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Proverbs 10 - 30



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg explores the latter half of the Book of Proverbs, delving into chapters 10-30. He notes that although some sections were not written by Solomon, they still contain valuable insights and observations on human nature, wisdom, and faith. Gregg emphasizes the importance of maintaining a connection to God in both times of wealth and poverty, and warns against speaking ill of others. Ultimately, he encourages listeners to seek wisdom and guidance from a divine source amidst life's challenges.

Transcript

We've been on a survey of the book of Proverbs but we really have taken quite a lot of time in the first 9 chapters. And that is because the first 9 chapters are different than the rest. In that they are not simply a collection of miscellaneous proverbial sayings, but it is a sustained argument for the need to value and to seek and obtain wisdom that Solomon had given to his son, hoping that his son would love wisdom as much as he had come to love it.

And so, since that was not just a miscellaneous proverb, we actually went through it more or less verse by verse, but we're still in the midst of our survey. That which we've been through in the past several sessions was simply a breakdown of what the first major segment of the book contains, and that is a father's attempt to impart love for wisdom to his son, chapters one through nine. The next section of the book is the longest section, and it is chapter 10 through chapter 22, 16.

Now, I've referred to this as Solomon's notebook, which is I call it that because it seems that Solomon noticed things and jotted them down and wrote proverbs about them, and they don't seem to be organized in any kind of topical arrangement. It seems that he wrote them down just as they occurred to him, probably over a period of many years. And so it would appear that we have something like a notebook that Solomon kept of various points of wisdom that he observed and was able to distill into these small proverbs and short sayings.

Now, the reason I break it at chapter 22, verse 16, is because it seems that chapter 22,

17 through chapter 24 is another section which contains some sermons, primarily two sermons. One of them is longer and the other is quite short. The first sermon is chapter 22, verse 17, through most of or good section of chapter 24.

So 22, 17 through chapter 23 and through much of 24 up through verse 22 can be regarded as a single sermon. Once again, it's exhortations of wise men transmitted to his son. It's not certain that these are necessarily Solomon's words.

It says in verse 17 of chapter 22, incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, as opposed to your mother's and your father's counsel and law and so forth that he said so many times before in the first section. He was continually telling his son to listen to his father and mother's wisdom. Here, the advocacy is of the wisdom of the wise in general and therefore it may or may not be Solomon's section.

Solomon was not the only wise man in Israel and there's no reason to necessarily think that all of the proverbs were written by Solomon. In fact, chapter 30 apparently was not written by Solomon. And chapter 31 has the name of someone named King Lemuel, who very probably was Solomon, but no one knows for sure.

So it's not essential that we would say everything in the book of Proverbs is written by Solomon. Most of it is. It is largely a collection of Solomon's proverbs.

But there are these sermons, too, which, as I say, the first of them, chapter 22, 17 through most of chapter 24, is this exhortation of wise men in general, or at least to a son to listen to the counsel of wise men in general. The second sermon is the remainder of chapter 24, verses 23 through 34, and it, too, seems to be about wise men in general rather than just Solomon. It says in chapter 24, verse 23, these things also belong to the wise.

And then it would appear to be sayings of wise men who may or may not have included Solomon. This could have been other wise sages collected their sayings here. But we do get back to Solomon's saying specifically, at least in chapter 25.

And these things of Solomon in chapter 25 through 29 were collected by the men of Hezekiah, the king of Judah. Now, Hezekiah was a king, a descendant of Solomon, but many generations removed. I don't remember the exact number, probably 15 generations removed.

I'd imagine something close to it. But anyway, Hezekiah lived a long time after Solomon. But Solomon's sayings had been, I guess, either verbally or in a written form circulating, and Hezekiah thought it was a good idea to collect them.

And so he apparently appointed some of his men to seek out authentic sayings of Solomon and to make sure there was a good collection made. And so chapters 25 through 29, we read in chapter 25, 1, these are the proverbs of Solomon, which the men

of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copy. And some of them, of course, resemble or even identical to some of the Solomonic proverbs earlier.

And so, again, we have quite a few chapters here of Solomon's sayings. Then the last two chapters are kind of standalone chapters. They are not distinctly Solomon's, although, as I said, King Lemuel might be another name for Solomon.

No one really knows. But the writer of chapter 30 is a man named Agur, the son of Jacob. And he certainly is not Solomon.

And I've labeled this chapter, An Unpretentious Man's Observations. He is unpretentious because he doesn't claim to be one of the wise. In fact, he specifically says he's not.

In verse two, he says, Surely I'm more stupid than any man. Do not have the understanding of me. I neither learned wisdom nor have knowledge of the Holy One.

He's not claiming to be much. But he does make some observations. He gives this disclaimer in the first six verses.

