God’s every word is perfect, it is not for us to add our own ideas or man-made rules to it. (PBC)

They who add to God’s Word, under whatever pretext, substitute human wisdom for divine truth, and God will call them to an account for their folly and wickedness. (CB)

30:7 *Two things.* The use of lists characterizes Agur’s sayings (see vv. 15, 18, 21, 24, 29). (CSB)

This is the first of Agur’s “numerical proverbs,” in which he enumerates and thus emphasizes his subject. (For comments on this type of proverb, refer to Proverbs 6:16) (PBC)

30:8 *feed me with the food that is needful for me.* Cf. Job 23:12 and the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6:11). (CSB)

Agur's prayer is a request for the necessities of life, not the luxuries – Jesus teaches us to ask for bread and not cake. (PBC)

The most desirable outward condition is that of a moderate competency, free alike from the temptations of wealth and of poverty. (CB)

30:9 *lest I be full and deny you.* Moses predicted that Israel would forget God when their food was plentiful and their herds large (Dt 8:12–17; 31:20). (CSB)

Sometimes, people who become full or blessed with riches are tempted to rely on these things rather than God. Conversely, poor people are sometimes tempted to steal. Either sin makes a mockery of God's name. (TLSB)

Who is the LORD? Or, Why should I serve him (see Job 21:14–16)? (CSB)

profane the name of my God – This might be done by false oaths intended to cover the sin of stealing. (CB)

30:10 *slander.* Malicious falsehood told about another person. Those whose reputation is unjustly damaged by a lie may curse the slanderer, and before God the slanderer is absolutely guilty. (TLSB)

you be held guilty. Since the accusation is false, the servant's curse will be effective (cf. 26:2)—so do not suppose you can take advantage of a servant's lowly position. (CSB)

Here we are told not to take advantage of a person's lowly position. (PBC)

30:11–14 Four kinds of people whose attitudes prevent them from obtaining true wisdom. (TLSB)

30:11 *curse their fathers.* Punishable by death (see Ex 21:17; Lev 20:9; cf. v. 17). (CSB)

To curse really means to belittle, to treat as insignificant. To disobey, to dishonor, to show disrespect, to put down – these are all forms of cursing one's parents. (PBC)

30:12 *those who are clean in their own eyes.* Like the Pharisee (Lk 18:11; cf. Isa 65:5). (CSB)

These are self-righteous people although they are sinners, they don't see their own sin. (PBC)

30:13 *lofty are their eyes.* See Isa 3:16. (CSB)

Picturing arrogance and haughtiness. (TLSB)

This continues a similar class of people – the self-righteous who look at others with contempt. In the Sermon on the Mount, which often reflects the Book of Proverbs, Jesus warns against this sin. (cf. Matthew 7:3-5). (PBC)

30:14 *whose teeth are swords ... whose fangs are knives.* The wicked are like ravenous beasts that devour the prey (see Job 29:17). (CSB)

to devour the poor ... the needy. Cf. Ps 14:4; Mic 3:2–3. (CSB)

Sometimes it is those who ignore the Lord who are capable of “devouring” the poor, sometimes it’s those who put on the appearance of being religious. (cf. Mark 12:38-40) (PBC)

30:15, 18, 21, 29 *leech*. Hbr word is found only here. A leech has a sucker at each end of its body. Agur means the person is a parasite, who seems to have two mouths. (TLSB)

two daughters – This is put here to represent her entire race. (CB)

Used because “leech” is grammatically feminine. “Sheol,” “womb,” “land,” and “fire” are also feminine; the writer is using wordplay to relate all these observations. (TLSB)

never say enough – Greed is incapable of giving birth to anything but more greed. Those who devour the possessions of others will never be satisfied. They’ll keep wanting more. Like a leech that sucks blood from whomever it’s attached to, greed just keeps taking and taking from others. (PBC)

30:16 *Sheol*. Its appetite is never satisfied (Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5). (CSB)

barren womb. In ancient Israel, a wife without children was desolate, even desperate (cf. Ge 16:2; 30:1; Ru 1:11–13, 20–21; 1Sa 1:6, 10–11; 2Ki 4:14). (CSB)

Agur is showing that all of nature is caught up in the cycle of dissatisfaction. In our fallen world instead of peace and satisfaction, unrest and dissatisfaction prevail everywhere. This is true among human beings and in nature itself. Our only solution is to find nourishment that can satisfy. Jesus said, “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst” (John 4:14). As long as we look to the things of this world, we won’t find satisfaction no matter how much we acquire. True contentment and fulfillment are to be found only in Christ. (PBC)

30:17 *The eye*. Haughty and disdainful (see v. 13). (CSB)

Since the eye is the window to a person’s inner feelings, the mocking and scorning eye symbolizes the person’s attitude. (PBC)

will be pecked out by the ravens ... the vultures. The loss of an eye was a terrible curse (see the story of Samson in Jdg 16:21). Since vultures normally devoured the dead (see Jer 16:4; Mt 24:28), the meaning may be that the body of a disgraceful son will lie unburied and exposed. (CSB)

