

## **BOOKLET SERMON No.3**

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# **THE WORDS OF AGUR (AND THEIR PLACE IN WISDOM)**

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- Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Scripture are from the New King James Version.
- I often type words in capitals for EMPHASIS. You will notice it occurring in the expression of my own thoughts AND in quotations.
- All my comments and opinions are given from my viewpoint as a Christian who believes that the text of the Holy Bible, as originally given, is the Word of God. My opinions are based on my understanding of God's opinion as expressed in the Bible and I offer them with good intention without any will to cause offense to anyone holding a different opinion. They are offered in the hope of shedding light and providing help to anyone open to receive it.
- The text of this booklet would be too lengthy if I typed out in full every Scripture referred to, but you will miss much of the message if you do not turn to, and read, each of the Scriptures concerned.

## THE WORDS OF AGUR (AND THEIR PLACE IN WISDOM)

### INTRODUCTION

This introduction is a little bit lengthy, but I believe it is necessary.

It would be difficult to over-emphasize the importance of WISDOM. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get WISDOM. And in all your getting, get UNDERSTANDING. Exalt her, and she will promote you; she will bring you honour, when you embrace her. She will place on your head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory she will deliver to you” (Proverbs 4.7-9). We get some idea of how many ingredients combine to produce WISDOM when we read, “To know WISDOM and INSTRUCTION, to perceive the words of UNDERSTANDING, to receive the instruction of wisdom, JUSTICE, JUDGEMENT, and EQUITY; to give PRUDENCE to the simple, to the young man KNOWLEDGE and DISCRETION – a wise man will hear and increase LEARNING, and a man of understanding will attain WISE COUNSEL,” (Proverbs 1.2-5”).

We must, however, learn that there are TWO KINDS OF WISDOM and TWO SOURCES OF WISDOM. Starting with a question the Word of God, in the following verses says, “Who is WISE and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of WISDOM. But if you have BITTER ENVY and SELF-SEEKING in your hearts, do not BOAST and LIE against the truth. THIS WISDOM does not descend from above, but is EARTHLY, SENSUAL, DEMONIC. For where ENVY and SELF-SEEKING exist CONFUSION and EVERY EVIL THING are there.

But THE WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE is first PURE, then PEACEABLE, GENTLE, WILLING TO YIELD, FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS, WITHOUT PARTIALITY and WITHOUT HYPOCRICY” (James 3.13-17)

You can see, by the number of words I have put in capitals, that these verses make a very important statement!

When we are exhorted to “incline our ear to WISDOM” and “seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasure” (Proverbs 2.1+4) we are being directed toward “THE WISDOM THAT IS FROM ABOVE” with all its graces and benefits. The exhortation comes with the assurance that “The Lord gives WISDOM” (Proverbs 2.6). We can do without the wisdom that is “demonic”, with all its churlishness and drawbacks. We do well to remember that “God has made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1 Corinthians 1.20).

Take time to read Job 28. There you have confirmation that, concerning WISDOM, God “knows its place” (v.23), “prepared it” (v.27) and “to man He said, ‘Behold, THE FEAR OF THE LORD, THAT IS WISDOM, AND TO DEPART FROM EVIL IS UNDERSTANDING’” (v.28)

Much more could be said on this IMPORTANT SUBJECT, but let me conclude the introduction by saying that WISDOM ENABLES YOU “TO UNDERSTAND A PROVERB and an enigma, THE WORDS OF THE WISE and their riddles” (Proverbs 1.6). This is exactly what we are about to attempt in this study.

AGUR was a WISE MAN. It was his privilege to write a chapter of Scripture. As I read **PROVERBS 30 (the chapter Agur wrote)** I detect messages on **14 SUBJECTS** (spiritual messages and practical messages, messages about people, messages about nature and messages about God).

If God gave you the opportunity to write a chapter of Scripture, with God helping you in the same way as He helped everyone who had this privilege and responsibility, WHAT WOULD YOU WRITE? What would be the important messages you would want to give. Knowing that many people would read what you had written, what would you be most anxious for them to know?

This is not a frivolous question. Many people do not read the Bible, but they watch your life (if you profess to be a Christian). What messages are you sending them? Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, **“You are our epistle written in our hearts, KNOWN AND READ BY ALL MEN”** (2 Corinthians 3.2). As you live your life in front of believers and unbelievers THINK CAREFULLY and LIVE MEANINGFULLY as you, by your words and actions, record the messages you wish people to receive.

