

Proverbs

The Humility of the Wise

Lesson #12 for March 21, 2015

Scriptures: Proverbs 30; Luke 18:9-14; Job 38-40:2; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 3:14-22; Psalm 104:24.

1. The first 24 chapters of Proverbs are believed to be composed of proverbs written by and/or put together by Solomon. Apparently, Proverbs 25-29 were Solomon's proverbs, but they were later gathered together and added to the book of Proverbs by scholars in the days of Hezekiah. (See Proverbs 25:1.) The final two chapters of Proverbs were written entirely by other people! Who was Agur?

AGUR ā'gər [*Heb.* 'āgûr; *Akk.* agāru; *Ugar.* agr]. A contributor of proverbs, mentioned in Prov. 30:1, otherwise unknown. (The *LXX* and *Vulgate* renderings even suggest uncertainty that this is a proper name. —Bromiley, G. W. (Ed.). (1979–1988). Agur. In *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised (Vol. 1, p. 75). Wm. B. Eerdmans.

Cohen (Proverbs *SonB*, 200) cited a midrash that identified Agur as Solomon, the one who “stored up” (*agar*) wisdom and (*nqh?*) “spewed it out” (*hiqqi*—for Jakeh) by taking many wives. Another ancient view of the passage understood “Agur” allegorically, i.e., as a reference to Solomon and saw “Jakeh” as David. Apparently, the *Vulgate* translated 'āgûr as a passive participle, hence, “the Assembler” (from 'āgûr “to gather”), an appellation rather than a proper name. The *LXX* reads “fear (my words)” based on the Hebrew *gûr* or *tagûr* (*BHS*:1315), from *gûr* (“to dread”).—Berry, D. K. (1992). Agur. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 1, p. 100). New York: Doubleday.

2. Whoever Agur was, he had a clear message about humility. Read Numbers 12:3. What is implied by the idea that Moses—the great leader, prophet, and champion of the children of Israel—was the meekest man who ever lived? When choosing a national leader, is one looking for meekness? At what point do you think Moses became meek? About 700 years after Moses and in a time of crisis, Micah wrote Micah 6:8, saying: “No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.” (*GNB*) **What does it mean “to live in humble fellowship with our God”?** Does it mean a humble willingness to listen, learn, and serve?
3. Jesus supported the same idea in Matthew 18:4, saying, “The greatest in the Kingdom of heaven is the one who humbles himself and becomes like this child.” (*GNB*) The most important characteristic of a child is his capacity to grow in every way.
4. So, is there anything about which we can rightfully boast? Read Jeremiah 9:23-24. It is impossible to find anything better to boast about than our God. He is the Creator, the Savior, and the Sustainer of all that is. (Acts 17:25,28) “Every pulsation of the heart is a rebound from the touch of the finger of God.”—*Review and Herald*, December 2, 1890 paragraph 15. Isaiah 64:6 tells us that our best efforts are nothing more than filthy rags.
5. Read Proverbs 30:1-3,32-33. With all our limitations and dependencies, it is completely foolish to act arrogantly or to be proud. Imagine Lucifer being jealous and proud while being in God's very presence in heaven! And look where it got him!
6. It is important in understanding the message of this chapter to compare kingly messages from other ancient monarchs of the Near East. In their writings, there was never any mention of humility; there were no battles lost; they boast of their wisdom, achievements, and always of their military victories. Solomon himself is recorded as surpassing all the

kings of the earth in “riches and wisdom.” (1 Kings 10:23, *NKJV*; Ecclesiastes 2:9)