Under OT law, parents could have a “stubborn and rebellious” child put to death by stoning (Leviticus 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21). The implication of this verse is that a disrespectful child will be put to death, lie out in the open, and have his eyes plucked out by birds of prey. We no longer have capital punishment for this kind of sin; nor does the Bible anywhere endorse physical abuse of children. Yet the fact that children could be punished in this manner for disobedience indicates how serious a matter it is to God. (PBC)

30:18–19 It is difficult to understand the four “ways” because there are no tracks that can be readily followed. (CSB)

First three things move in extraordinary ways (without legs). Human love is also mysterious, particularly when expressed physically. (TLSB)

30:18 *too wonderful for me* – through these four amazing activities, Agur demonstrates that even this fallen world is full of wonder, mystery, and beauty. (PBC)

understand – *yaw-dah'* A primitive root; to *know* (properly to ascertain by *seeing*); used in a great variety of senses, figuratively, literally, euphemistically and inferentially (including *observation, care, recognition*; and causatively *instruction, designation, punishment, etc.*):—acknowledge, acquaintance (-ted with), advise, answer, appoint, assuredly, be aware. (QV)

30:19 *way of an eagle*. Soaring and swooping majestically (cf. Job 39:27; Jer 48:40; 49:22). (CSB)

way of a man with a virgin. Probably a reference to the mystery of courting and how it leads to consummation. (CSB)

The word translated “maiden” can also be translated “virgin.” It is the same Hebrew word as in the famous passage “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son” (Isaiah 7:14). There, as the NT asserts, we have a reference to the birth of the Savior (Matthew 1:22-23). In this Proverbs passage, the reference may well be to the wonder of young man courting, winning, and consummating his love with a young woman. (PBC)

30:20 *She eats and wipes her mouth*. Making love is compared to eating food. (CSB)

She sees no fault in taking what does not belong to her. (TLSB)

What’s amazing about this woman is that apparently adultery to her is merely an innocent physical satisfaction, like eating food. This verse really hits home in that it so concisely describes the attitude of many modern, “liberate” people. Adultery and other sexual sins are considered natural and morally neutral. If there are feelings of guilt, they are viewed as hang-ups from an overly strict childhood training. If it feels good do it! (PBC)

“Wipes her mouth” so that none can discern the fact that she has been eating. The meaning is that she hides all the marks of her guilt, and passes herself for an innocent person. (CB)

Fools in Proverbs

God often teaches the way of wisdom by using contrast. As a skilled artist sets his or her subject matter against a contrasting background, so the Lord, through His inspired writers, sets the bright gem of wisdom against the dismal backdrop of foolishness.

When the Bible in general—and Proverbs in particular—speaks of foolishness, the first and most important point to remember is that it describes a moral and *spiritual* condition. We should not confuse foolishness with lack of academic prowess or a low IQ. Some people who are brilliant may, in God’s eyes, be fools. For example, Ps 14:1 and 53:1 state, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” In Proverbs, the fool is one who does not have a proper fear of the Lord. Consequently, such a person is likely to deny God’s Word.

The Hebrew language in which Proverbs was originally written makes a distinction among different kinds of foolishness or fools. Awareness of these differences will help you more fully appreciate the message of Proverbs.

The simpleHbr *pethi*, the person who is easily lured or deceived; gullible. Of the various types of fools, this one is the least hardened in his or her foolishness. These naive and inexperienced people drift along aimlessly, until they fall easy prey to temptation (14:15). Such gullibility, of course, is not an excuse for sinning. Gullible people are responsible for their actions and may even end up killing themselves (1:32). In Pr 7, Solomon observes the gullible people and notes one who is drifting along aimlessly, ripe for a prostitute's picking. If they are to escape their ways "and live," the gullible need wisdom (9:4–6). Indeed, wisdom invites them by calling out, "Whoever is gullible, turn in here!"

The foolHbr *kesil*; if the gullible person doesn't learn, he or she may well move to the next level of foolishness and become a regular fool. This Hbr word is used 50 times in Proverbs and is the Book's most common term for fool. In the end, "fools die for lack of sense" (10:21).

Stubborn foolHbr *'ewil*, occurs 20 times in Proverbs. What can be said about the "generic fool" can also be said about this fool. As the term "stubborn" implies, however, the individual at this level of foolishness is more hardened and persistent. "Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright enjoy acceptance" (14:9). This category of fool is connected to the word for foolishness and stupidity, or folly. Sadly, it's a trait often found in children: "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (22:15). As the child becomes a grown-up, the trait is even more difficult to correct: "Crush a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, yet his folly will not depart from him" (27:22).

The godless foolHbr *nabal*, appears only three times in Proverbs. This is the word used in the psalms quoted earlier in this article. Those people who say to themselves, "There is no God." Their mind is closed; they have rejected the Lord. This word is used in Pr 30:21–23, which states that one of four things under which the earth trembles is "a fool when he is filled with food." Once such a person's physical needs are satisfied, who knows what havoc he or she will bring to others? We find the epitome of this boorish and domineering

fool in the man named Nabal (1Sm 25). He was “harsh and badly behaved” (v 3), and one of his own servants said of him, “He is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him” (v 17).