And then in verses seven through nine, we've got what I call his prayer for mediocrity. Again, he's pretty unpretentious. He doesn't ask for much.

He says, Two things I request of you. Deprive me not before I die. Remove falsehood and lies far from me.

Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food you prescribe for me, lest I be full and dry you. And say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

I don't want much. I don't want to be exceptional. I don't want to be too poor or too rich.

Just give me a pretty uninteresting life. One that doesn't have too many challenges. And then the rest of the chapter, 10 through 33, would be just various observations he's made about life, including quite a few number sayings, which we won't get into, of course, right now.

We will another time. The last section of the book is chapter 31, which is womanly wisdom. It seems to be really the wisdom of a mother to her son.

The author says the words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him. So it sounds like his mother wrote this and taught it to him. So he has written it down.

Who King Lemuel is, is a bit of a mystery if it isn't Solomon. And if it is Solomon, it's still a mystery. Why is he called Lemuel? It could be a pet name that his mother gave him.

And so maybe that's why he called himself that in this chapter. But we know that in

Israel, the Northern Kingdom had 19 kings and the Southern Kingdom had 20 kings in their entire history. And none of them were named Lemuel.

So if this was a Jewish man and a king, Lemuel would have to be another name for one of the kings that are known to us otherwise by a different name. And then it would be Solomon. It's not a bad guess.

And so the first few verses, the first nine verses of chapter 31, his mother is warning him against wine and women, really. Don't abuse wine. Don't succumb to the temptation of women.

These things will blur your judgment. These things have destroyed kings in the past. Rather, just consider it your duty as a king to open your mouth for the speechless and the cause of those who are appointed to die.

Verse 8 says, open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. And then the last 22 verses, verses 10 through 31, are an acrostic song. Acrostic meaning it follows the Hebrew alphabet.

As many of the Psalms do. And even some of the prophetic writings like the book of Lamentations is an acrostic, an elaborate one. An acrostic psalm or acrostic poem is one that follows the sequence of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

In this case, there are 22 verses. Each one begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet.

You'll find in the book of Psalms, many psalms are 22 verses long. Some of them are 44 verses long. And there are some psalms that are 66 verses long.

When a psalm has only 22 verses, you're almost certainly looking at an acrostic that has one verse per letter of the alphabet. That is, each verse begins with the letter of the alphabet that's next after the previous one. If there's 44 verses in the psalm, then it's probably got two verses each for each letter.

And 66 verse psalms are three letters each. But psalm 119 has eight verses for each letter of the alphabet. This psalm at the end of Proverbs is 22 verses long.

And in the Hebrew, each verse begins with the next letter of the alphabet. And it's in praise of the virtuous wife. Or the King James says the virtuous woman.

Sometimes they say an excellent wife. The word woman and wife can be the same Hebrew word. In any case, it is talking about a wife and a mother.

And that she is virtuous or excellent is a matter of translation. Okay, so that is a summary of the book. You've got the nine chapters at the beginning, which we looked at in a measure of detail.

Then you've got these different collections. What I call Solomon's Notebook in chapters 10 through 22:16. A couple of sermons recommending the wisdom of the wise men in general, not just of Solomon.

In chapters 22 through 24, 22:17 through 24. Then you've got another collection of Solomon's writings, which Hezekiah's men collected chapters 25 through 29. And then you have those two chapters at the end that are not said to be Solomon.

Though it's possible that one of them was written by Solomon. All right, now we've finished our survey, finally, of the book. Why don't we use this time to look at chapters 30 and 31.

They're different than the others. Let's look at chapter 30. The words of Agur, the son of Jacob, his utterance.

This man declared to Ithiel and Uchal, who they are, we do not know. But they were the ones who heard him speak. In fact, they may even be the ones who recorded his words.

Or else it wouldn't make any sense to mention that it was declared to them. He might have been serving like a mentor or like a rabbi of some sort to these disciples of his. And his disciples may have taken down the essence of what he taught them.

He says, surely I am more stupid than any man. I do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.

And here he may be simply being self-deprecating in a Middle Eastern manner. Or he may be simply saying, I'm going to mainly talk about things that are over my head. I'm a bit out of my depth when it comes to the kinds of subjects I want to talk about.

And indeed, he does say, for example, in verse 18, there are three things which are too wonderful for me. Yes, for which I do not understand. You know, there are things that he's trying to figure out that he's contemplating, things he's observed.

He wants to point them out, but he really hasn't got them sorted out. So he's not claiming any final authority on any of the subjects he's talking about. He's not claiming that he's got this from God necessarily, or even that he's learned wisdom.

