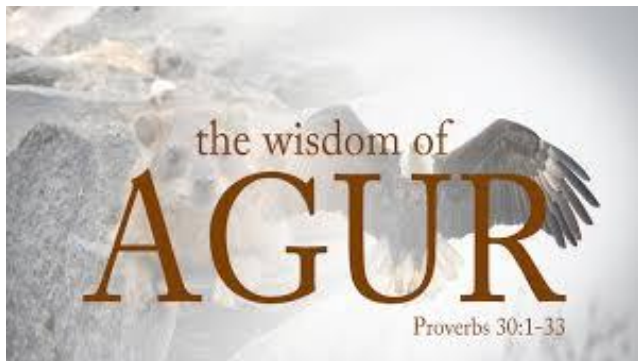


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The Wisdom of Agur

30: 10-33

A proverb is a short and memorable saying designed to be our blueprint for living in the world that ADONAI has created. It is important to note that proverbs are not promises; they are generally true principles, all other things being equal.



Agur could have ended **Chapter 30** with **his** prayer (**to see link click [Du - The Prayer of Agur](#)**). But he chose to continue . . . and so shall we. When **he** finished **his** thought-provoking prayer, **Agur** was only one-third of the way through **his** inspired writing assignment. What more was there to say? Well, as it turns out, more worth listening to, even three thousand years later. **He** wants to make sure no serious Bible student forgets **his** humble prayer.

After the prayer (30:10-15a): Agur may very well have read many of the **proverbs** written by **King Solomon**. **They** were organized into chapters and verses centuries later, but you can be sure those nuggets of **wisdom** were being passed around ancient Jerusalem – mostly by word of mouth. I can imagine **Agur** studying the words of **the wise king** and then trying to figure out some of the same literary techniques.⁵⁵² Without wasting any time, **Agur** says **Never slander a worker to his employer because he will curse you, and you will deserve it**. This **verse** is a warning not to meddle in another person's domestic affairs. Then **Agur** mentions four kinds of people: (1) Disrespectful: **Some people curse their father and do not thank their mother**. (2) Hypocritical: **They are pure in their**

own eyes, but they are filthy and unwashed. (3) Arrogant: **They look proudly around, casting disdainful glances.** (4) Oppressive: **They have teeth like swords and fangs like knives. They devour the poor from the earth and the needy from among mankind. The leech has two daughters. “Give! Give!” they cry (30:11-15a NLT).**⁵⁵³

Of **Agur’s** five lists, four of them begin with a kind of joke, as if **he’s** playing a game with words and numbers. **He** composes these curious lists to make a point about **God’s** creation, including geology, zoology, physics, and human nature. **Each list has only four items.** But **he** wants the reader to know that each list could conceivably go on for several pages. **He** says: “There are three things, no, actually four . . .” That play on words invites us to use our imagination to envision other examples of mysteries, mistakes, and marvels. In other words, the Bible isn’t something you just read. It’s meant to be applied to everyday life. **Agur** wraps up **his** chapter in **Proverbs** with **five short lists** that read like notes jotted down by a comedian specializing in observational humor. “Did you ever notice . . . Did you ever wonder about . . . Let me tell you a few things that really bother me . . .” So, let’s take a look at them one at a time.

List one - things that are never satisfied (30:15b-17 NLT): This first list really serves as a reality check. **Agur** wants us to know that **he** is a shrewd observer of the world in which we live, noting that there are truths we cannot escape. We can’t ignore them, so we might as well prepare for them. **There are three things that are never satisfied, four that say, “Enough!”**⁵⁵⁴ **(1) Sh’ol** (see [Af - Sh’ol](#)): **Sh’ol is never satisfied.** There is always room for one more dead person. Death never stops, and its insatiability means that everyone inevitably will be found in the grave. In light of this spiritual truth, we should live with the awareness that **this earth is not our home yet (Hebrews 13:14a).** We have only so much time here on earth, and eternity awaits. **(2): A woman who cannot bear children: And a barren womb.** Perhaps we should look to some of **the barren women** in the TaNaKh to paint a picture of the insatiability of **a barren womb.** Having a child was the most important thing for a woman in Jewish society. When **Rachel** saw that **she** wasn’t having any **children, she** said to **Jacob: Give me children, or I’ll die (Genesis 30:1).** Or we can remember **Hannah,** who is described as **crying bitterly as she prayed to ADOANI for a child (First Samuel 1:10).**⁵⁵⁵ **(3) The thirsty earth: the earth, never satisfied with water.** Back in middle school you learned about the water cycle. Rain, plants, underground water, rivers, oceans, and clouds all play their part in the endless movement of life-giving water. The water

cycle is another example of **God's** organized creation. And **(4) Fire: And fire, which never says, "Enough!"** Just like **the earth** thirsting for **water** during the growing season, **fire** also cannot be satisfied. **A** raging **fire** will continue to consume any combustible material in **its** path. **It** will never stop on **its** own.

