

**THE DECLARATIONS OF
AGUR**

**FISTFULS OF
SPIRITUAL
GLEANINGS**

**THE WISDOM OF A
WISE MAN OF THE EAST**

PROVERBS 30

A TRIPLET OF MEN LED BY AGUR 1-5

The word of Agur son of Jakeh -the "load"(the message) "carried" (Hebrew *avmh*) This man (or) warrior made his declaration to Ithiel for Ithiel and Ucal. The message in the form of a declaration -hence the NIV "prophecy" was made to "Ithiel" with the intent that it be shared with "Ucal" also. 'Ithiel' means simply "God with" so this man was one who sought and practised the presence of God. Both knew 'Ucal' whose name means "swallowed"(by fire or sword or wrath). The message has special bearing therefore on those who are seeking to walk with the LORD and for those who have come through great trouble and serious incident or who are "angry with God". 'Agur' himself bore the name "**collector**" and although he confesses his poor past record of spirituality and devotion in v.3 it would appear that is the prelude to a change which he advertises in his "declaration". In "collecting" the hand is opened and closed with the thumb tightening to firm up the four fingers. **I have taken his seven "Three or four things" as "fistfuls" of "collected" topics which make up a valuable series of teachings on the godly state.** In each case the "fourth" lesson in the series is highly significant and helps impress and illuminate the main topic or lesson. Between the larger topics of Agur we are given a number of his important dictums of teaching on vital subjects. There are a dozen illuminating topics in all that Agur addresses.

AGUR CONFESSES HIS PAST FAILURES-HIS TESTIMONY 2

Surely I am "consumed"(as with fire or anger) **beyond any man.** He feels he is "exterminated"-consumed with personal anger Ezek 21.36, Isaiah 30.27 Psalm 79.5 or as in Psalm 90.4 by divine wrath-both can be true. He (was) like Paul who says "I am the chief of sinners. In fact when Paul speaks of "breathing out slaughter" his "fierceness" is exactly paralleled with the "brutishness" of Agur.

I had not the mediated understanding of Adam. Adam had the blessing of the LORD walking with him evening by evening in the garden giving him understanding. Agur did not walk with God. **I did not persist in learning spiritual wisdom and I was not experiencing first hand the view or knowledge of God Himself and holy people separated to God.** Hebrew *myvdq*

1. AGUR ON THE FOUR THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS 4

Earth water wind and fire are the four primordial physical powers acknowledged by the ancients. Here Agur asks questions about three of them. But he begins with a question which our LORD Jesus Christ put to Nicodemus in John 3.13

(1) Who has ascended up to heaven and will come down again? The perception is uncanny. It is as if this old question is picked up by Jesus as being absolutely the first and vital query to put to Nicodemus. It entails the power to transit from the realm of deity to the realm of humanity. It brings us back to the beginning when God could and did descend to be with Adam and returned to heaven on a daily basis

(2) Who has gathered the wind or Spirit in his fists? Hebrew *ngp* points to One so powerful that all the storms that afflict the earth he can hold back and rein in like a wild horse-grasping the ethereal and controlling the immense strength of natural elements with consummate ease. The text of Mark 4.39 supplies an immediate answer from the ministry of Christ. The deeper implication of "adding the Spirit" to his

possession and gift takes us to John 14.26 where this level of the query is answered by Jesus.

(3) Who has bound together the waters in a heavy night time robe? *In the darkness before dawn in Galilee Jesus walked the waters and bade them "Be still". The force of this question is "Who can bundle up the waters" for safety? cf 1Sam 25.29 The decree of God shows that this control lies with the LORD -Genesis 9.15*

(4) Who has established all the ends of the earth? *Who raised or restored to their height the extremes of the earth? The question may well relate to the former as the renewal of the earth after the flood relates to the withdrawal of the waters from off the surface of the earth. The earth ends at its poles and the wonder of the polar ice caps may well have been known 3000 years ago-for the story of their formation may have been folk memory at the time of Agur. The divided earth with its distant lands was also known to ancients of scripture (Genesis 10.25) This fourth question unmasks a man who believes in the deluge and understands judgment and reveals a person deeply interested in "big questions and out of this fourth and most important question relating to the LORD of history and his providences comes the query:-*