And he says in verse four, who has ascended into heaven or descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name and what is his son's name, if you know? Now, you'll note in the New King James, in the second to the last line, what is his son's name? The word son is capitalized. This is not, of course, the case in the Hebrew. There's no capitalization or lowercase in the Hebrew.

So that is the translator's preference. It's clear that the translators think that this is a

reference to Christ. Now, how do they reason that? Well, you know, who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established the ends of the earth? Obviously, God did.

And so some feel that he's making a reference to God here and saying, do you know God's name? And do you know his son's name? There are not very many places in the Old Testament that can be pointed to, to suggest that God has a son. And so those who look for such evidences in the Old Testament often come to this verse. And if you are among those who are defending the idea of Jesus being the son or that the Old Testament teaches a trinity or anything like that, almost always this verse is brought up.

Because the assumption is the reference to the one who has established the ends of the earth and bound the waters in his garment is a reference to God. And therefore, there is a reference to him having a son here. But I think that Agger is doing something different.

I don't think he's making a reference to God. I think he's asking a rhetorical question, not asking for real information. He's not asking, you know, who is God? I think he's saying, what man could possibly speak with the kind of wisdom that we need? No one has ascended into heaven.

And by the way, this who, if who in all these cases refers to God, why would you say who has ascended into heaven or descended? God, in fact, had not ascended into heaven. God lives in heaven. I think what he's saying is, what man is there who's ever gone up to heaven and come back? And what man is there who can speak with the authority of a divine knowledge of things? The who, I think, carries the idea of, is there any man who has ascended into heaven or descended? Is there any man who has gathered the wind in his fist? Is there any man who has bound the waters in a garment? Is there any man who has ascended to the earth? Of course not.

And he says, if there is such a man, I'd like to know who he is. I'd even like to meet his son. What man is there who could make such claims for himself? Or what son is there who can make such claims for his father? Is there anyone on earth who can speak from this kind of authority? Now, when it says, who has ascended into heaven or descended? We have, in John 3.13, either John is speaking or Jesus is speaking.

We don't know. The quotation marks are added by translators, and it is their guess whether Jesus is still speaking to Nicodemus in this verse or whether he finished speaking in verse 12, and now John is giving his own commentary. But in verse 13 it says, no one has ascended into heaven but he who came down from heaven.

That is the Son of Man who is in heaven. Now, what does it mean, no man has ascended into heaven? In the Old Testament, Elijah ascended into heaven, and so did Enoch, it would seem. Why does it say no one has ascended into heaven? I think this is perhaps a deliberate echo of Agur's words.

Who has ascended into heaven or descended? That is, who is there that is on earth today who has been to heaven and back? Who is there that you might consult if you want to know divine things? Is there any man that you could find who has ascended to heaven, gotten the information, brought it back down again? John is saying, well, there is one, Christ. He came down from heaven and ascended. He didn't ascend and then descend like Agur is asking, who has ascended and descended and brought down information? Well, Christ actually descended and ascended, but he is in heaven and he is the authority.

The point being, if you are looking for someone who can speak of divine authority, you can find no one equal to Christ in his qualifications. He has been to heaven. He came down from heaven.

What man might you find otherwise who could say that for himself? What philosopher, what religious leader can say I've gone to heaven and back? And therefore, I've brought down this information for you. That's what Agur is asking, I think, is who has been up to heaven and come back? Also, in Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses 12 through 14, this kind of language is found. In Deuteronomy 30, verse 11 and following, Moses says for this commandment, which I command you say it is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off.

It is not in heaven that you should say who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it down. Bring it to us that we may hear it and do it. Now, Moses said the commandments that God has given, you don't have to ask who will go up to heaven and bring it down for us.

He's saying God has already come down to Mount Sinai and giving you these things. You don't have to go to heaven and get them. He came down to where you are.

In fact, he says in verse 14, but the word is very near to you in your mouth and in your heart so that you may do it. The point being that in order to get divine wisdom and divine knowledge, either God has to bring it down or someone has to go up to where he is and get it from him and bring it down. That's the concept.

John says that Jesus has brought it down. Moses says that God has brought down Mount Sinai. No one has to ascend and no one can ascend to heaven and get this information.

No one else you might speak to who might have any claim to divine authority in their speaking can make that kind of a claim that they've gone to heaven and back. And that's what I think Agur is asking in chapter 30 in verse 4, who has ascended into heaven or descended? Is there any wise man on earth who can claim more than Agur is claiming? He says, I don't have the knowledge of God. I don't have wisdom.

How could any man claim to have such? Has anyone been to heaven and back? Is there

anyone who has the special insights and status and experience that God has who is bound the wind in their fists or set the bounds of the sea or establish the ends of the earth? Of course, God has done that. But is there any man who has done that? No, that's that's what the who is saying. I think it's not raising the question of who is God, but rather who among men might claim to have done the things that God has done, who might claim to have God's insights into things.

