

## Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Ten)

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In Ecclesiastes 3, we are given instructions of really wondrous proportions capable of filling our minds with the serious benefits from God for the present and exceedingly great possibilities that lie in the future for those called of God. In it, God confirms that the possibilities can be fulfilled because He is overseeing our preparations from His sovereign position on high.

It is He who controls time and events, and He does it in such a way as to create His purposes in us without denying us the use of our free moral agency. He does this so that we bear some of the responsibility for making right choices and thus we play a role in our preparations for His kingdom.

We must make our choices by faith, voluntarily giving ourselves in submission to His will and His way. He tests and proves the validity of our faith while creating circumstances for us to navigate our way through, overcoming the conditions that the trials present. He gives us gifts by means of His spirit so that we are enabled to make right choices and bring glory to Him as we grow and overcome.

Solomon signals a change of direction in his instructions in Ecclesiastes 3:16, by his use of the term *moreover*, which is tied together with the phrase *under the sun*, and from here it is as though he has reopened the door back to the harsh realities of this present evil world that we have been consigned to by God to live in as our preparation for His Kingdom continues.

Living in this world, while maintaining an over the sun way of life, can be discouraging and sometimes downright difficult because the world is ever present with its influence surrounding us with evil as we are being tempted; to lure us into compromising with the ways of God in favor of Satan's commands.

Overall, chapter 3 is a strong positive reminder of the great gifting God has given us. However, in the face of everyday realities, we sometimes manage to forget to be thankful for the gifting, and thus we reopen the door to danger of the thoughts that will arise and lead us back to the world. Thus in the final verse of chapter 3, once again, we are urged toward contentment.

It is urging us not to allow ourselves to be drawn into the vanities of this world, and they

are admittedly sometimes very attractive realities that the world holds out to us as invitations to rejoin it. Sometimes God's trials are pretty difficult, but discouragement within them and a wandering mind go hand in hand.

We have God's word regarding a couple of examples in I Kings and Jeremiah 20. Some of His outstanding servants appeared at times to be ready to go off the deep end and back to the world. In this Chapter 19, the subject is Elijah.

**I Kings 19:3-5** And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree, and he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough now, Lord take my life, for I am no better than my fathers." Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat."

**Jeremiah 20:14-17** Cursed be the day in which I was born, let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me. Let the man be cursed who brought news to my father, saying a male child has been born to you making him very glad. And let that man be like the cities which the Lord overthrew, and did not relent. Let him hear the cry in the morning and the shouting at noon, because he did not kill me from the womb that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb always enlarged with me.

These are just two examples; they are not the only ones. We can turn to others, but I wanted you to at least have a little touch of that understanding—that others in the past have gone through trials that they felt were exceedingly difficult, and yet we will see eventually they came through them. So it is not unusual for us to feel the weight of the problem that God gives us to work within. The pressures placed on us are no different from what these men were put under by God. There is no doubt about their humanity.

Jeremiah and Elijah had in some ways exactly the same humanity that we do, and they complained. They felt as though they were failures; they felt as though God could not possibly use them in the Kingdom, and that they would never get there. And if God would just give up on them, they would feel nothing from that point on.

Their discouragement proves that for a while for these men, running back to the world seemed attractive to them. This attitude, this leaning, can happen to us, too. Given all

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the depressing things that happen in this world, it is easy to think that we would be better off never having been called. Thus we are reminded that God is continuously judging those in the world, and they are paying penalties that are often beyond our current vision, and God is testing us, and we are having difficulties as well.

Go back in thought to what appears in Ecclesiastes 3. Do you believe that with God's promises we are given the certainty of salvation? If we believe, it gives us hope and joy; it is when we doubt that the temptation level to flee back to the world arises. And yet like them—Jeremiah, Elijah and others who complain—we know *already* the rest of the story. Are we going to throw it aside in our life and drift back into the world? Just remember God did not abandon Jeremiah, God did not abandon Elijah, and they survived because of God's patience and mercy. They will be in God's Kingdom.

**Ecclesiastes 3:22** So I perceived that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him.

This is penetrating and fitting advice, because we all have the tendency to let our minds drift. Nothing in the world can even begin to compare to having the assurances of eternal life in glory with God. Nothing in the world can trump God's promises to never leave nor forsake us.