### **THE WORDS OF AGUR**

(In the following paragraphs the verse references are to Proverbs 30)

Little is known about Agur, but I assume, from the inclusion of his words in the book of Proverbs, that he lived around the same time as Solomon. He was a wise man and, as is typical of wise men, he could talk with confidence on a wide range of subjects (like Solomon - 1 Kings 4.29-34).

He did not have a large congregation when he uttered these words. According to v.1 there were only two people in the congregation! Don't let it worry you if there are not many people paying attention to your words. Millions of people have read Agur's words down through the years.....and we are studying them now. You never know how many people pass on to others the things you say.

Let's look, briefly, at the things Agur refers to in his chapter (things he thought to be important for us to know). In looking at them I will tell you what I see in his remarks. You may agree completely with what I say or you may agree only in part. You may see more than I see or you may see something entirely different, but I believe the study will be beneficial. As I comment on the subjects Agur raises I will say

just a few things on each subject, then I will speak more fully on one subject in particular that I think is of particular importance.

He talks about:

### 1. HIMSELF (vs. 2-3)

Often, when you speak about the things of the Lord you have to give personal testimony as to your relationship with God and your experience of His effect on your life. Agur wants us to know that when you speak about yourself you need to do so with HUMILITY.

Of himself he says, "I am more stupid than any man" (v.2). Wise men know how much they do not know, so they remain humble.

"I never learned wisdom" he says (v.3). He was not an academic!

"Nor have knowledge of the Holy One" (v.3). He was not a theologian! Nevertheless we will discover that he knew a lot about God, but he was conscious that there was so much more to know. "now I know in part" Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13.12 ("but then I shall know just as I also am known" – what a great prospect!).

Do not praise yourself! "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth, a stranger and not your own lips" (Proverbs 27.2). "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2.3). Scripture gives such good advice!

PRIDE is possibly the cause of original sin (in Satan – Isaiah 14.12-15, and in us – Genesis 3.1-7).

### 2. GOD (v.4)

As far as Agur is concerned God has no comparison! God has done, and will do, what no one else could do. This is the God of Scripture! God asks, "To whom will you liken Me, and make Me equal and compare Me, that we should be alike?" (Isaiah 46.5). Read Isaiah 45.18 + 22-23 and 46.9-10.

Agur even knew that God has a SON! – through a misunderstanding of Deuteronomy 6.4 ("Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE") the Orthodox Jew still has difficulty with this truth, but Agur knew it way back then!

### 3. THE WORD OF GOD (vs. 5-6)

What a privilege it is to have the Word of God! What amazing benefits flow from it (Psalm 119. 9, 11, 18, 89, 93, 97-101, 165 etc.). What great things can happen when we obey it! (Psalm 1)

#### 4. PRAYER (vs.7-9)

We are exhorted to pray “always” (Luke 18.1). We are told to pray “in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6.18). We are to pray “fervently” (James 5.16).

God answers prayer (Philippians 4.6-7). What an amazing RESOURCE prayer is!

Agur had priorities in prayer. He knew what he was doing when he placed two things in particular on his prayer list (vs.7-9). Over the years I have noted, in the Scriptures, special prayers people have made for themselves, and I have added them to my daily prayer list. Agur’s prayer is one of them.

He did not wish to be either POOR or RICH. Both have dangers! He wanted to live at the level God decided to be best for him. This is a valuable lesson to learn (Philippines 4.11-13) (Hebrews 13.5 Amplified Version).

He did not wish to be FALSE. Why should we deceive others or ourselves (Job 31.5-6 and Galatians 6.3). NO one ever wishes to have dealings with a deceiver? You do not know where you are with them. As the Scriptures say, “The folly of fools is deceit” (Proverbs 14.8).

LIES and LIARS are on the list of things God HATES (Proverbs 6.16-19).

#### 5. MEDDLING IN OTHER PEOPLE’S BUSINESS (v. 10)

Avoid it. You do not know all the facts. You may well end up being very embarrassed.

You should be particularly wary of making accusations against anyone who in a disadvantaged position (i.e. maligning a “SERVANT” to his “MASTER”)

#### 6. BEING AWARE OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE WORLD (vs. 11-14)

Do not live in a bubble! This wise man paid attention to what was happening in the world around him. He sees how people are behaving and I think he is disturbed. He speaks in the PRESENT tense (There IS a generation).