7. Read Daniel 4:30. Nebuchadnezzar II was another great example of one who thought he was very special. And look what happened to him! (Daniel 4:33-37)
8. While we do not know who Agur was, he certainly recognized that boasting about our human condition is completely foolish. The Hebrew word for *foolish* is *nabal*, and we remember the story from 1 Samuel 25 of the foolish man with that name.
9. As recorded in 2 Corinthians 11:18-33, Paul had some very incredible words to say to the church members who were boasting. What would there be left to say after a history like Paul's?
10. Read Luke 18:9-14. Be honest about your own attitudes. Are we more like the Pharisee? Or, more like the tax collector? Are we proud that we are Seventh-day Adventists?
11. We are born completely self-centered. A newborn baby thinks of nothing but his own needs. What does it take for us to recover from that attitude? Should we feel sorry for people who boast about themselves? Often, they have serious problems, and that is why they are boasting—to try to cover up those problems.
12. If we truly get to know God, shouldn't that completely wipe out the possibility of our pride and boasting? It should, but the story of Lucifer should make us think about it very carefully.
13. Think of the God who created the vast universe which we are just beginning to understand; and the God who created the universe sustains everything. It is His power that makes science possible. The laws which scientists use in performing their experiments are the laws written by God into the very nature of things.
14. Read Proverbs 30:3-6; compare Job 38-40:2. If we even begin to understand the incredible complexity of our universe, we must bow in humility before the God who is able to do all of that. We do not even begin to have answers to some of the toughest of all scientific questions.
15. A number of the world's most brilliant men spent years putting together the first nuclear weapons. By destroying a very tiny amount of mass and turning it into energy, they destroyed massive cities. But, imagine a God who can take His Own energy and compress it into matter. In other words, God can reverse a nuclear reaction!
16. Read Proverbs 30:7-9. These verses contain the only prayer recorded in the book of Proverbs. It is a prayer that might be good for us to ponder frequently. Why does the prayer begin by asking God to keep us from lying? As human beings, are we prone to cheating and lying? Surely, we must recognize that it does no good to try to lie to God because He intimately knows all the facts already. He knows every detail of our thoughts, our motives, and our actions. Surely, if we recognize all of these facts, we should bow humbly before Him. (Lamentations 3:29)
17. Read Proverbs 30:8 and Genesis 1:29. Even the Lord's prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 emphasizes the point that without God's gifts we would not even have food. (Matthew 6:11) We need to thank God for our daily bread.
18. It is one of the sins of the teenage years to question the wisdom of parents. Proverbs 30:11,17 should be compared with Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:2-3. The parents who give us life and care for us when we are totally helpless need to be respected. In fact, Exodus 21:15,17 tell us that the death penalty is appropriate for those who do not respect their parents.
19. Read Proverbs 30:12,20. Do we sometimes do some very bad things and then pretend like they never happened? Is that why confession of sin is one of the first steps in our return to God?
20. The Laodiceans lived in a very wealthy city. Laodicea had a medical school, banking and

business, and two large theaters. Water was piped right into the city. That was amazing in ancient times. They produced a type of black wool that was famous in their day. But, God knew them very well, and He revealed to John that they needed something much better than what they had—God’s eyesalve, gold, and white raiment. See Revelation 3:14-18.

21. Read Proverbs 30:13-14. Have you ever felt contempt for someone who regarded himself as superior to you? It is not pretty! Do we ever treat others like that? Do any of us have the right to feel superior to any of God’s other children? Aren’t we all truly siblings?
22. Read Proverbs 30:18-19. Agur mentioned just a few common things that are beyond our understanding. We still do not know why feathers work so well in helping birds to fly. We have a hard time explaining how some snakes can move so quickly across the ground. And perhaps, one of the greatest mysteries of all is how a man and a woman fall in love.
23. Agur went on to mention ants, rock badgers, locusts, and lizards. (Proverbs 30:24-28) Who commands those creatures to behave as they do? Did God program them to do what they do? It is interesting that Agur used the same word to describe their behavior as Solomon used in Proverbs 3:13 to describe human wisdom. And others used it to describe God’s wisdom in Job 12:13 and Psalm 104:24. Perhaps, one of the most important reasons why we say Solomon was wise was the fact that he recognized how ignorant we all are!
24. If our one most important task in life is getting to know God, how should we feel about His revealed Word? When we pick up a Bible, how should we feel?

We should reverence God’s word. For the printed volume we should show respect, never putting it to common uses, or handling it carelessly. And never should Scripture be quoted in a jest, or paraphrased to point a witty saying. “Every word of God is pure”; “as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 12:6.—Ellen G. White, *Education* 244.1.