There is one word in there that is exceedingly important; it is the word *heritage*. Interestingly it is linked with the word *work*. If we could just think of this now—in our labors in God's behalf in preparation for the Kingdom of God, that word *heritage* begins to become very important to you and me, in spurring us on to keep on going.

Do you know what a heritage is? It is that which is worthy of preparation. In other words, it is what is saved for an inheritance. What is our inheritance going to be? Is it going to be in God's Kingdom? It better be in our minds that way, because the things that we have done that made God give us salvation—that is our heritage—that is why Solomon links it to the word works. Our works of faith are very important because those works are our heritage. But, you have to expend energy to produce works, and sometimes we have to put up with things while we are working.

**Ecclesiastes 4:1-3** Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun. And look the tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter, on the side of their oppressors there was power, but they have no comforter. Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, more than

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the living who are still alive. Yet better than both is he who has never existed who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

Beginning with verse 1, Solomon brought back his thoughts to the present again, after those high and great things that appear in chapter 3. What he began doing was marveling at the injustice occurring without anything being done about it by those in position to leverage these sad affairs into a right direction. The first thing that he starts talking about is unjust courts that are working amongst the people.

We know that these things are occurring in our time, in our day, but what is going on there is not really Solomon's interest at this point. His overall interest is still on the frustrating meaninglessness of life lived by the vast bulk of the citizenry. I think the reason it is so amazed him is that the knowledge that would greatly improve people lives was readily available from God's word even all the way back then. We are talking about one 1000 BC.

The head-shaking reality that disturbed Solomon continues to this day. I think that you will agree with this. Looking in our day in much the way that Solomon looked at things in his day there, we find that almost nobody is making an effort to truly seek God and His way.

I am sure this filled Solomon with a high degree of frustration because God gave Israel a very good system of administration of their courts. It was more than adequate and it was based within God's own laws. Exodus 18:13-23 gives a bit of an insight into their justice system.

**Exodus 18:13-23** And so it was on the next day that Moses sat to judge the people and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening? And Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God when they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another, and I make known the statutes of God and His laws," So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you. You are not able to perform it by yourself. Listen now to my voice I will give you counsel, and God will be with you. Stand before God for the people so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall

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teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge so it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure and all this people will also go to their place in peace.”

This overview is given in the simplified form to let us know that administration of their courts was well organized. They began with an adequate system for spreading the work load out so that the disputes could be settled quickly. This occurred even before they reached Mt. Sinai and the formal giving of His laws. The context then here indicates that there was already a great deal of bickering among them, and verse 16 reveals that God's laws were the basis for the judgments made.

So they have a system; they also have the basis for the judgments. This also gives us some insight because this took place before Mt. Sinai and some already had considerable knowledge of God's laws. Verse 21 sets the standard of qualifications for the judges. Again those standards for the judges were based upon God's character standards.

We could go to Deuteronomy 1, where we have a reiteration of what we see here in Exodus 18. Here we are forty years later (in Exodus 18), but what we see here in Deuteronomy 1 is actually an expansion from what we just read from Exodus 18. It is given in greater detail.

Back in thought to Solomon. He was upset by what he saw going on there in his day. The Bible shows him to have been a fairly good administrator even though he taxed the people heavily because of massive building projects that he involved the nation in. It also points to a reality that despite his leadership—the gifts that God gave him and I am sure he was a charismatic person in terms of personality as well—these verses (in Ecclesiastes 4:1-3) show us something. Despite his leadership it was impossible to guarantee the integrity of every officer in the Kingdom.

Solomon apparently went into a court room to watch a trial. What he witnessed was the exploitation and oppression in the hall of so-called justice. He witnessed the pain and the sorrow of the innocent, and he saw unconcern on the part of those who could have

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brought comfort to the innocent. This was a fairly common problem in Israel. The book of Amos especially addresses these very things present in Amos' time as well.

What Solomon witnessed was so disturbing to him that it lead him to declare that it was better to be dead than alive. That is pretty bad. And better than that was not even being born; then one would not have had to experience or see this grasping rapacious covetousness on the part of the judges.

I found an interesting quote regarding a situation like this made by Edward Gibbon. He is a historian responsible for authoring, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." Gibbon said, regarding the times that we live in, that political corruption is the most infallible symptom of constitutional liberty. What he meant was that if a country has a constitution that guarantees freedom to obey; there is also freedom to disobey.

