

The Biblical Unitarian Podcast - by Dustin Smith, PhD

Episode 364—"Does Prov 30:4 Prove Jesus' Preexistence?"

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Introduction

I've made the argument in my videos that is the standard position among Old Testament scholars, namely, that Jesus Christ was not conscious and alive during the period of the Old Testament documents. Instead, God created all alone, by himself, and the Messiah was a promised figure, expected to descend from the line of Abraham, Judah, and David. Nevertheless, I am reliably informed by those who comment on my videos in an attempt to set me straight that the Old Testament does speak about the son of God, alive and well. The verse that gets pointed to is Proverbs 30:4, a passage that is never quoted in the NT to refer to Jesus.

This week's episode will look at Prov 30:4 to determine whether it refers to the preexistent son of God, Jesus Christ, in the Old Testament. We will look at Prov 30:4 in its context and ascertain what it meant to the original readers. Then, we will steelman the argument that the verse does, in fact, refer to Jesus as the son of God, in order to demonstrate why this reading is unlikely.

What is Prov 30:4 all about, and does it prove the literal preexistence of the son of God in the Old Testament?

Let's find out on this week's episode of the Biblical Unitarian Podcast!

1. A Close Look at Prov 30:4 and its Context

a. *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. Surely I am too stupid to be a man. I have not the understanding of a man. I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One. 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! (Prov 30:1-4)*

- i. Agur openly acknowledges his ignorance on four occasions
 1. Too stupid
 - a. Verb *ba'ar*; which is related the intelligence of animals, like cattle. As such, he is comparing himself to having the understanding of animals as it compares to human understanding.
 2. I have no understanding of a man
 3. I have not learned wisdom
 4. He does not have the knowledge of the Holy One
- ii. Agur then, in his self-professed ignorance, raises four questions:
 1. Who has gone up to heaven and come down?
 2. Who has gathered the wind in his fists?
 3. Who is wrapped the water in a garment?
 4. Who has established all the ends of the earth?
- iii. In Agur's line of questions, given in the context of his own acknowledgment of human ignorance, we should confine the questions to human beings.
 1. What man has gone up to heaven and come down? No one
 2. What human being can gather the wind into his or her power, into their hands? No one
 3. What human beings can gather water into their clothing?
Obviously, no one has that ability
 4. What man can say they created all the ends of the earth? Not a single human being.
- iv. The fifth and final question concerns who could possibly do these godlike things. Who could traverse the universe? Who controls the elements? Who

created the world? This would result in an obvious answer to the question: What is his name, and his son's name?

1. No one, of course.
2. Humans are aware that they are less powerful than the creator God. Therefore, they should rely upon him, which is exactly how the passage continues.
 - a. *Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar. (Prov 30:5-6)*
 - i. God's oracles are true and truthful. He is a help to those who trust in him. Those who alter his words are subject to rebuke and the label of a liar.
 - ii. Since no human being can perform the things of God, one should rely upon God for direction, moral formation, and wise teachings
3. For what it is worth, the only other reference to "his son" in Proverbs refers to a human father and his human son in Prov 13:24.

2. Could Prov 30:4 Refer to Yahweh and Jesus?

- a. Some have suggested that "his name" and "his son's name" in Prov 30:4 must refer to Yahweh and to Jesus.
- b. Here are the reasons why this interpretation is highly unlikely:
 - i. The order of the ascension and descending suggests someone on the ground first, going up to heaven to gain the wisdom, understanding, and secrets from God, and then descending afterward. To say that the God of heaven ascends and then descends doesn't fit well. This seems more likely to refer to a human being on the ground, with the implied answer of "no one."
 - ii. Jesus, in John 3:13, affirms this point of view.
 1. *If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:12-13)*
 2. No human being has ascended to learn the heavenly things and then descended, except the son of man. This is true of Jesus, the human son of man, but it wasn't true back in Proverbs.
 - a. Why? Because Jesus wasn't born yet.

- iii. Another reason why 30:4 does not refer to Yahweh is that Agur explicitly admits that he does not have knowledge of the Holy One in 30:3. If he does not have knowledge of God, then it is unlikely that Agur is going to tell us all about God in 30:4, and not only God, but God's son. To suggest that he both *does not* possess the knowledge of the Holy One and that *he does* tell us all about the Holy One in the next verse is a huger stretch that strains the text. It is much easier to see Agur noting the ignorance of human wisdom along with humanity's inability to do godlike things.
- iv. Jesus wasn't yet in existence yet.
 - 1. Jesus has a genesis in the womb of his mother (Matt 1:18)
 - 2. Jesus was begotten (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35)
 - 3. Jesus was the descendant of Abraham, Judah, and David (genealogies in Matt 1 and Luke 3)
- v. The LXX read the question in 30:4 as asking about his name and the name of his children
 - 1. *Tois tekvois autou*
 - 2. This means that the earliest Jewish view of Prov 30:4 was not about the preexistent son of God.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode!

Join us next week as we explore Revelation 3:14, a passage often pointed to in order to suggest that Jesus was the first created being in God's creation.

Please look forward to our next episode.

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