What is His name and what is His Son's name...for you will know (or) is it so that you know? *Either translation is accurate. Certainly revelation would make this clear in future time. But Agur is probing if Ithiel or Ucal have rumbled the Triune being and the concept of the "Son" which David also in Psalm 2.12 plainly grasped.*

2. AGUR'S DICTUM ON THE PURITY OF SCRIPTURE 5-6

*Agur knew the commandments of Moses (30.9) and perhaps even the psalms of David (cf Psalm 12.6) He was a student of the scriptures. He said **Every word of God is pure** (Hebrew *prx* of melted, refined and tested metal-and in particular of "gold"). So God's words were "golden". **He is a shield to those who flee for refuge in Him.** It is hard to avoid the view that Agur was familiar with the psalms of David. His statement here is virtually a "take" from Psalm 2.12 and 5.12 and is of a piece with Psalm 11.1. **Do not add to his words** in the form of legal and action commands (Hebrew *rbd*) **lest He chastens you and you prove yourself a "liar" or "deceiver"** (Hebrew *bzk* meaning "a stream that dries up and disappoints"). Several sects have taken in hand to re-write the bible and insert their own commands. One example is the so called "new world translation" of the Jehovah Witness organisation. The five man team was represented in court by Franz (the only recognised "scholar" who in answer to the question, "Can you translate that into Hebrew -the fourth verse of the second chapter of Genesis?" answered "No". He dropped out of the University of Cincinnati in his sophomore year. He had not been studying Theology. He later admitted being unable to translate even "one" bible verse. (Nov 24 1954)We can include this bogus translation among those classifying as "deceptive."*

3. AGUR'S PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL FOOD -TO ENABLE HIM AVOID FALSE LIFE-STYLES 7-10

Two things I pray from You, do not withhold them from me before I die. Remove far from me, noisy calamity or vanity or raging mischievous design and "false oracle". Give me neither poverty (Hebrew *vnr* meaning "to be in want") **nor "a build up of riches" or** (to be "happy rich" Hebrew *rv*[)

Break for me the (fresh) bread of my portion or pluck the (fresh) fruit of my food (This is co-ordinate with the fourth petition of our LORD'S pattern prayer.)

- (1) **Lest I become satisfied or full and make a habit of disavowal deceit** *Hebrew Piel of vjk* and say, "who is the LORD?" or
- (2) **Lest I become dispossessed of goods and steal covertly or**
- (3) **Lest I use the name of my God irreverently. Do not use the tongue boldly or slander a servant to his master**
- (4) **Lest he curse you and you become guilty and get punished.** *Hebrew mva* As he ages Agur desire the LORD to provide for him and he seeks "quietness" and also has learned like James the careful use of the tongue so that he does not occasion his relationship with others to be affected by mistreating people of lower estate.

(4) AGUR'S DECLARATION ON THE FOUR PERSONALITY TYPES 11-14

- (1) *The Melancholic. (Moody Melancholius)* **There is a generation or "contemporary" that continually curses his father and does not continually bless his mother** *The Hebrew verbs llq and Jrb are in the Piel repetitive. Here is the richest personality and at the same time the weakest. **Plagued with mood swings, critical negative revengeful** lacking in confidence. Analytic perfectionist gifted self-disciplined and industrious "One sour at home and successful abroad"*
- (2) *The Phlegmatic (Pussyfoot Phlegmaticus)* **There is a generation that is pure and bright in its own eyes yet has not washed itself from its own excrement.** *This type puts off till to-morrow what could be done today and is marked by a **lazy streak** and can prove a bit stubborn. On the positive side this is calm cool diplomatic and efficient type practical and agreeable enough "One that sits and sulks a bit but achieves a lot"*
- (3) *The Sanguine (Sparky Sanguinius)* **There is a generation, "How aloft their eyes!" and their eyelids elevate themselves.** *This type may lack discipline, be somewhat excitable, tend to exaggerate or manipulate and prove hot tempered. On the positive side enthusiastic compassionate stimulating and ambitious features will be recognisable. "One who storms at those he cherishes"*
- (4) *The Choleric (Rocky Cholericus)* **There is a generation whose teeth are swords and whose biting or molar teeth are knives for murder to devour the earth's poor and the abysmally poor from among mankind.** *Cold self sufficient domineering and sarcastic types with a cruel turn of phrase unsympathetic opinionated yet active energetic with strong leadership gifts and goal orientated. cf Amos 8.4 "One who gets what others lose"*