With this list of elements that can never be satisfied, **Agur** confirms that he has a tight grip on the realities of surviving in this world. Death is inescapable, family circumstances can be unsettling, and the demands of the land and the volatile nature of fire reveal that the world is not perfect. **Agur** may even be reflecting on the opening chapters of **Genesis**. **ADONAI** had created paradise, and even saw that it was good, but mankind was not satisfied. The devil's temptation led to the first sin, which ushered in our broken world.

Then, as **he** does with three of the five listings, **Agur** adds a follow-up idea. **The eye that mocks a father and despises a mother's instructions will be plucked out by ravens of the valley and eaten by vultures.** In this case, he uses hyperbole to confirm another truth. Young people need to respect and listen to their **dad** and **mom**. A child best learns the truth through **the eyes** of caring **parents**. **The pecking ravens** are most likely a metaphor suggesting that if you mock or disrespect your **parents**, your worldview turns dark. **Agur** gets it. **He** understands the ways of the spiritual and physical worlds, and human relations. **His** insight can be trusted.

List two - amazing enigmas (30:18-20 NLT): **Agur's** second list confirms that **ADONAI's** ways are beyond human imagination. And that's the way it should be. I don't know about you, but I prefer a **God** who has my best interest at heart and who has a better handle than me on how things work. When we stop and think about **the LORD's** design for the natural world, it should blow our minds. **Isaiah 55:8-9** explains that we can seek to know **YHVH**, but we can never truly understand who **He** is or how **He** carries out **His** plan: **My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares Ha'Shem. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.** **Agur** gives us four examples of how **the Creator** of the universe works in ways that we will never understand. **There are three things that amaze me; four that I don't understand.** With this list, **Agur** reveals **his** appreciation for **God's** design when it comes to biology, physics, and human nature. **(1) How an eagle flies:** Most of us have been transfixed by **how an eagle glides through the sky.** **(2) How a snake moves:** **How a snake slithers on a rock**, and have been **slithering** on **their** bellies since the Garden of

Eden. **(3) How a ship stays afloat. How a ship navigates the ocean. Ship** builders in ancient Isra'el knew how to build a seaworthy vessel, but they probably weren't calculating buoyancy forces and the physical properties of water displacement. **(4) The birds and the bees. And the way of a man with a virgin (30:19 NLT).** Once again, **Agur** reveals **his** sense of humor and speaks to every future generation when **he** confesses that **men** really don't know what **women** want.

After listing those four amazing enigmas, **Agur** adds a follow-up idea and tackles an issue that might not be so mysterious. As can be found in many chapters in **Proverbs**, **he** offers a verse with a condemning tone that seems to come out of nowhere, perhaps to address an issue that **he** has seen tearing apart families. **This is how an unfaithful wife behaves: she eats, wipes her mouth, and says, "I did nothing wrong" (30:20).** **Agur** reports that **an unfaithful wife** can commit adultery and completely deny that **she** has sinned. That tendency to say culpability when we have done something wrong is a part of our old sin nature. **Cain** denied **his** role in the first murder and was banished from paradise (**Genesis 4:1-15**). In **Titus 1:16**, we read about people who **claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.** Even **Peter** denied **Messiah**, but **his** immediate repentance rescued **him** from **God's** wrath and secured **his** place as the leader in the early Church. By highlighting these enigmas, **Agur** confirms that **ADONAI** has an all-encompassing, well-ordered design for our world that the human mind cannot grasp. We should not expect to understand **God**, but we can trust that **His** plan for our lives is far better than we could imagine ourselves.⁵⁵⁶