If you can tell me the name of a man like that, I'd like to know or his son's name would be adequate. Yeah, I'd love to know his son's name. If you know.

So I don't think he's trying to make an affirmation here that God has a son. And I'm not concerned to prove that God did or did not. As you know, I'm not sure that Jesus was ever called the son before his incarnation.

He was the word and the word was God. So he was clearly God. But whether that specific father son relationship existed before his birth, the Bethlehem, I we have no scriptural evidence to answer, nor does it matter to me.

But I'm saying that those who would seek to prove that Jesus was the son of the father, the eternal son or whatever before his incarnation usually like to use this verse. And I'm saying that, well, it might be that he was and that that can be proven from scripture. But this verse is probably not asserting that.

It is probably talking about men and saying, who among men could these things be said about? You know, a man like that, let me know his name or his son's name. If you know it, I'd like to talk to a guy like that. Verse five, every word of God is pure.

Now, what he's saying is I don't really know that I could speak for God. I don't even have the knowledge of God. But when God speaks, that's pure.

Probably saying, I'm not. I'm not that pure. I'm not sure my words qualify, but every word of God is pure.

He is a shield to those who put their trust in him. Do not add to his words, lest he reprove you and you be found a liar. So all of this section, verse one through six, may be his disclaimer that, you know, many people may look to me as a prophet of God, he says, or many people may see me as an oracle.

I don't claim that for myself. God's words, those are pure words. You can trust those words.

You shouldn't add to them. And I'm not claiming to be adding to them. I'm not claiming to have the wise man or the inspired man or to have the knowledge of the Holy One.

I don't claim to have ascended into heaven and come down again. I'm not that man. If

there's a man like that, you can tell me who he is.

I'd be glad to know, but I'm not him. And so I think what he's saying is that perhaps wise men like himself should keep themselves humble with the knowledge that God is wiser than they are. And that when they speak, they're speaking with the limited capacity that human observation can give to even the wisest of men, because God knows more than they do.

And so then he goes into that prayer in verses seven through nine, which we mentioned earlier. Two things I request of you, deprive me not before I die. Remove falsehood and lies far from me.

That's one thing. That is, I don't know if he means don't let me be guilty of falsehood and lying, probably. Or he might mean remove men who are false and liars from my presence.

If I could just live without having to deal with liars and hypocrites and fakes. He might mean that. Or he might mean from my own character excise all falsehood and all lying so that I'm an honest man.

Maybe both are his concern. So that's one of his two concerns. One is that he be without falsehood and without lies.

And the other is that he be without extreme riches or poverty. Feed me with the food that you prescribe for me. Just give me enough.

Give us this day our daily bread. You know, not a lot of extra and not any too little. 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.

Sometimes preachers have used this prayer of Agur as sort of a model of a good, you know, a good model for Christians to pray. Don't make me poor and don't make me rich. Just make me a good middle class Christian.

But the man is not really saying something that is a good model for Christians, because he's saying, I don't want to be poor because I can't handle poverty. I'll probably steal. I don't think I can handle that temptation.

I don't want to be rich because I'll probably forget God. You know, he doesn't think I can't handle riches or poverty. So don't give me those tests.

Don't test me with either. Now, Paul, you might recall, in Philippians chapter four, had exactly the opposite attitude. In Philippians chapter four, verse 11, he says, Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am to be content.

I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have

learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

So Paul is saying that through Christ, and we might argue that Agra didn't have the advantage of knowing Christ, because Christ had not yet come. But through Christ, Paul said, I can handle really any set of circumstances. I can be poor, I can be rich, I can be full or I can be hungry.

He says it's not going to change me. I'm not going to forget God if I'm rich. I'm not going to steal if I'm poor.

That's just that's not the way Christians behave. Christians are tested with both. Agra didn't have much confidence in himself.

And he could see how men had stolen or fallen to temptation when they were in reduced to low circumstances or had sinned in other ways, forgetting God when they had been rich. So he didn't want either of those things. Just keep me just keep my life more or less mediocre without exceptional tests of any kind.

As I said, it should not be that Christians would be afraid to be either poor or rich. And Paul was not afraid of either. He said, I've learned whatever state I'm in to be content.

I can be full. I can be hungry. You know, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I won't deny God. I won't steal because I trust God will give me the grace to handle in a way that glorifies him every circumstance that I'm in. Agra may be wisely for his time, seeing that people in extreme poverty or extreme riches who did not at that time have the Holy Spirit, as people do in the new covenant and did not know Christ in the way that we do.

Maybe he saw that that is just too much for a lot of people. And so he didn't want that. I don't know that we should pray that prayer ourselves, giving me the riches of poverty, although there's certainly nothing wrong with being just middle class.

