

Agur

Proverbs 30:1-9

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

30:2 Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. **30:3** I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the Holy [One]. **30:4** 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?

30:5 Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. **30:6** Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

30:7 **Two things** have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: **30:8** Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: **30:9** 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.

Proverbs 30:10-32

30:10 Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.

30:11 There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. **30:12** There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. **30:13** There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. **30:14** 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.

30:15 The horseleach hath **two daughters**, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, **four things** say not, It is enough: **30:16** The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.

a forgotten man

Unlike King Solomon who is the well-known author of most of the book of Proverbs, Agur, the writer of Proverbs chapter 30, is a mostly forgotten man.

30:17 The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.

30:18 There be **three things** which are too wonderful for me, **yea, four** which I know not: **30:19** The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid.

30:20 Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness.

30:21 For **three things** the earth is disquieted, and for **four** which it cannot bear: **30:22** For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; **30:23** For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

30:24 There be **four things** which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: **30:25** The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; **30:26** The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; **30:27** The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; **30:28** The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.

30:29 There be **three things** which go well, **yea, four** are comely in going: **30:30** A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any; **30:31** A greyhound; an he goat also; and a king, against whom there is no rising up.

30:32 If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth. **30:33** Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

negatives

The first several lines below are typical complaints about the lack of information, this time about Agur. Some speculate that this is a symbolic name for Solomon, but this is highly unlikely since, unlike Solomon, Agur was probably not a wealthy man. (See 30:7-9.)

According to the Jewish Publication Society's English translation (the *Tanakh*) of Prov. 30:1, Agur was a "man of Massa." In line with this, many scholars believe that he was from "Massa" in northern Arabia. If so, he may have been a descendant of Ishmael (Gen. 25:14).

The most important lines on the worksheet below and the one on the next page are about the nature of Agur's message. Most of the lines in the "B" section are complaints about his teaching. Though many of these are true, they also are probably overly critical.

Sadly, there are many who, unlike Agur (30:5), approach the Bible with a bad attitude, constantly trying to find fault with it. This kind of negative thinking is reflected in some of the B lines below. Even so, each of these should be judged for its correctness rather than by its tone.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() We do not know much about Agur.
A-1	() We do not know where he was from.
A-2	() We do not know if he was married or not.
A-3	() We do not know if he was a Jew or a Gentile.
A-4	() Agur is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.
A-5	() We do not know anything about his occupation (30:1, 28).
A-6	() We do not know why Agur's teaching was included in Proverbs.
B	() Agur's message was very negative.
B-1	() He was negative about himself (30:2-3).
B-2	() He was pessimistic about wisdom (30:2-6, 24).
B-3	() He tended to see sin everywhere (30:11-14, 18-20).
B-4	() He wrote about repulsive subjects (30:10, 20, 30:33).
B-5	() He wrote about repulsive creatures (30:15, 17, 25, 27-28).
B-6	() He spoke favorably of those who walk with pride (30:29-31).
B-7	() His use of numbers (30:7,15,18,21 24,29) is unusual (6:16-19).
B-8	() His message was too negative to be the final chapter of Proverbs.

positives

Just as a personal letter may reveal a lot about the person who wrote it, a sermon or a written message may do the same. Therefore it is possible to learn quite a bit about Agur from what he wrote. Since Proverbs chapter 30 is fairly long, it is quite revealing.

One of the most revealing parts of the chapter is Agur's prayer in 30:7-9. It is the only specific prayer in Proverbs. (*Caution: 30:1 also contains a prayer in some translations.*) As in the Lord's prayer in Matthew six, Agur's requests were few, but they help show what was important to him.

Having prayed about his own sinfulness in 30:7-9, Agur focused his message on the pride and sins of others in 30:10-33. Though sceptics and sinners will complain about his words (as seen in the B lines), he did not hesitate to write boldly about sin and judgement.

It is easy to see Agur's message in a negative light if one is so inclined, but there are many wonderful things in Proverbs 30. It is especially rich in illustrations, for Agur believed that we can learn from creation (30:10-33) as well as from God's word (30:2-6).

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() We know Agur through his writing.
C-1	() He was humble (30:1-9, 18).
C-2	() He believed the Scriptures (30:5-9).
C-3	() He was afraid of losing his salvation (30:7-9).
C-4	() He was probably not a young man (30:7, 11-14).
C-5	() He was a keen observer of many things (30:11-33).
C-6	() He wanted things to go smoothly (30:10, 21-23, 29-33).
D	() Agur's teaching was good.
D-1	() He asked good questions (30:4).
D-2	() His illustrations are all easy to understand.
D-3	() He taught us how to pray (30:7-9, Mat. 6:9-13).
D-4	() Many things that he said are easy to remember.
D-5	() His teaching included applications (30:6, 10, 32-33).
D-6	() He showed what covetousness is really like (30:11-17).
D-7	() He showed how strife can be avoided (30:10, 21-23, 32-33).
D-8	() He preached against pride (30:6, 9, 11, 13, 17, 18, 24-28, 32-33).

conclusions

worksheet answers

Agur's prayer shows that he feared losing his testimony rather than his salvation (C-3). (See 1 Cor. 10:13.) Some view 30:7-9 as a model prayer because of its brevity and focus on truth and faithfulness (D-3).

Agur wrote honestly (B-1) and humbly (C-1) about himself, knowing from painful experience that true wisdom is from God alone (30:1-6). Humanly speaking he was pessimistic about obtaining wisdom (B-2), but he was also hopeful (30:24-28).

It is incorrect to say that we know nothing about Agur's occupation (A-5). He spoke like a prophet (30:1), was familiar with palaces (30:22, 28, 31), and showed a strong desire for things to run smoothly (C-6). So he probably was a royal counselor.

Agur's use of numbers is somewhat unusual, but it is also seen in 6:16-19 and Amos chapter one and two (B-7). Because there are never more than four things in his lists, they are quite easy to remember (D-4).

The compiler of Proverbs knew about Agur and was guided by the Holy Spirit to include his often negative teaching as part of the book's conclusion (A-6). The final chapter, chapter 31, is more positive (B-8).

So what?

Was Agur too negative? Would he be in the Bible if he was? There is no denying that he did tend to see sin everywhere (B-3). Notice, for instance, that he regarded society as a whole as an evil influence (30:11-14).

To Agur, God alone was "the Holy One" (30:3, cf. 9:10). So he stressed the unique purity of God's word (30:5). Though he acknowledged the wonder of physical intimacy in marriage (30:19), he quickly pointed out its adulterous perversion (30:20).

Much of Agur's message against sin was focused on pride (D-8). Yet in 30:29-31, he seemed to speak favorably of walking or marching in a proud manner (B-6). Yet, the next verse (30:32) is opposed to exalting oneself (D-2).

The explanation is that Agur appreciated dignified leadership (30:29-31) because good leaders maintain order (C-6). Therefore he was also totally against usurpers, who arrogantly upset the normal order (30:21-23).

The main application of Agur's message is made clear by his three commands (D-5). We must avoid acting proudly toward God (30:6) and others (30:10, 32-33), including toward our parents (30:11, 17).

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