Brethren, this is exactly what we are experiencing in this nation at our time. You can read between the lines in Ecclesiastes 4, and you will find that in Israel the same thing was occurring. I am starting to put together a sermon in which I will show you how much liberty the citizenry of Israel had under God. It is almost mind-boggling.

You see the principle here that Gibbons points out. If people are free to obey, they are free to disobey too, and those who are corrupt in their heart and mind are going to take advantage of it. They will get all that they can get. What we are seeing here is that human nature never changes. It does not even matter when you have a great king, like David. You can be sure it happened under David also. Did not his son rebel? Were not a lot of people corrupted in that system, even when they had one of the greatest kings that ever existed on the face of the earth?

This is what we are living with, and these people are in the world, and what God is concerned about is that we do not drift back to the world. Political corruption is the most infallible symptom of constitutional liberty. It requires disciplined belief in a constitution and character in the people for the citizen to obey, because remember the citizen is free to disobey, until they get caught. If the public does not have the people, as sure as anything it will corrupt and disobey, and this is exactly what the founders of this republic feared.

As John Adams said, "Our constitution is made only for a Christian people." He is saying it will not work unless people believe in it and unless people discipline themselves to obey it. You and I are living at the time in the history of this republic when it is getting ready to fall apart. The pendulum is swinging rapidly toward disobedience.

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**Ecclesiastes 4:4-8** Again I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. Better is a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind. Then I returned and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, without companion. He has neither son nor brother yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, for whom do I toil and deprive myself of good? This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.

Solomon disgustedly turned his attention from the halls of justice to the marketplace to watch and to analyze as people worked. Recall how those who worked diligently are lotted throughout Proverbs, and how in Ecclesiastes 2 and 3 both extoll work as a major gift of God. He came away from that experience—going into the marketplace and looking at these workers—with analysis of four different varieties of workers.

Please understand as we go into this that God chose to illustrate His council by using extremes. Thus not everybody will fit into every description exactly. But at the same time, we should be able to use the information by drawing on them to make necessary modifications to our approach to our employment for income, if any aspect of this might fit.

First, the one in verse 4, He is simply labeled as a *skillful worker*. This is a worker who not only has mastered the techniques of his trade and done it well, but is also unusually industrious in his approach while performing it. The man's skill is notable, but knowing human nature quite well, it motivated Solomon to think more deeply what might motivate the person to apply himself so intensely. This is very informative because I think it applies pretty much to life in an Israelite culture.

Verse 4 is interesting because the verse is translated in such a way to make it appear as though the diligent worker is envied by those watching him. That is a possible way of translating that. However other versions change the direction of the translation and instead say that the diligent worker labors as he does because he is driven by his attitude.

The Jewish Publication Society, The New American Standard Bible, and the Revised English Bible change that word *envy* to *rivalry*. People of the mindset Solomon observed in this description perfected their skills and worked industriously because of a competitive nature within them that has gone overboard.

They always want to be first with the most; they wanted to have more and to be better known; to have fame more than anybody else in their field in order to stay ahead of the competition. These workers saw themselves in what we might call a battle for bread. The purpose was less to produce a truly quality product than it was to make money and to be well known. Thus it shows that the hands were truly capable and that is admirable, but the heart was out of alignment with God.

What we see here taken to an extreme is the law of nature—the survival of the fittest attitude applied to one's trade. In the movie *Wall Street*, the character was cutthroat; he had to win every battle. It was in his nature; he was so grasping, so covetous, and if you did not work right alongside of him, he got rid of you. You had to have the same nature as him.

That is an extreme, but that is what Solomon is talking about here. As I mentioned, the word picture shows that the hands were truly capable, and of course that is admirable, but the man's heart was out of alignment with God. It is the law of nature, the survival of the fittest applied to one's trade. Solomon concludes that this is detrimental; he called it vanity and a grasping after wind. It is literally sheer vanity that makes life meaningless, to have that kind of approach to work.

He is describing what we might refer to as American capitalism taken to an extreme. It is without a doubt productive, but it is not perfect. I do not believe that this factor was a part of God's original creation; this is a twist that Satan has promoted to become part of human nature, and it creates an unbalanced person.