(5) AGUR'S DECLARATION ON THE VALUE OF A SOUL 15-16

- Life can "leech away". Man is born to death as the sparks fly upward. In his unique way Agur teaches the value of life by pointing to scenes where it is sadly wanting*
- The leech has two daughters "Give" "Give"** *These daughters have the same cry and deserve the same name. They are insatiable blood suckers and destructive of life.*
- There are three things that are never satisfied and four that do not say, "Enough!"**
- (1) **Sheol** *Here is the vacant chair and the weeping widow and her sad children. Death has entered. Solomon in Proverbs 27.20 stresses this unquenchable thirst of Sheol. Agur gives fair warning that death is 100% certain*
- (2) **A shut womb or girl restrained from bearing** *Here is the "Hannah" figure -the dearest barren Rachel-the woman feverishly calling on God to reverse her barrenness. The "closed womb" is indicative of a prejudiced future. Who will inherit? What of old age? Let's pray to God!*

(3) Land not satisfied with rainwater *The third picture is of a mid-east drought-famine has taken hold-the land languishes in the vein of Habakkuk, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom neither shall fruit be on the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail; and the fields yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls...yet I will rejoice in the LORD .What joy when the rainbow sits again amid the clouds and the land receives the "former and latter rains!"*

(4) And fire that (never) says "Easy" *Fire swirls through village after village when invaders strike and fire starts surreptitiously and burns the crop and trees and homestead. Afterward all is still. Hope lies in ashes.*

Life is so precious. It is vital to live godly and pray for the salvation of souls.

It is fundamental that we grasp the threat to "life" is sin unto death, only the "New Birth" build the church as natural birth builds the family , no provision of the word of God results in fruitlessness and death; and passion and anger that ruin so many lives.

(6) AGUR'S DICTUM ON "HONOURING PARENTS" 17

The eye that jests or "speaks scurrilously" (by silent gesture) concerning father and despises obedience to mother -the ravens of the valley will dig it out and the sons of the eagle will devour it.

Agur is warning that gross carelessness of parents will ironically result in nemesis. Carrion birds will deal with the earthly remains and the brood of vultures employing habits well and truly learned from their respected parents will despatch the earthly body of the one who despises his parents.

(7) AGUR'S DECLARATION ON PERSISTENCE -THE PATH AND THE LOVING FAITHFULNESS OF GOD 18-19

There are three things which are too wonderful or miraculous for me and four which I have not grasped by personal experience *Hebrew [dy*

(1) The way of the eagle in the heavens

(2) The way of the snake upon the sharp rock or rocky edge.

(3) The way of the ship in the heart of the sea and

(4) And the way of the young man winning a maiden. *In explaining these*

*"wonders" one has to say that Agur is quite clearly by his own confession no bird-handler or snake charmer and it does not appear that he is a skilled sailor for that matter nor would it appear that he has been married if "winning a bride" is something of a miracle in his eyes. Had he found the formidable task of investing every effort in the woman of his dreams came to grief once and again in face of a more ardent suitor and given up the chase? Second, one should be advised that the Hebrew word Jrd which is used in each of these phrases carries vital significance. It means "to tread along" or to pound the path" from which I think we can say that in each of these wonders there is some considerable **persistence** required. The eagle has to learn from that first fall from the nest to use of the air currents and preening of the all important feathers that unique skill of mounting into the heavens like no other bird can. The snake must persist inch by inch in moving on dry rock and climbing the steeps over sharp rocks. The ship that sails by the stars must tack slowly along its path and the suitor must court his maiden with utmost devotion. Thus what at first seems a miracle reduces to a labour of love and a skill that is developed by assiduous practise. It would be so easy for the eagle to give up-especially when it comes to that time when feathers fall off and it has to live through "bird-depression" as we might say. The story is told in Psalm 103.5. The snake too could slither around in the grass but it*