We are called to live relating to the current condition of the world. As we take the gospel and the full truth of God to the world we need to take in terms they can understand.

Back in the days of David, as his supporters increased in number, a group of men from the tribe of Issachar joined his army. It is recorded of them that they “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chronicles 12.32). They were numbered among the men who “came to

David at Hebron to turn over the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 12.23). So it could be said of them that:

- They were ready for action
- They knew what the people of God had to do, and,
- They were fulfilling the will of God according to the Word of God

We need to be the same!

The importance of “understanding the times” is reinforced by the Lord’s rebuke to the Pharisees and Sadducees as we have it in Matthew 16.1-3. Had they known and understood Daniel’s prophecy (Daniel 9.24-27) and especially what it says in verse 26, “after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself”) they would have known that they were living in the days when the Christ would appear and be put to death. How different their actions would (or should) have been had they known that!

Let us not fall into the trap of the Pharisees and Sadducees. May we study the Scriptures and let God reveal to us where we are in relation to the fulfilment of God’s plans and purposes.

Agur was not pleased with what he saw around him. How are we reacting to what we see around us today?

#### 7. THINGS YOU CANNOT CHANGE (vs.15-16)

There are people who, of themselves, are NOT INCLINED TO GIVE. By nature their impulse is to TAKE (like leeches). You cannot change leeches. You have to learn to take precautions when you come into contact with them.

In the course of your life you will encounter many things you cannot change (like those mentioned in verse 16:

- The GRAVE – we are mortal. Death is a certainty (unless the Lord returns while we are still alive). You have to be prepared for it personally and you need to be ready for the inevitable changes caused by the death of others.
- The BARREN WOMB – it is natural for most women to wish to have children. To have that desire and not be able to fulfil it can be an immense burden. Coming to terms with such a circumstance is an extremely difficult process.
- DROUGHT – Here in Australia we understand something of the hardship it causes.
- Fire – brings most things to ashes. We know something of its destructive power.

These are but reminders of realities we have to face. As a wise man, Agur warns us to be prepared. The words “the fire never says enough” in Verse 16 tell you that fire is never satisfied. It will always burn more, and more, and more! There is a parallel between fire and our human nature, for Ecclesiastes 1.8

tells us that “the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing”. We always want to see and hear more. Only the things of God can truly satisfy us.

One great BRIGHT SPOT is that GOD CAN CHANGE PEOPLE! Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU. BUT YOU WERE WASHED, but you were SANCTIFIED, but you were JUSTIFIED in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6.9-11). This is the great news of the gospel we are commanded by God to proclaim.

#### 8. CONSEQUENCES (v.17)

There is much that is wrong in the world and much that is evil but all of it has consequences. Evil invades our families for the verse says “mocks his father” or “scorns obedience to his mother”.

God does not pass over these things. Paul reminds us of this as he writes to the Galatians and he exhorts us to avoid the consequences of doing evil and reap the benefits of doing good. He writes, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that will he also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” (Galatians 6.7-8).

It should be a great comfort to us that we never need to try to get even with those who do us harm. God will balance all things out on a day to come. We can concentrate on doing the right thing and being at peace. That is the message of Romans 12.17-21.

#### 9. THINGS WORTH WATCHING (vs.18-19)

Agur links four things he does “not understand”. It may be difficult for us to understand why he links them or what he wants us to learn from his observation.

The eagle leaves no imprint in the sky, the serpent leaves no ‘footprint’ on the rock, the ship leaves no permanent imprint on the sea and the seducer is careful to cover his tracks. There is danger for the eagle’s prey, there is danger for the serpent’s prey, there is danger on the seas and there is danger for the seducer’s target. That makes them all worth watching.

Perhaps it is a warning for us to be wary of things WE do not understand!

#### 10. THE DANGER OF JUSTIFYING OUR SINFUL WAYS (v.20)

It is a folly to judge ourselves by our own standards. The adulterous woman finds ways of excusing her own conduct in the same way as many of us tend to find ways of excusing our sins. Paul refers to those who “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10.12). God sets the standards for our behaviour and the adulterer comes out condemned (Exodus 20.14).