Scripture and the Fool

As we look closely at the fool in Proverbs and the rest of Scripture, we come face-to-face with sinful human beings and with the “natural man.” In other words, we see ourselves. The believer realizes, “There but for the grace of God go I.” Even the author and compiler of Proverbs, wise King Solomon, became such a fool that he fell into idolatry (1Ki 11:4–11). As long as we are in this world, we will struggle against giving in to our sinful, foolish tendencies.

The remedy for foolishness is for God’s Word to remain our daily companion (Pr 2:1). The foolishness of the world is overcome by the foolishness of Christ. As the apostle Paul says, “If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise” (1Co 3:18). It comes down to this: to know Christ and Him crucified is to know God’s wisdom (1Co 1:23–25). His forgiveness destroys our sinful foolishness. Through the Savior, we become truly wise and able to offer that wisdom to others as well. (TLSB)

30:21 *earth trembles* – In verses 21-23 in each case, the problem is sin – (1) wrongful seizing of power, (2) love of material possessions, (3) polygamy or a marriage not following God’s ideal, (4) contempt toward someone in authority. These sins disrupt relationships and cause heartaches and all sorts of troubles. Under them, even the earth trembles. (PBC)

30:23 *unloved woman when she gets a husband*. Probably one of several wives, who is miserable because her husband does not love her (cf. Leah in Ge 29:31–32). (CSB)

maidservant when she displaces her mistress. Perhaps because she was able to bear a child, whereas the wife was barren (cf. Hagar and Sarah in Ge 16:1–6). (CSB)

30:24 *four things are small* – Bigness is not the same as greatness. Nor is it synonymous with wisdom and virtue. Interestingly, Agur used people for negative examples (verses 21-23), but now he turns to the animal kingdom to teach the positive. (PBC)

wise – *khaw-kawm'* (that is, intelligent, skilful or artful):—cunning (man), subtil, ([un-]), wise ([hearted], man). (QV)

30:25 *ants* – From ants we can learn to provide. While we trust the Lord, we also plan ahead and are careful not to squander His blessings so that we have nothing left in time of need. (PBC)

30:26 *rock badgers* – or “marmots” are little mammals, about the size of rabbits. At the first hint of danger, they scurry into their rock shelters (see Psalm 104:18). They teach us a God-pleasing caution. As Jesus answered when Satan tempted Him to throw Himself down from the temple, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Matthew 4:7). (PBC)

in the cliffs. Which provide a refuge for them (see Ps 104:18). (CSB)

30:27 *locusts have no king*. Locusts teach order and cooperation. Individually, they are tiny and weak. Collectively, they form a “might army” (see Joel 2:3-9) (PBC)

march in rank. Locusts are portrayed as a mighty army in Joel 2:3–9. (CSB)

30:28 *in kings' palaces.* Lizards climb stone walls easily. (CSB)

While a lizard can easily be caught, because it is able to scale walls it can also find its way into the most secure of places. (TLSB)

From lizards we can learn boldness, as these little creatures appear even in the palaces of kings. There is a time for caution, but also a time for boldness. Through Christ, we can be bold enough to bring our prayers and needs before the throne of the King of all. (PBC)

Behind nature and the animal kingdom, of course, is the great Creator. If we but open our eyes, we can see His wisdom in the wisdom of His creation. And from it we can learn. (PBC)

30:30 *lion, mightiest among beasts.* See 2Sa 1:23; Mic 5:8. (CSB)

Since ancient times, the lion has been considered the king of the beast. (PBC)

30:31 *strutting rooster* – The rooster is still known for its strutting. (PBC)

he-goat. Goats were used to lead flocks of sheep (see Jer 50:8; Da 8:5). (CSB)

Although not so familiar to Westerners, in the Middle East the he-goat with its haughty stare remains a symbol of dignity. (PBC)

Wise people do not express boastful thoughts or evil schemes they may have had. Instead, they keep their mouth shut. However, wicked fools express them and, as a result, cause strife and conflict in their community by pressing the issues. (TLSB)

30:32 *exalting yourself.* Pride is condemned in 8:13; 11:2; 16:18. (CSB)

The fool forgets his smallness before the Almighty and exalts himself. Putting oneself, instead of God, at the center of life can lead to nothing but evil. (PBC)

The spirit of ambition and self-aggrandizement is as foolish as it is wicked. It involves men in angry contention, hypocrisy, falsehood, and dishonest artifices, often to their ruin, both for this world and eternity. (CB)

put hand on your mouth. Stop your plotting immediately (cf. Job 21:5; 40:4). (CSB)

Ch 30 Agur demonstrates the futility of life without wisdom, and also the blessings obtained from God's Word. We cannot obtain enough insight, correct every injustice, or curb some of the most common sins. It is only through knowledge of the Holy One—God's only Son, Jesus Christ, who was crucified, died, and resurrected—that we are rescued from pressure of inadequacy, failure, and, ultimately, eternal damnation. Knowledge and soundness of mind gained from the Lord enable us to approach life in this world with confidence. • O Lord, raise us up in newness of life, so that we may love and serve our neighbors. Amen. (TLSB)