But there's nothing really wrong with being rich or poor, either. All those states of life are proper for certain callings. And some people are called to be poor.

Some are called to be rich. The Christians should not say, God, don't let me be rich. Don't let me be tested in this way.

If, in fact, God has some calling in your life for you to be a distributor of his riches, a manager of a lot of his stuff, a steward of much. On the other hand, many of us may not be called to that. And we should probably have his attitude.

I'm not eager to be rich. It's a fine line between having the right and the wrong attitude

toward riches. Because, on the one hand, we should be very glad if God gives us the opportunity to help a lot of other people and makes us prosperous.

It is a ministry. My father-in-law had that ministry. He was a multimillionaire and he gave all his money away.

I don't mind being poor or middle class. It's a little less responsible position. But then, shirking responsibility isn't really that mature either.

It's just laziness, I suppose. Anyway, this man was a little lazy himself. He didn't want the extra burden to carry of poverty or of riches.

He wanted kind of an easy life in those respects. But he probably thought of himself as being very modest in this way. Any man who said, I want to be rich, given human nature and human attitudes toward riches, that's a rather modest position to take.

But he didn't want to be poor either. So, he was basically trying to avoid conflict, inward conflict over riches and the temptations that come with having too many or too few. Verse 10, he says, Do not malign a servant to his master, lest he curse you and you be found guilty.

I'm not sure exactly what scenario he has in mind here. Maligning a servant to his master, I don't know if that means you don't report on a servant's bad behavior to his master. It seems like that would be a responsible and good thing to do.

He might have in mind slandering, but I'm not sure why. I'm not sure in what circumstances a person would slander another man's servant. Of course, if we're talking about Christians being servants of God, this would be applicable.

But I don't know that that's what Ager has in mind. You know, Paul, when he talked about how some Christians eat all things and some will eat only herbs and some keep one day holy and some observe every day alike. He says, Don't you judge another man's servant.

To his own master he stands or he falls. And we could make this verse 10 apply in that situation that we don't malign one of God's children or one of God's servants because you could be found guilty too. Lest he curse you, that would probably mean the servant.

Though maybe the master would object and curse you and you'd be found guilty. It may be the idea. Let him that is without sin be the first to cast the stone.

Because if you begin to speak evil of somebody else, it may be that when those searchlights turned on you that they'll find something wrong with you as well. Not entirely clear exactly what Ager has in mind in verse 10 here. Then in verses 11 through 14, he has a series of statements that begin.

There is a generation that and the word generation is probably figurative. Generation would mean a family. The offspring of a certain man, if you take it literally, would be a generation.

But he may be thinking figuratively because when we talk about how when we look at Cain's offspring, seven generations of removal. One of them is the father of those who dwell in tents and tend sheep. And another one is the father of those who play musical instruments and so forth.

Well, obviously not everyone who tends sheep is from one family, literally. And not all people who play musical instruments are from one family. So to say he's the father of, it means he's the originator of that behavior.

And those who do that are kind of following his precedent. And therefore, the sons of that man, that's all who play musical instruments, are sons of this one man. It doesn't really mean that they're physically sons, but they may follow his example.

As sons follow a father's example. Remember, Jesus said, if you were the sons of Abraham, you would do the deeds of Abraham. That a person is considered to be the offspring of someone, figuratively speaking, if they are following in the example of that person.

As children follow in the example of their parents. And that being so, to say there is a generation of those who do this. Generation could be understood to be the sons of or the family of.

But in a figurative sense. There's a certain tribe, there's a certain kind of people who behave a certain way, is all he's really saying. Now, when you look at these descriptions, it's interesting how many of them resemble what Jesus said about the Pharisees and the scribes.

In verses 11 through 14, it says, there is a generation that curses its father and does not bless its mother. Jesus said the scribes and Pharisees, he said this in Matthew 15. They had come up with traditions that allowed them not to honor their father and mother if they didn't wish to.

Because if they had something by which their father and mother could be profited. That is, if they had some material thing that perhaps their needy parents could be benefited from. But they didn't wish to honor their parents with it.

Perhaps they had some hostility toward their parents for some reason. They could dedicate that thing to God and no longer help their parents with it. Jesus said that in Matthew 15 verses 5 and 6. That the Pharisees had connived ways to not honor their father and their mother through their religious hypocrisy.

And they might be considered to be like this generation that curses its father and does not bless its mother. In verse 12, there is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, yet is not washed with filthiness. Certainly Jesus indicated that the Pharisees were pure in their own eyes.

They thought themselves righteous, but they weren't. Verse 13, there is a generation, oh how lofty are their eyes. And their eyelids are lifted up as the proud look that God hates so much that it is mentioned in Proverbs 6. Verse 16, certainly the Pharisees were, Jesus described them as proud hypocrites.