#### 11. PEOPLE WHO SPELL TROUBLE (vs.21-23)

The book of proverbs has some remarkably revealing descriptions of different types of people. For example, the WORTHLESS PERSON is described in these words, “A worthless person, a wicked man walks with a perverse mouth; he winks with his eyes, he shuffles his feet, he points with his fingers; perversity is in his heart, he devises evil continually, he sows discord” (Proverbs 6.12-14). You get the picture. You can hear him before you see him (he “walks” with his “mouth”), he is too clever for words, (he speaks with his “eyes”, “feet” and “fingers”), he has always some shady activity going and he usually causes division. These descriptions can help us to recognize troublesome people and FOUR SUCH PEOPLE are mentioned in these verses.

What they have in common is that they are all, to some extent, out of place or out of character.

The SERVANT who reigns, like the MAIDSERVANT who succeeds her mistress might misuse their new-found authority, the FOOL who is overfed might be a loose cannon and a HATEFUL WOMAN might bring shame to her husband and family.

Whatever the lesson Agur wants us to learn we certainly would wish to avoid troublesome people and we would not support putting people in positions they cannot handle, so he wants us to be able to recognize people who spell trouble.

#### 12. LESSONS FROM NATURE (vs.24-28)

We can learn great lessons from the creatures God has created. Wisdom is not dependant on physical characteristics.

- The ANTS’ wisdom comes from the measures it takes to PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE. How about you? Have you prepared for your encounter with God as you finish this life and enter the life to come?
- The ROCK BADGERS’ wisdom lies in his CHOICE OF SECURITY. For us, we cannot be more secure than having the Lord as your Saviour, Shepherd and Friend.
- The LOCUSTS’ wisdom comes from COMPANY they keep. For us, we cannot have better company than THE PEOPLE OF GOD.
- The SPIDER’s wisdom is in its choice of A GOOD HOME. What better for us than David’s choice, to “dwell in the HOUSE OF THE LORD forever” (Psalm 23.6).



### 13. THINGS WE SHOULD ADMIRE (vs. 29-31)

With another grouping of four Agur reminds us that there are things to admire and ASPIRE TO.

- The LION is BRAVE and STRONG. We too can be, in the Lord, particularly when we put on the armour He has provided (Ephesians 6.10-18).
- The GREYHOUND is SWIFT. So should we be “swift to hear” (James 1.19) the Lord’s instructions and swift to respond to requests for help (Proverbs 19.17).
- The MALE GOAT instinctively DEFENDS THE WEAKER MEMBERS of the herd. So should we defend those who are younger or weaker in the faith (1 Thessalonians 5.14)
- The KING WHOSE TROOPS ARE WITH HIM presents a UNITED FORCE confident in the task they are undertaking. Unity is the ideal for any group of believers (Philippians 2.1-2)

We should spend time thinking about things that can be admired. It can have a significant effect on our lives, “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things” (Philippians 4.8). Of-course the next thing is to add these things to our lives in a practical way, the ultimate aim being to have a life that is “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5.18) and is exhibiting the “fruit of the Spirit) (Galatians 5.22-23).

### 14. THINGS WE NEED TO CURB (vs.32-33)

Agur finishes his chapter with some very practical advice. If pride has brought you to the folly of “exalting yourself”, or if your fallen nature has led you to “devise evil” you should, as quickly as possible curb your lower nature and recover yourself. Certainly do not go foolishly talking about it (“put your hand to your mouth”). Just as certainly as “churning milk produces butter” and “wringing the nose produces blood” you will anger people and get into strife.

The dangers of loose use of the tongue are spelt out in James 3.2-10. To be forewarned is to be forearmed!

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Proverbs 30 is a TREASURE CHEST OF WISDOM!

Having outlined what it contains and commented briefly on the subjects raised by Agur I now propose to comment, in more depth, on ONE OF THESE SUBJECTS THAT I CONSIDER TO BE OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE FOR US AT THIS STAGE IN THE UNFOLDING OF THE PLANS AND PURPOSES OF GOD, namely:

## **6. BEING AWARE OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE WORLD (verses 11-14)**

We live in a day when many prophecies concerning the return of the Lord have been fulfilled, for example:

- The Jews have returned to the land of Israel.

After an absence of almost 2,000 years Israel is a nation with a homeland. Since it was re-established in 1948 the number of Jews in the land has increased remarkably. The nation has grown in strength in the face of constant opposition and attacks from surrounding nations. Prophecies like Isaiah 11.11-12 and Ezekiel 36.24 are being fulfilled before our eyes.