develops its muscles by exploits not by rest and ease. The ship will convey no cargo nor get the prize of golden merchandise unless it climbs through the heaving waves of the sea. The youth who proves unfaithful to his dates will lose the hand of the maiden. He too must sacrifice everything to win his fair lady. Each of these four puts in huge effort to achieve their goal and where Christ and his church symbolised by the "fourth" picture are concerned the cross no less is the standard for the saint as it was the demand the Saviour made upon Himself. Personal experience is the touchstone in every case-and without this "all too wonderful" experience of marriage Agur will have to be content to dream. Without being prepared to sacrifice everything like the eagle dropping out of the nest and falling on its devoted parent or the snake hazarding the precipice for its hissing brood or the sailors amid tumultuous seas for desire of that abroad or the suitor hazarding all for a bride there is no understanding of "the way". "The way" demands the faith which trusts the eagle mother; the faith which for the snake is the tree in the crag and for the ship is the starry heaven and for the beloved is the love that places itself on a cross-to show how firmly we are held in His affection..

(8) AGAR'S DICTUM ON DENIAL OF SIN 20

Similar is the manner of the woman of adulteries. *Such a woman hardened to her life style pursues her trade day and night. Hers is a steely persistence in moral evil. She eats and wipes her mouth which being interpreted means she experiences oral sex and cleans up afterward as a routine. And says "I have attempted Hebrew [p meaning "I made no preparation" yet she set herself in the way or prepared her house no deep moral and spiritual evil (Hebrew *ma*) yet adultery is visited with the penalty of death because it is so gross in God's eyes.*

(9) AGUR'S DECLARATION ON MATTERS THAT DISTURB THE BODY POLITIC 21-23

Under three things the land is provoked to anger or irritated & disturbed Hebrew *zgr* And under four it has not the prevailing power to bear up.

(1)(When it) is under a servant because he will be reigning into the future *No nation can continue to resist irritation and anger when in place of a weak monarch one of his entourage effectively becomes monarch. When the rule of a nation is subverted a corrective must be sought*

(2)And (under) a fool when he will go on sating himself with food *When the Fool looms large in the land one must expect his downfall. The Hebrews associated the word "fool" with godlessness and self-regard. It may be that Agur was very familiar with the Nabal of 1 Samuel 25 and is making him an object lesson to others lest they adopt a life style of excess.*

(3)And (living under) a hate producing woman when she has married herself to a husband *The Niphal of the Hebrew verb "to marry" means that she has by forwardness gained a husband but her union with him and all her ways are marked by hate-filled living. Hatred then spreads like a canker and polarises the community. Ultimately as in the case of Jezebel such a person must be brought to book*

(4)And when the maidservant dispossesses her mistress *The process of displacement of a wife by a concubine is mirrored in the Genesis 16 default of Sarah who proposed that her husband Abram partner Hagar -her handmaid-for the purpose of bearing a son. Agur -who knew the psalms and the Law of Moses, would have known this story well. In the event the love of Abram for Sarah was not prejudiced or*

lessened although it was compromised. Besides it was not so much Hagar as Ishmael who caused the family rift though Hagar may have featured in the background and so scripture says, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son"

(10) AGUR'S DECLARATION ON SPIRITUAL BEGINNINGS 24-28

This of all the eight lessons of Agur is perhaps the most stunningly interesting and also has brought him to prominence with his biblical audiences over the ages. A children's' evangelist from Southport by the name of Arthur Greenwood Merseyside produced a fifteen page tract printed by the Eastern Printing Press Liverpool on these verses 25-28 and entitled it "Clever stick, Helter Skelter, High Flyer and Interloper. I have been so taken by Arthur's imaginative names for the little creatures that I am using them in the present section of this commentary on "Proverbs" which may at some stage warrant separate issue.