That they would sound the trumpet before them before they gave alms to the poor and things like that to get attention. And to look good in the eyes of men. Verse 14, there is a generation whose teeth are like swords and whose fangs are like knives.

Who devour the poor from off the earth and the needy from among men. Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. So, although of course, Edgar doesn't have the Pharisees in mind because they didn't exist in his day.

But it's interesting that there is a certain kind of person. A certain generation, a certain family, a tribe who behave this way. Figuratively speaking, a tribe.

And Jesus pointed out at one time or another most of these things about the scribes and Pharisees. So, there are people who think they are righteous, who act righteous. But they are not clean at all and they are harmful and destructive to other people.

And verse 15 says, the leech has two daughters crying, give, give. Now, that's an interesting stand-alone statement. But it says the leech has two daughters crying, give, give.

And it doesn't identify two things. Instead, it talks about three and four. In fact, maybe this is how, maybe it's a number saying like this.

There are two, no three, no four. The leech has two daughters. No, there's three things that are never enough.

No, there's four that never say it's enough. It's possible that this is a more elaborate number saying where it's not just the three and four. But this starts out with two and works up to four.

You know, all the statements of verse 15 are talking about something that never really seems to get enough. It's never satisfied. And one of those things is the grave.

It just never seems to stop claiming its victims. People keep dying. The barren womb.

Now, the barren womb is never satisfied for a different reason than the grave. The grave

keeps feeding, but never seems to get enough. The woman who is barren hungers for motherhood, for having a child, but never is satisfied in an entirely different way than the grave is never satisfied.

The earth that is not satisfied with water. There doesn't seem to be any limit to how much rain can be absorbed into the earth. And fire that never says is it enough.

Generally speaking, as long as there's fuel, the fire will just keep going. It never says, OK, I've burned enough. I think I'll stop now.

The only way a fire is going to stop is if you quench it or if it runs out of fuel. It never just says, OK, I've eaten enough now. And so what is the meaning of these things? Well, he doesn't make application, but perhaps he intends for us to ponder and make application.

Perhaps he's saying there is something to be said for being content and that we not be like the grave or like a barren womb or like the fire that just keeps going until it has to stop. Maybe he's saying being satisfied is a good thing. These thoughts are not really developed.

He just gives a list of things and perhaps wants us to contemplate them and find some application to life. Verse 17 says the eye that mocks his father and scorns obedience to his mother. The ravens of the valley will pick it out and the young eagles will eat it.

In other words, honor your father and your mother. It's not likely that he's saying this will always be the specific faith of everyone who dishonors their parents. This is hyperbole.

Obviously, he would know of people who dishonored their parents and ended up being buried in a tomb where birds didn't pluck out their eyes. But the idea here seems to be that God's judgment on many people, including those who mocked their parents, is that they fall in the field of battle, perhaps, or they die in some other dishonorable way and are not buried. So that they're just eaten by the birds of the air.

There are three things which are too wonderful for me. Yes, four of which I do not understand. The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a virgin, or with a maid, with a woman.

Now, once again, it's not obvious that all these things have much in common with each other, except that they perplex him. They're too marvelous for him. He can't work it out.

He can't work out how an eagle flies in the air. They didn't know the laws of aerodynamics, probably any bird in the air, but the eagle seems, more than many, to be able to fly without effort. Because the eagle, of course, gets up and it just positions its wings and it just cruises without flapping its wings.

That probably was a huge mystery to ancient people. That a bird would flap the air, to them, without knowing aerodynamic laws, might appear to them to be similar to maybe a fish flapping and propelling itself through the water, and air being like water. I don't know how they saw it.

But when you see a creature with its wings out and it's not doing anything, it's just staying up there, that apparently perplexed him. The way of a serpent on a rock. Again, the way that serpents move is amazing, really.

I mean, even though we can describe it, if you study it, you can see that it's because their ribcage moves back and forth and they have these scales on the bottom that have one sharp edge facing backwards. And the way they move, they catch the ground and just nudge themselves forward, but they can go fast. It's amazing how they move.

But somebody who's never really been able to explain it could easily say, this is amazing, here's a creature with no legs, and it just moves along on a rock and doesn't seem to need legs. I don't understand that. The way of a ship in the midst of the sea.

It's possible, even, that all three of these things he's mentioned so far, an eagle in the air, a serpent on a rock, and a ship in the sea, one thing they have in common is they don't leave a trail behind them. He says, I don't know the way of it. He might be saying, I can't trace its path, because it doesn't leave footprints, it doesn't leave a trail behind it.