- The gospel is being taken to increasing numbers of nations.

Scripture translating and missionary organisations are combining to carry out the great commission. Aided by modern technologies (radio, television, computers, mobile phones, solar powered audio devices, etc') they are working to fulfil the Lord's assurance that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the nations and then the end will come" (Matthew 24.14).

- The world is becoming more violent.

Jesus said, "as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24.37). According to Genesis 6.9-13 Noah's day was marked by "violence". It is not just African countries, or Middle Eastern countries, or the U.S.A. that is experiencing almost unprecedented violence, but we have it here in Australia and in our own state of Victoria.

- Homosexuality is on the increase.

Again, Jesus said, as He referred to His return, "Likewise as it was in the days of Lot" (Luke 17.28). According to Genesis 19.1-8 homosexuality was common. The very name of one of the cities destroyed (Sodom) has been used over the years to refer to this practice.

- The ability to travel has increased.

When referring to end times the book of Daniel says, "many shall run to and fro" (Daniel 12.4). In my grandparents day the fastest way for travel on land was on horseback and on water by fairly slow ships. Now with cars, trains, buses and planes, and water craft of all descriptions, travel is easy and is available to almost everyone. You only need to spend some time at an international airport to appreciate the extent to which this brief prophecy in Daniel has been fulfilled.

- Knowledge has increased.

Daniel 12.4 also says, “knowledge shall increase”. It is natural to assume that knowledge increases with the passing of time, but the explosion in access to knowledge over recent years has been amazing. If you wish to know something you “google” it. Knowledge is so readily available that teachers have problems staying ahead of their pupils.

But what immediately struck me when I read verses 11 to 14 of Agur’s chapter was that he described “a generation” that has amazing resemblance to the generation described in 2 Timothy 3.1-5 (A DESCRIPTION OF PEOPLE WHO WILL BE ON EARTH IN THE LAST DAYS). It is probable that Agur is commenting on what he observed in the generation of his own day, but it is also possible that, under the influence of the Spirit, he was warning about a generation to come (in the last days). Another possibility is that the generation of Agur’s day was similar to the generation Paul warns about. History has a habit of repeating itself (we have already seen that Scripture tells us people in the last days will be similar to people in Noah’s day and Lot’s day). Whichever is the case we do well to make ourselves aware of what is happening in the world around us today. Jesus said, “WATCH therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming” (Mark 13.35), “And what I say to you, I say to all: WATCH!” (Mark 13.37).

As Jesus answered his disciple questions concerning His return (in Matthew chapters 24 and 25) he indicates that the final rush of fulfilment of signs preceding His return will be accomplished IN THE COURSE OF ONE GENERATION (“Assuredly I say to you, THIS GENERATION will by no means pass away till all these things take place” - Matthew 24.34). Paul (in 2 Timothy 3.1-5) describes that generation. It will be one where:

“Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.”

Many of these characteristics are seen in people today, but that, of itself, does not mean that the Lord’s return is “near – at the doors” (Matthew 24.33). It should, however, alert us to be obedient to Jesus’ command and “WATCH” for the fulfilment of “ALL THESE THINGS” (Matthew 24.33) that will tell us that His return IS “near – at the door”, for example:

- The false prophets (Matthew 24.11 “many false prophets will rise up and deceive many”) (2 Timothy 4.3-4 “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned aside to fables”)
- The falling away among professing believers (Matthew 24.12 “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold”) (2 Thessalonians 2.3 : “the falling away”)
- The temple rebuilt at Jerusalem (Matthew 24.”standing in the holy place”) (2 Thessalonians 2.4 “he sits as God in the temple of God”) I have been to The Temple Institute and experienced the

enthusiasm of those working toward the construction of the temple described in the latter chapters of Ezekiel.

- The beast (Matthew 24.15 “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet”) (Daniel 9.27 “then HE shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week HE shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be ONE who makes desolate,”) (2 Thessalonians 2.3-4 ‘THE man of sin IS REVEALED, THE SON OF PERDITION, WHO OPPOSES AND EXALTS HIMSELF above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that HE sits in the temple of God,’)
- The great tribulation (Matthew 24.21 “For then shall be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”)

And fitting into their place will be the other prophecies scattered through books like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah.

I think it is appropriate for me to close this study by repeating the Lord’s words, **“And what I say to you, I say to all: WATCH!”**