THERE ARE FOUR THINGS WHICH ARE LITTLE THINGS OF THE EARTH. *The Hebrew ׀ףק suggests both "little" and "cut off". In each case they live separated lives. So should the people of God. They are wise beyond the wise. Their wisdom enters into the "When" "Where?" "Why?" and "How?" of sustaining life*

(1) Clever stick. The ants are a people not splendid & majestic or firmly protected or heroic. *Our writer is not interested that greenflies are their cows or any other aspects of their incredible industry than their preparation to sustain their lives. Hebrew ז[**Yet they create and prepare their food in the summer** we learn from them to seize the hour-they are tiny opportunists-every one of them. In matters of the gospel they teach us "Now is the day of salvation. Today while you hear His voice-harden not your hearts".*

(2) Helter -Skelter. The conies are not a people with strong bodies and they make their homes in sharp rock fissures *Hebrew []S These little rock badgers whose habit I have watched with fascination along the margins of Galilee at Horvat Minnim near Tabgha. They are so readily frightened and I remember them scurrying off "helter skelter" into the crevices of old basalt ruins leaving just one brave look-out to advice when it was safe to adventure out again. They teach us the "Where" of safety. Like them we are not able to sustain our lives from the predators of sin and death unless we hide in the Rock that is Christ. Augustus Toplady wrote that lovely hymn "Rock of Ages" on a playing card as he took refuge in a rock cleft during a storm in the West Country. Its lines direct us as to where we are forever safe.*

*Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee
Let the water and the blood from Thy riven side which flowed
Be of sin the double cure; cleanse me from its guilt and power.*

(3)High-Flier. The locusts have no king but they all (he) going forth goes forth in divisions *The text is grammatically perverse. There "they are" -the "he" that goes in bands. They display absolute unity and each is a model of pin-point location. They are seen as many and yet the verb to "go forth" is put twice in the singular as if they go as one. They are utterly united yet in divisions. They follow some unseen order. The Hebrew literally reads "He going in bands goes in divisions or bands" It is like that with Christians. The "Why?" of unity and the "Why?" of ordered witness and warfare and the "Why?" of sustained Christian life and growth are to be found in the guidance of Christ through the Holy Spirit.*

(4)Interloper. The (poisonous) lizard again and again lays hold or takes hold with its hands and it is in the palaces of kings. *Such as we who have sinned and proved deadly to our king should not be admitted to his courts but precisely on account of the*

death of Christ which was and is the way in our first relationship with Him and in all our dealings with him-like the lizard we must constantly cling to what He has done and by faith we will arrive in the beautiful place where Christ is. An "Interloper" as to feelings and our state but kings sons as to our standing by faith in Him who died for us.

(11) AGUR'S DECLARATION ON CONQUEST AND OR VICTORY 29-31

There are three things which make their way well from slow pace *The idea is that they can accelerate speedily* **and four things which go-on adding or pursue from doing well.** *They can continue to increase and hold speed*

(1) A lion which is mighty among wild beasts and it will not turn from the face of any. *Here is both the courage and the immense pace of the lion. It first stalks and then it increases momentum and goes flat out in pursuit of prey. It conquers as it puts everything into it and is assured of victory. It does not stall for lack of courage.*

(2) A warhorse of loins (or) a wrestler (or) a greyhound. *The Hebrew רַרְיָז (greyhound) is linked to מַיְתָם (loins) and western commentators favour the warhorse and the wrestler is also suggested for his leg and stomach muscles-but I will stay with the rabbinic scholars because the greyhound has the acceleration that neither of the others has and its pursuit of the rabbit is sustained until it obtains its quarry. The greyhound has massively developed thigh muscles which give it acceleration and pace and ensure it outruns its lesser prey.*