A snake on a rock, on the sand, the snake leaves a trail, but on a rock it doesn't. The bird as it flies through the air doesn't leave a trail, like a jet stream behind it or something to show where it's been. And a ship in the sea, likewise, after the wake of it has smoothed out, you can't really tell where it's been.

These things have that in common, but I don't know if that's the point he's wanting to make. He doesn't understand it. I don't understand it either.

I don't understand exactly what point he's trying to make from it. Except to point out that there are many things in nature that we all see on a regular basis, which defy explanation by our present knowledge. Which is what he said right from the very beginning, is he doesn't claim to know mysterious things, and these may be just examples of how people who think they know a lot should humble themselves and say, do you know how this works? And also the way of a man with a woman, with a virgin.

A virgin meaning a woman who's been courted. The ways of romance, the ways of love, they seem to be somewhat uncharted, like the way of an eagle in the air, like the way of a serpent on the rock. It's rather unpredictable.

People do things when they're in a courtship or when they're in a romance that are, maybe in some ways, inexplicable to others. And you do see people doing crazy things. People who aren't normally crazy in romantic relationships.

Man, can't they see the disaster they're courting here? They can't. But anyway, I don't know if he just gave all of this list in order to make this point about a man and a woman in a romance that is impossible to analyze as these other things he's mentioned. Then it says, this is the way of an adulterous woman.

She eats and wipes her mouth and says, I have done no wickedness. To say she eats is probably figurative. She's an adulteress.

Probably not talking about her eating, but her sexual misbehavior. But it's like a person who's eaten and cleans up the, you know, wipes the evidence off their face and claims that nothing has happened. So the idea would seem to be that a woman who's an adulteress will conceal it and deny it, which isn't an extremely profound observation, but he didn't claim to be profound.

That's just the point. He claims he's not profound. He's just making some observations.

Verse 21, for three things the earth is perturbed. Yes, for four it cannot bear up. And by this, I think he means there are some things that are unendurable in general.

Even the earth itself would find it appalling. A servant when he reigns. A fool when he's filled with food.

A hateful woman when she's married. And a maidservant who succeeds her mistress. These are situations I guess he has seen, which didn't turn out well.

In fact, they were, they turned out very unbearably. A servant when he reigns. I guess, I'm not sure what kind of situation that is.

Probably a servant who becomes the leader over the other servants of a household. Unless he's thinking about a servant who actually comes to be the master of a household. But I'm not sure how often that would happen.

It could be that he has seen such happen because the Bible in Proverbs it says, a wise servant will bear rule over a son who brings shame. So, apparently Solomon knew of cases where a man would leave his estate to his trusted servant. Rather than to his son who was a jerk.

And who he wouldn't trust with it. At one point in time, Abraham thought that Eliezer, his servant, was going to be his heir. It didn't turn out that way because Isaac was then born.

But it was not unthinkable that a rich man like Abram could die and have no offspring. And leave his entire estate to a man who was a slave previously. So, I guess though we don't have slavery in our country.

And we've never seen this kind of thing happen. I guess it was something that could be

observed from time to time. A man who is a slave comes into rulership.

He comes to be the owner. But perhaps because he is not cut from the cloth. Or doesn't have the experience of ownership and leadership.

He may end up being an oppressor. I'm not sure. God warned Israel that they should be careful not to oppress the strangers in the midst.

Because they should remember that they were strangers in the land of Egypt. Apparently, it's easy to forget. When you're a servant, you know how you'd like to be treated.

But once you're no longer in that state, it may be easy to forget. And it's a heavy place to get into. And begin to just exploit your new position over people that you should be more sympathetic toward.

What Agur has seen in this respect, I don't know. And he talks about a fool when he's filled with food. When a fool is not put to profitable labor.

But he's rich enough that he can just glut himself and be full and lazy. It just gives him opportunity to do harm. It's better to keep a fool busy in profitable labor.

Make him work for his living. A little bit of hunger might give him some wisdom. God said that he had caused Israel in the wilderness in Deuteronomy 8. He says, I caused you to hunger.

So that you might learn that man does not live by bread alone. But every word that comes out of the mouth of God. God apparently thought that causing Israel to hunger was a positive thing.

To teach them good lessons. A hateful woman when she is married. Now, the word hateful woman here could be translated as a hated woman.

So it's not clear whether she's a woman who is hateful. Or a woman who is hated by her husband. And either one might be true.

A woman whose husband hates her might end up reacting very negatively. But not necessarily. A woman who is hateful certainly would be intolerable to her husband.

And a maidservant who succeeds her mistress. Again, this would be like a servant who reigns. Someone who is brought up into the position that her owner.

A mistress is the owner of a maidservant. Like Sarah was the owner of Hagar. And there is a sense in which Hagar seemed to succeed Sarah.