One of the more obvious is the people so driven. They absolutely ignore or submerge other important aspects of life like one's family, marriage. The worker may feel good about himself because he is providing well for his family, but he is blind to the fact that a severe price is being paid by others. So we will find as we go through the Bible that covetousness, competition, envy, and jealousy are often linked, not always those four, but two or three are linked.

Competition is not evil in itself, but when being first is focused on at the expense of honesty, so that breaking rules such as athletes occasionally do with drugs or cutting back on the quality of a product occurs, trouble will be produced. What we have to remember is that the world is full of Joneses and one can keep up with or excel forever and ever; it is never ending.

Second, in verse 5, this worker is at the other end of the working spectrum. He is the lazy bones. Solomon shows by what he wrote in the book of Proverbs that he had no

sympathy whatsoever for the lazy person.

**Proverbs 24:30-34** I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding [A lazy person, Solomon says, has no understanding. He doesn't know which end is up.], and there it was, all overgrown with thorns, its surface was covered with nettles, its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well, I looked on it and received instruction. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, so your poverty will come like a prowler, and your want like an armed man.

As Solomon described it, laziness is a slow, comfortable path towards self-destruction. What the Proverb tells us is that Mr. lazy bones robs himself. How does this apply to our relationship with God? Laziness toward the things of God will kill us by means of a slow spiritual suicide. It may be comfortable to sleep in or to give ones self-justification for avoiding spiritual work, but what the laziness produces is not fun to live through. This is a picture of complacency and an unwitting self-destruction. It is the picture of a much deeper damage than simply wasting his material resources because his idleness is not only eating away at what he has, but more importantly what he is.

It erodes his self-control, and his grasp of reality, and therefore we must work through Bible study. It might be boring; it might be hard; there might be a lot of difficulty within it because...you name it, but we have to work through it in obedience to build our relationship with God.

What does it take to live comfortably in this culture? It is money, but laziness produces poverty, whether it is in regard to material or spiritual things. Paul warns us that if one does not work neither shall he eat. Spiritually I take that to mean that the lazy person will not eat at God's table. Comparing these first two men, Solomon basically shows the industrious man motivated by rivalry; the lazy man is motivated by his desire for his personal pleasures—both extremes are in the end destructive vanities.

The next one is in verse 6. This verse once again, without directly saying it, calls for contentment. Three times in the last two chapters, it is either named or implied. One commentator called this the integrated man; this person is productive in his labors, but he also finds time for other important activities. This person guards against getting caught up in the rat race. He finds time for balancing his life through sharing himself with his family for their wellbeing.

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Are you aware that Americans spend more time working than any other people in the industrialized world? We put in more hours per week than the employees in any other industrial nation. We are part of an entire nation caught up in getting what we refer to as "the good life," and it seems as though Daniel 12:4 and its "run to and fro" comment applies to Americans in spades, but it has a downside of fairly great importance.

When one's heart is consumed with constant doing or running, as we chase around for whatever it is, and true quietness is ignored, life gradually becomes a battle to make sure all the time is consumed simply by activities, by movement of some kind.

God puts it so simply. Godliness with contentment is great gain. The man in verse 6 pays attention to being quiet; he pays attention to being content and that is why he spreads himself around to a variety of things. This is a choice we can make, and thus I believe that what Solomon is teaching here is that in order to have truly good work habits, one must also exercise a goodly measure of contentment in order to balance life.

The industrious man reveals that he thinks life's sole purpose is to achieve in materialism; meanwhile the lazy person's self-seeking, pleasure seeking achievement is a slow suicide. The balance life requires quietness with contentment.

What is the lesson so far? Three workers. We can take what we want from life through our laboring, but what we take must be paid for; there is no escaping the cost. Sometimes it is time, sometimes it is energy, and sometimes it is time with the family, whatever. God is giving us these descriptions here to help us balance ourselves regarding what we work for.

These two verses in chapter 4, verses 7 and 8 examine a fourth type of personality. This person may not have the drive of the workaholic nor is he a lazy pleasure seeker, but neither does he show evidence of contentment. He is a person uncommitted to sharing his life with another; therefore perhaps this person is quite selfish. He wants it all for himself. This person seems to want to keep the produce of his labors for himself; he does not share them with a wife and a family. He has no partners and no family to inherit what he leaves behind; and with the lack of information within the context, it appears as though he does not enjoy the profits either. He just saves it. This is a miser; he simply worked; he simply existed.