(3) A He goat. *The "He goat" is fierce as I have occasion to remember. Once in Co Tyrone one such visited with us in the afternoon and was determined to take up residence on the lawn. I was equally determined the animal was to find other distant pastures. Armed with a stick I set about teasing it away but to the "tee hees" of my wife and the consternation of our boys the animal reared up on its hind legs and challenged me head on. I made a calculated withdrawal and was gratified when a farming friend Irwin Craig arrived to save the day. He grappled the animal to the ground tied its legs and took it off like the scapegoat to a place from which it never again returned. I had no doubt that if I had run -and I could have managed a good pace for some time- this lusty fellow who was used to the terrain would have cornered me ere long and the battle would have been over. The He-goat is a natural conqueror*

(4) A King with troops. *The Hebrew translated "troops" is no such thing. The word is מַיְקֵלָא which Jewish interpreters claim is formed from the words "Not" and "arise" and therefore means "None will rise" against him may also be rendered "the strong or heroic one rising". The Arabic word form to which Gesenius traced the word means "the people". So" the king with His people" goes on majestic. The king in this case who has the love and support and following of his people would go on well. I return to my own understanding of the Hebrew מַיְקֵלָא "Mighty God(or) Hero"" rises" and add to that " with his people" and we have something vastly speedier and a booty greater than any lion or greyhound ever gained. Here is the Risen returning LORD speeding from the throne of heaven with his people to take his servants home. This is the final majestic sight that Agur lays before us. For his part Agur may have had such thoughts of David who was so beloved and whose psalms he quotes and who was both fleet of foot and full of courage and lived victorious amid turbulence. The final example of this principle must however be our LORD Jesus Christ in his glorious victory.*

(12) AGUR'S DICTUM ON PRIDE 32-33

If you have been a "fool"-a Nabal-in having lifted yourself up proudly in the past or if you have meditated a plot or muttered dissention put your hand on your mouth. *The enemies of David were dealt with by Solomon as recorded in 1 Kings 2. The context suggests Agur is a man deeply aware that "the day of reckoning" had arrived for the King's enemies. The king in the midst of his people had not only come to be crowned and honoured by his people-he had come to right wrongs and to do judgement. It will be even so when our LORD Christ returns again. For as the pressing or churning or separating of cream produces butter and the pressing and wringing of the nose blood so the pressing or squeezing or churning of anger produces strife contention or legal action. Agur's last word is to disabuse his hearers and readers of any notion of engaging the king's anger and risking contention in the shape of the threat to one's life or the threat of legal condemnation. The final danger which runs in parallel to this dictum is the "day of judgement" where all who have provoked the LORD by revolt and rebellion and failure to repent will appear on that great day. Agur advises the fool to turn from his foolishness and scripture advises the sinner to turn from his unrighteous ways and seek the LORD while he may be found "for God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by "this Man"(Jesus) whom he has ordained, whereof He has given assurance unto all men in that He has raised Him from the dead."*(Acts 17.31)

CONTENT REVIEW

Thus commencing with his "testimony" and confession of personal failure Agur moves to settle his declaration on four great theological questions. He proceeds to declare the purity of scripture and shows us the beginning of his prayer life as he seeks a daily portion from the LORD to sustain him. His declaration takes its natural course through the basic personality types of the human race from which he shows them all to be flawed. Nevertheless he does not lose sight of the value of a soul and of the first base of training in godliness-the home-where a person learns to honour his parents. The teacher goes on to state that "the way" is one of Love. He moves to show we just can't deny sin and its total corruption for we see it in the body politic again and again as in our own lives. So the means and method of salvation are affirmed and the way of victory set out for our instruction as we tread the way of the pilgrim till the King comes who is LORD and judge of all. A finer piece of work on the spiritual life of similar compass and comprehensiveness would be hard to find in all literature. Well might Solomon include it as his work comes to a majestic finish.

FINIS