The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld. He has unrestricted access to Him in whom all fullness dwells.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* 300.1. [Bold type is added.]

25. What does all this wisdom teach us about the plan of salvation? By looking to and following the example of Jesus Christ, we can be transformed. (*Great Controversy* 555.1; 2 Corinthians 3:18) We are totally incapable of making that transformation ourselves; we just allow God the time to do it in us as we study the Bible and pray.
26. The Bible Study Guide for Friday, March 20 says: “We need a substitute, someone who legally stands in our place and **whose righteousness alone is enough to make us right with God.**” [Bold type is added.] In light of what we have studied in this lesson, what is the role of a substitute? Can Christ’s righteousness make us right with God? How does that work?
27. God has designed our world so that it is a self-sustaining system. We breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide. Plants “breathe in” carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. It is a marvelous system. And we could give many other examples of our interdependence.
28. In light of what we have studied so far, do we adequately respect God’s divine wisdom and His creative power?
29. Wouldn’t we benefit from spending more time in nature especially with our children to discover some of the many ways in which God has blessed us?
30. We are told that God has two great books from which we are supposed to learn about Him: 1) The Bible and 2) The book of nature. Are we making adequate use of both?

31. How does the theory of evolution strike right at the root of our relationship with God? Could we believe in evolution and still correctly worship God on the Sabbath? Does a correct understanding of creation as depicted in Genesis 1&2 help us to more correctly worship God on the Sabbath? Would our children be better off if they spent more time in nature?
32. How different would our world be if everyone believed the lessons taught in Proverbs 30? What if everyone did an honest day's work and no one made any attempt to steal from another person. How different would society be if we all followed God's guidance in choosing spouses and then remained faithful to them?
33. How does a personal knowledge of God impact your human wisdom?
34. In light of this chapter, could you spell out in more detail what it means when it said earlier in Job 28:28, Psalms 111:10, and Proverbs 1:7, and 9:10 that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom? If we believe that God is the only true Source of wisdom and that He is willing to share that wisdom as we study His Word, shouldn't we hold the Bible in great respect? Does reverence for God begin with acknowledging His creatorship? Wasn't God's love expressed preeminently in His creation as well as in salvation?
35. There are not many direct statements about God in the Bible. First John 4:8,16 tell us that God is love. What other attributes do we know about God?

The Bible does not say God is forgiveness, even though he is forgiving; or that God is knowledge, even though he is all-knowing; or that God is power, even though he is all-powerful. All other attributes are, like facets on a diamond, radiant windows into the heart of God.—Timothy R. Jennings, M.D., *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2013), p. 22.

36. Read Ecclesiastes 7:29. If those words were true in Solomon's day, how much more are they true in our day?
37. So, what should we have learned from Proverbs 30? How many of the common social skills are addressed in this chapter? Why does there seem to be less and less reverence for God's truth? People who are misled by human perversions of the truth are described in this chapter as "'simple' or 'fools'. . . as gullible, irresponsible, empty-headed, inexperienced, drifting into temptation, and as not accepting discipline, rebuke, or correction." *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Proverbs, p. 146.
38. One of the best ways to learn about God is a careful study of nature. There are many wonderful things that human beings have discovered about God's creation. Solomon even suggested that we should "Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise." (Proverbs 6:6, *NKJV*) If there are important lessons we can learn from the ant, what about the multitude of other creatures that we can study?

The intelligence displayed by many dumb animals approaches so closely to human intelligence that it is a mystery. . . .What man with a human heart, who has ever cared for domestic animals, could look into their eyes, so full of confidence and affection, and willingly give them over to the butcher's knife? How could he devour their flesh as a sweet morsel?—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 315.3-316.1.

39. How much better off would our children be if they spent more time in nature instead of spending time with their noses glued to an electronic device?
40. Living this far from the tree of life, we are shriveled-up pygmies compared to Adam and Eve. And yet, God has promised us marvelous things. In fact, we could be the final generation that fully prepares itself for the second coming. Are we ready for that?

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