Because Hagar got pregnant when Sarah could not. And got a little uppity about it. And

kind of despised Sarah.

And Sarah found it intolerable. And told Abram to get rid of her. So, these are the kind of situations that I think Hagar probably had observed some of this kind of thing.

And just that these situations are not going to work out. The earth itself is perturbed by these things. Then he says, there are four things which are little on earth, but they are exceedingly wise.

The answer of people not strong, but they prepare their food in the summer. Solomon observed that too in some of the Proverbs already we have seen. The rock badgers are a feeble folk.

Yet they make their homes in the crags. They are vulnerable to predators, but they know well enough to hide in the rocks. If they have no natural built-in defenses like an armadillo has.

Or a turtle has. And they are vulnerable. Then they will find a strong fortress for themselves.

It says, the locusts have no king, yet they dance in ranks. So, even with the leadership of one king over them. The locusts seem to manage to come like an army and conquer whatever is in their way.

And the spider, sometimes they say the lizard. Skillfully grasped with its hands and is in the king's palaces. Now, no doubt all of these small things are given as good examples for people.

Like ants are elsewhere in Proverbs. The ant prepares for the winter. It is wise.

It is small, but it has got a lot of good sense in it. And we probably should have that kind of good sense even if we are not that small. If we are vulnerable, we should find a fortress in the rock.

And Jesus, of course, we know is our rock and our fortress. And it says we recognize that we are vulnerable folk. Feeble folk.

That will make our homes in the rock. When we think we are strong, we are less likely to run to the rock. To run into the name of the Lord, which is a strong tower.

And find safety there. Being able to work without a leader. The locusts, they are self-organizing.

They don't have one king over them organizing them. People can do that too without a particular leader. If they will, they can find their place in society and fill a position and work cooperatively with others.

And then the spider skillfully grasped with its hands and is in the king's palaces. Not sure exactly what that is saying. Except that I don't know if it is because it is small enough to go unnoticed.

That it gets to be in the king's palaces. Or what point he is making about that. It says there are three things which are majestic in pace.

Yes, four which are stately in the way they walk. A lion which is mighty among beasts and does not turn away from any. A greyhound.

And the greyhound here, some translations say a rooster. The Hebrew word that is translated greyhound here is literally girded of waist. Which is obviously a strange expression.

And translators have guessed, apparently something that has a very narrow waist. Like a rooster or a greyhound. It is hard to know what this might be.

There are some of these passages because the Hebrew word is not easily translated. It is hard to know exactly what he is picturing. A male goat also.

And a king whose troops are with him. There are some people who just walk with an air of confidence. And animals too.

A lion, he doesn't turn away from anyone. A king whose armies are with him, he moves forward confidently. If you have been foolish in exalting yourself or if you have devised evil, put your hand on your mouth.

Now, put your hand on your mouth may mean, if your mouth is saying things that are wrong, it would be best to walk around from home so you don't talk. Don't say wrong things. If you can't control your tongue, just by controlling your tongue, then control it with your hand.

Do what you have to do to not say things that are ill advised to say. For as the churning of milk produces butter, and as the wringing of the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife. If you stir up the wrath of somebody else, you are going to have strife.

It is cause and effect. You churn milk, it is going to turn into butter. You wring a nose, it is going to bring forth blood.

You stir up somebody's wrath, you are going to have strife with them. There was a man named Hubert Lindsay who used to preach at UC Berkeley in the 60s and 70s. He got beat up a lot because he was very audacious.

He was a very in-your-face kind of preacher. He was there for years. He got beat up and cursed a lot, but people came out to hear him in the public areas of the university

because he was so outrageous.

But he was pretty quick-witted. I mean, he was pretty quick with answers to hecklers and things like that. For example, once a heckler said to him, Hubert, it takes an idiot to be a Christian.

It takes an idiot to be a Christian. And he said, you qualify. You qualify.

He was real quick with those. And once a heckler said to him, Hubert, prove to me the Bible is true. And he reached out and grabbed the guy's nose and twisted it and said, The wringing of the nose produces blood.

It proved the Bible is true. This guy was outrageous. He was a legend.

At UC Berkeley, he was equal to that university. But anyway, he was able to use this scripture. I don't know.

I'd say it's a good effect or not. But he was able to prove the Bible is true from it. Anyway, so much for Agger's musings.

And that's all they really are, pretty much, is musings. He doesn't really give us too much insight, but he does list things to contemplate, things that are stately in the way they walk, things that are small but wise, things for which the earth is perturbed and cannot bear up, and so forth. I think maybe his point was primarily just to say there's a lot of things to think about that we don't know.

And if we think we're wise, we shouldn't think so. We're not that wise. And that probably is all he's getting at.