List three - human mistakes (30:21-23 NLT): There are three things that make the earth tremble, no, four it cannot bear up. (1) Life experience matters: a slave who becomes a king. To **Agur**, a **servant** is a **servant** and does not have what it takes to be a ruler. If someone with the mentality and background of a **servant** were to take over, then who knows what chaos would result? We have already seen this sentiment expressed in **19:10**, but also in **Ecclesiastes 10:5-7: Another evil I have seen under the sun, cutting God out of the picture, the kind of mistake rulers make, is that fools are promoted to high positions, while the rich occupy low places. I have seen servants riding horses, while princes walk on foot like slaves.**⁵⁵⁷ **(2) Laziness kills: a godless fool who prospers (30:22 NLT).** When people get everything they want without working for it, they have no motivation, no responsibilities, and no reliance

on **ADONAI**. Consider the fate of most lottery winners. Unearned wealth is a burden few can handle. Similarly, if your parents leave you a fortune, be warned. Don't spend your days lounging around the pool or your nights throwing wild parties. Consider the lesson of **the prodigal son** (see the commentary on **the Life of Christ Hu - The Parable of the Lost Son and His Jealous Brother**). **(3) love wins: a bitter woman who finally gets a husband.** A marriage without love is destined to fail. Of course, every marriage will go through seasons of highs and lows. And love can be difficult to define. Love is different when you're 20 than when you're 80. But consider this warning *before* the engagement: Don't marry for spite, lust, or greed. Don't marry out of convenience, practicality, or to escape your parents. Marry your best friend, and marry because you can't imagine living without that person.⁵⁵⁸ **(4) Inappropriate ambition destroys: and a servant girl who displaces her mistress (30:23 NLT).** Just as it is inappropriate for a **slave** to be in the position of a **king (30:21)**, so it is inappropriate for a **servant girl to displace her mistress**. Here, we can see why **Sarah** was so furious with **Hagar**. **Hagar** was a secondary wife. But once **she** had given birth to **Ishmael**, **she** began to **treat her mistress with contempt (Genesis 16:4)**.⁵⁵⁹

Agur is not covering new ground here. The undeniable benefits of following **God's** guidance are sprinkled throughout **Proverbs** and all of **Scripture**. There are clear moral values to uphold as well as evidence for absolute right and wrong. Nevertheless, don't panic when you or a loved one strays from the path of righteousness. Human mistakes may cause your world to tremble, but not to crumble. **ADONAI** will always make room for a repentant sinner. **Agur** is simply reminding us that there's a better plan. And we can know it. If your choices align with **God's** perfect plan when it comes to life experience, earning your daily bread, marrying for love, and climbing the social ladder, well done! Thinking back to the big idea of **Agur's** prayer, your ongoing assignment is to consider our own areas of weakness, find your sweet spot, and build your foundation on solid biblical footing.

List four - small wonders (30:24-28 NLT): **Ants, hyraxes, locusts, and lizards** are the stars of **Agur's** next list. What can we possibly learn from these **small wonders**? How about this? These brilliantly designed **critters** all take full advantage of the limited gifts granted to **them** by **their Creator**. **There are four things on earth that are small but unusually wise: (1) Ants wisely store food in bulk for the winter: the ants - they aren't strong, but they store up food all summer.** **Ants** can lift up to five thousand times **their** body weight. **Agur** didn't have an electron microscope or a micro-CT scanner to calculate that number,