I think Solomon's final comment regarding this worker is really intriguing.

**Ecclesiastes 4:8** . . . This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.

It is not only a vanity; it is a grave misfortune. He said nothing similar anywhere else regarding workers. This is a grave, a serious misfortune. Solomon seems to conclude that this is the most serious flaw regarding work of them all. It appears completely and totally self-centered. Nobody, not even the worker, really benefits. Maybe this is why Dickens had Old Scrooge being a miser; he was really a miserly person; he did not share anything with anybody. He was a miserable man, if you have ever read the story.

The NIV translates what Solomon called a *grave misfortune* as a *miserable business*. Ecclesiastes teaches us that work can be a God given pleasure, but now it is telling us that it will not be that way if we work only for our own self-centered purposes. That is the lesson regarding the miser, thus it is counseling us to ask ourselves, “For whom am I working?”

God works from the foundation of the earth. John 5:17 says that. But He is not consumed by it. It is one of God's greatest gifts to mankind. Work is given at least partly that we learn not to be self-centered, but rather to be sharing life with others so that we have the material wherewithal to enable ourselves to do it. God wants us to labor—to create wealth if nothing else. But He desires that we labor in the right spirit and for the right reasons, and this counsel is that it is for others' benefit besides our own. So our labors must be shared in order to please God.

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again if two lie down together, they will keep each other warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

The way the scriptures are flowing gives me the impression that Solomon's experiences regarding the man who was alone within the framework of his labors motivated him to think of the importance of friendship and the value of doing things together. That is in a partnership.

There is a Proverb that is not included in the book of Proverbs, but it says, “A friendless man is like a left hand bereft of the right.” Think of how much inconvenience having only one hand produces and how much more and more easily one can accomplish virtually every activity involving the hands.

In verse 9, we are provided with instructions regarding the four types of workers. So,

how much greater in almost all cases is the production of two people doing a task than if labor is restricted to but one? Even when they divide the work, the profits, they will still get a better return for their efforts than if each had worked alone. So the instruction moves on to “What if there is trouble along the way toward production?” Two are more likely to come up with a solution than one working alone.

If one is alone when working and falls, there is no one to help him in his injuries. How about if we stumble in our spiritual walk? Is it not good to have a friend you can bounce things off and receive correction and encouragement in love?

**Galatians 6:1-2** Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourselves lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

We are commanded by God to work together, to work in harmony, to work in unity, and we will accomplish more than if we were alone. Some things you can only do alone, but many times the work we are doing... it helps very greatly to have another person there.

Back in thought to Ecclesiastes 4:11-12. It seems here to be calling to mind traveling back and forth by foot in ancient Israel where it might be cold during the winter months and perhaps dangerous to life and limb because of attacks by robbers. There is both warmth and safety in numbers. We are going to look at something that happened to David in II Samuel 21 where this paid dividends for him.

**II Samuel 21:15-17** When the Philistines were at war again with Israel, David and his servants with him went down and fought against the Philistines; and David grew faint. Then Ishbi-Benob, who was one of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose bronze spear was three hundred shekels, who was bearing a new sword, thought he could kill David. But Abishai [David's nephew] the son of Zeruah [David's sister] came to his aid, and struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, “You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.”

David was the lamp of Israel. It shows you a practical example where even the king, who was a great warrior, had to bend to the will of his subjects about something that involved a great deal of wisdom. That is the kind of thing that Solomon is talking about here. There is a time, a place, to be alone; but there is far more time and places in

many, many cases when it is better to have companionship and partnership.

Back to Ecclesiastes 4. This section provides us with an interesting look at a particularity of Hebrew writing that is seen in a number of places in the Old Testament. It involves the Hebrew use of the word *better* in making comparisons. Solomon began with *one* better, in verse 3. He increased it to *two* in verse 6, and then he raised the number to *three* in verse 9. Then as he reached this section, we are going to find that there is one more.

