

Proverbs 30:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.

Analysis

The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough. The four insatiable things: sheol (שְׁאוֹל, the grave/realm of the dead), otzer rechem (עֶצֶר רֶחֶם, closed womb), eretz (אֶרֶץ, earth/land) never satisfied with water, and esh (אֵשׁ, fire) that never says "Enough!" (הֵן, הֵן).

Sheol appears sixty-five times in the Old Testament as the shadowy abode of all the dead before Christ's resurrection. Proverbs 27:20 parallels: "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied." Death is insatiable, claiming every generation without exception. The barren womb represents desperate longing for children in cultures where fertility equaled blessing and barrenness meant social shame (Hannah, Rachel, Elizabeth). Parched earth symbolizes drought-ravaged land crying for rain—constant Near Eastern agricultural anxiety. Fire's appetite for fuel is limitless, consuming everything flammable. Together, these four natural phenomena illustrate spiritual realities: human desire uncontrolled by wisdom becomes destructive, all-consuming, never satisfied.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelites understood barrenness as divine judgment or testing (Genesis 20:18, 1 Samuel 1:5). Prayers for rain dominated agricultural festivals; drought meant famine, death, exile. The Law promised rain for obedience, drought for disobedience (Deuteronomy 11:13-17, 28:23-24). Elijah's drought-bringing

prophecy (1 Kings 17:1) demonstrated Yahweh's sovereignty over Baal, the supposed rain god. Fire's destructive power was known through warfare (burning cities), sacrifice (consuming offerings), and divine judgment (Sodom and Gomorrah, Nadab and Abihu). These four images would trigger immediate, visceral recognition in ancient audiences, making the wisdom principle unforgettable.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How do these four insatiable forces (death, childlessness, drought, fire) help diagnose the spiritual condition of uncontrolled desire in human hearts?
2. In what ways does Christ satisfy what these forces represent: conquering death (1 Corinthians 15:55), bringing spiritual fruitfulness (John 15:5), providing living water (John 7:37-39), and purifying by fire (1 Peter 1:7)?
3. What legitimate desires in your life might be becoming insatiable appetites that rival God's place as your ultimate satisfaction?

Interlinear Text

שָׂאֹל	וְעֵצָר	בְּחֶם	אֶרֶץ	לֹא	שֶׁבֶעָה	מִיָּם
The grave	and the barren	womb	the earth	H3808	that is not filled	with water
H7585	H6115	H7356	H776		H7646	H4325
וְאֵשׁ	לֹא	אֶמְכָּה	הֵן:			
and the fire	H3808	that saith	not It is enough			
H784		H559	H1952			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 27:20 (Parallel theme): Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

Habakkuk 2:5 (Parallel theme): Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

Genesis 30:1 (Parallel theme): And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

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