but **he** was inspired by **YHVH** to recognize that **the ants'** diminutive size doesn't prevent their work or define **their** potency. **Ants** effectively use the abilities that **God** gave **them** to prepare for **their** future needs. **(2) The clever hyrax takes refuge in hillside crags: the hyraxes - they aren't powerful, but they make their home among the rocks.** **Hyraxes**, huh? **The hyrax** is the cutest little creature you've never seen. Go ahead, search online, find a photo or two and prepare to smile. The TaNaKh mentions them several times. **Leviticus 11:5** and **Deuteronomy 14:7** note that the cud-chewing **hyrax** is unclean, while **David** mentions that the crags provide refuge for **them (Psalm 104:18)**. Also called coneys, and rock badgers, these cute little guys spend most of their time sunbathing on narrow cliffs but quickly scamper into mountain crevices when danger appears. For you and me, the reminder is obvious. We also have a **Rock** in which to hide. When **ADONAI delivered David from the power of all his enemies, David declared: ADONAI is my Rock, my fortress and my deliverer (Second Samuel 22:2)**. Even as we bask in **His** provision, let's not wander too far from **His** protection. **(3) Locusts have no leaders, yet they spread terror and destruction quite effectively: the locusts - they have no king, but they march in formation.** The lesson of the locust might be to acknowledge the power of many individuals working together. Conversely, Agur might be warning us that unguided mob action leads to rampant carnage. Or maybe he's giving Bible readers a reminder of the plagues of Egypt or a foreshadowing of the **locust demons** who will torture unbelievers during the Great Tribulation (see the commentary on **Revelation Da - The Fifth Trumpet: Locusts Came Down Upon the Earth and Were Given Power Like That of Scorpions**). As a prophet, Agur might have had the ability to see that far into the future. **(4) Lizards sneak into castles: the lizards - they are easy to catch, but they are found even in king's places.** **Agur** paints a humorous picture here. Imagine hulking palace guards bumping into one another as they try to catch a scampering **lizard**. I think **Agur** might be telling us not to take ourselves too seriously, and not to panic when minor details don't go our way. After all, even powerful **kings** cannot stop **lizards** from scampering around **their** homes. Or maybe **Agur** is reinforcing the main lesson on this list: don't take small things for granted.⁵⁶⁰

List five - The downfall of kings (30:29-33 NLT): There are three things that walk with a stately stride, no, four that strut about. Power breeds confidence, and confidence is reflected in the way one walks. The **three, no, four** parallelism gives us four examples of those who walk without fear. Three are from the **animal** kingdom, and the fourth is a **king**. However, it starts with the animal

that even today we call **the king of beasts**. **(1) The lion king: the lion, king of the beasts, who never backs down from anything. The lion** is afraid of nothing. **(2) the rooster, crowing king of the barnyard: the strutting rooster. Roosters** also have a cocky gait, as do **male goats**. **(3) the male goat, braying from the mountain top: the male goat.** But the most dangerous is **the king and his army**. **(4) the king who thinks he is invincible: and a king who leads his army.**⁵⁶¹

This short list of **those** who stand tall is followed by wise words for all **those** who **foolishly** exalt **themselves**. **If you have been a fool by being proud or plotting evil, cover your mouth in shame; As the churning of cream produces butter and striking the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.** Even if lions, roosters, goats, and arrogant kings miss the lesson, it's still valuable to us. No matter how powerful you are, when you act rudely, stir up anger, or actively plan evil, then you should know what's coming. It won't be pleasant, and you probably deserve it. In the final two verses, Agur clearly describes a frequent source of human strife and turmoil. Whether it's cataclysmic or quite unsettling, much of our conflict is the result of that classic human stumbling block: **pride**. Or more accurately, destructive **pride**. Unfortunately, the English language uses the same word for haughty arrogance as it does for the feeling of accomplishment that comes from working hard and achieving a goal. It's really okay to feel proud after you finish rebricking your patio, have a poem published, or get that promotion. If you're a parent, I hope you do feel parental pride when your child wins a spelling bee, graduates from trade school, or scores the winning basket. Let's all agree not to discourage feelings of uplifting pride just because the other kind of pride can be so destructive.

One way to counteract destructive **pride** is to practice submissive authority. Admitting our reliance on **ADONAI** is a recurring theme of **Agur's** chapter and a character trait valued throughout Scripture. **Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commands himself who is approved, but the one who the Lord commends (Second Corinthians 10:17-18).**

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up (James 4:10).

This should leave us with a significant realization. Like **the lion, rooster, goat** and **king**, we each have been given our own Serengeti, barnyard, or kingdom to watch over and maintain. But unlike those earthy kingdoms, you are smart enough to realize you are dependent on **ADONAI. The Creator** provided the territory over which you reign, and **He** has established a purpose and plans unique to you. In order for those plans to bear fruit, **God Himself** has showered you with gifts, resources, and **wisdom**. Every one of us is different. None of us is more important than anyone else. But make no mistake; your personal kingdom requires you to be your best self. **God** is calling you because there is work to do.

Don't panic over that responsibility. Rejoice and accept the challenge. Self-proclaimed kings are destined to fall. But you were given authority by **the King of kings**, which means you are destined for greatness. Consider again **the wisdom** of **Agur** and **his** five lists; the physical world has limits, there are mysteries we cannot understand, we make mistakes, and even earthly kings need to remember that this world is not our home.⁵⁶²