

The Way of Skillful Living Described:
The Proverbs

Thus far in our brief study, we have looked at a variety of wise sayings by Solomon and others, grouped together by topic. Today, we will look at two samples of the sayings of one man, Agur.

Introduction, 30:1

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle.
The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal.

1. The wisdom of Agur and Lemuel, the final two chapters in the book seem to be additions that were appendaged to the collection. Some have suggested that Agur and Solomon are the same persons, but there seems little warrant (Perhaps because of 1:1).
2. What we know of Agur is found in 30:1-9 and his literary style. He was the son of Jakeh (unknown).
3. The instruction was to Ithiel and Ucal (especially the former) so it is reasonable to assume that they were his students.
4. The word, "oracle," means "message." The message has to do with Agur's personal witness to the superiority of God's wisdom over his own.

The Message of Agur, vv. 2-9

1. The limitation of human wisdom, vv. 2-4

- a. Stated, vv. 2-3

He begins by confessing that he is the most ignorant of the species. It seems that Agur places himself in the sphere of ignorance to make the point that man's wisdom is woefully insufficient, if restricted to what natural reason teaches us. "Whoever knows his own heart knows that of himself and can hardly conceive of anyone else being as degraded as himself," said a writer.

He seems to be saying that there is an enormous unbridgeable gap between the knowledge possessed of God and that of mankind.

- b. Reasoned, v. 4

- 1) The limits of mankind in knowing, v. 4a

- 2) The evidence, v. 4b

This verse reminds me of Job 38-41. God asks the man what he knows in the form of seventy questions, and he can answer none of them.

Who controls the wind?

Who controls water (the extend of the oceans, floods)?

Who created the expanse of the earth?

Do you know His character?

What revelation has brought up to us from these untraceable depths are pearls of great price!

3) The inquiry, 4c

"Surely you know," or do we? The section seems rhetorical; he seems to highlight a deficiency to arrive at an insight.

c. The Necessity of divine wisdom, vv. 5-6

1) The fact, v. 5a

One writer states, "Of what other book in the world can this be said? Where else is the gold found without alloy? The Word has been tried, and it has stood the trial, and no dross has been found in it."

God's wisdom is flawless. The word "tested" or "tried" means that it is without dross (pure as from a furnace [Ps. 12:6]).

2) The reason, v. 5b

The aim of revelation is to promote trust, not bare knowledge, and trust that goes behind the words to the Speaker. Revelation is our protection, our place of refuge.

3) The warning, v. 6

To equate the "wisdom" of mankind to the wisdom of God is to add folly, deception, and God's chastisement. God's wisdom is meant for our improvement; human wisdom is not enough!

3. The Prayer of a Wise Man, vv. 7-9

a. Plea to be heard, v. 7

Spiritual blessings occupy the first place; temporal blessings are secondary and subservient to them. Agur seems to value the wisdom of God in life, not merely in his restoration.

b. Plea to be kept from folly, v. 8

"Folly" is defined in two requests: To be neither poor nor rich, and to be content with what we possess.

c. Peril of folly, v. 9

What is the gain of human folly? Discontent is distrust. It leads to wrongful acquisitions. It gravely dishonors the Lord.

The wisdom of Agur: exemplified, 30:24-28

1. The thesis, v. 24

God has placed in the animal kingdom degrees of insight that humans seem to have missed at times. This is explained through the wisdom in four small, generally defenseless, even non-attractive creatures. No one that I know would go to a pet store and buy an ant or a locust, put a leash around its neck, and walk it home.

2. The illustrations, vv. 25-28

Industry is commended to us by all sorts of examples, deserving our regard and imitation. All nature is a copy thereof, and the whole world a mirror, wherein we may behold this duty represented to us. The general lesson to learn from these diminutive teachers is the importance of acting wisely according to the principles of their nature as the best means to secure the greatest amount of happiness of which they are capable.

The four counterpoises to weakness are (a) provision; (b) sanctuary; (c) order; (d) audacity.

a. The ant knows what time it is and prepares for tomorrow, v. 25

Ants possess the wisdom of forethought and organization to make provision for their future. They display an uncanny ability to plan, storing up food in the summer that they will need in winter.

A comment on ants with application (notice that Agur does not apply the meaning of the animals leaving it to the reader in this section) can be seen in 6:6-8.

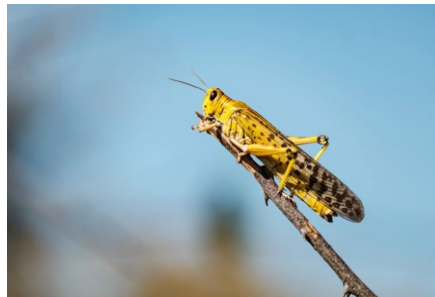


Go to the ant, O sluggard,
Observe her ways and be wise,
Which, having no chief,
Officer or ruler,
Prepares her food in the summer
And gathers her provision in the harvest.

- b. The rock badger (coney, marmot) knows where its security is found, v. 26
The lesson of the coney is to provide for personal security.



- c. The locust knows the power of community or togetherness v. 27
The lesson of the locust is the power of cooperation in the accomplishment of a task.



- d. The lizard thinks beyond its limitations, v. 28
Though vulnerable, the wisdom of the lizard is in its elusiveness and boldness. The lesson of the lizard is that one can succeed despite disadvantages. The lizard is relatively defenseless; lacking in significant claws or teeth; as it is, even a child can grab it without fear. Even so, it can attain residence in a palace.