His overall point seems to be that in most cases more is better than less. One cord may be easily broken; two would require greater strength; but three would be difficult to break. One traveler might be inviting danger; two travelers adds to both travelers' safety; but three would fair even better. I think what he had in mind is the matter of how unity and partnership adds to productivity, adds to safety, being greatly increased, and makes an activity with real friendship and thus greater unity almost invulnerable to failure.

Think of this series of increase here in regard to families. Solomon virtually calls being single a miserable business, at least in terms of work. Husband and wife would be two, and they are stronger than one alone and also more productive. If Christ is the third with the husband and wife, He adds immeasurably to their productiveness and invulnerability. Incidentally, families with many children hardly ever break up. There is strength even in numbers within a family.

**Ecclesiastes 4:13-16** Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more. For he comes out of prison to be king, although he was born poor in his kingdom. I saw all the living who walk under the sun. They were with the second youth who stands in his place. There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king. Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him, surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

We added a *fourth* better here, and another comparison is on its way. He states in each one of these better cases, that this is better than that. In verses 3, 6, 9, and now in verse 13, he uses the term better for the fourth time. What he is doing is he is going to let you know that in this series of verses, he is going to make another serious comparison.

The story flow in this comparison is a bit choppy, but it goes like this: A young man born without wealth, who even spent time in prison, unexpectedly rises to power. And as king

when young, he listens well, and rules well, but in old age it appears that he becomes prideful and loses his kingship to a younger man. By this time, the kingdom was very great, but Solomon admonishes that the new king's fame will not last long, and people who formerly cheered for him will lose their appreciation for the younger king, and he too can thus look forward to losing his office.

Solomon does not dwell on why the original king became hardened to his counselors advice, only that he gradually rejected his counselor's advice as he aged, thus implying that it was foolish for the king to do so, and he ended his rule in a measure of disgrace. A piece of advice from Solomon—he is not overbearing with it—but do not get so prideful that you cannot take advice.

Thus the overall subjects of these four verses is a warning regarding pride and more obviously the instability of political power and the fickleness of popularity. Do not ever depend on being popular. The point is made, in the last part of verse 16, that the younger man who replaced the original king in this example in turn is going to find that history will repeat itself. He will go through much the same process as the man who preceded him to the throne. He will find in time that he too is no longer accepted by the citizens, and he too will be removed from his rulership and be replaced by another.

The most obvious lesson from this is that public life is not lasting. Political life is a bumpy ride. Do not bank on it being a constant regarding your future. Fame is fleeting and everybody is expendable. It does not even matter if you are the king; everybody is expendable.

The second is related to the public being fickle. Because of the self-centeredness of human nature, the majority of people operate toward their leaders by the principle that, "I believe you were good in the past, but what have you done for me lately." The emphases, there, is on the word *me*. That is what Solomon is implying there.

One of the items we see Solomon describe here teaches to some degree on the frequent changes of leadership in our governmental elections systems. Each administration begins with high hopes within the citizenry, but by the time the next election occurs, that is forgotten. Elections invite a measure of emotional, economic, and social chaos within those nations' every election, because the people's dissatisfaction with the old regime are brought front and center as persistent appeals are made for the removal of those currently in power.

You cannot have a stable system with that going on. Each election invites the opportunity for the citizenry to express their accusations, thus creating at times a

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significant emotional, social, and, economic disturbances in the culture, as people persistently give their dissatisfaction vent against the current administration.

Rarely does anything change in a positive way. Instead, history shows that the overwhelming number of times, quality of life issues that greatly involve morality grow worse. It seems as though we quickly forget that the previous election changed little or nothing.

There is a possibility that when Solomon gave this last several verses that he had Joseph, the son of Jacob, in mind. Joseph experiences in Egypt pretty closely parallel the examples given here in verse 15 and 16. One can draw parallels from his life in Egypt during which: 1) Joseph spent time in prison. He was really poor then, and 2) He was released from prison at the command of Pharaoh (all of these references are in Genesis 41:37-46), and was placed in authority over everybody in the nation except for Pharaoh. So Joseph received much acclaim because his leadership, which was deemed fair by the population, because of the circumstances. However, sadly, the final note of this story is that Solomon also said, "Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him."

**Exodus 1:8** Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph.

The acclaim was gone and forgotten; and we know that this impacted the plight of the Israelites or God would not have acknowledged it. Right at the beginning of this story.

So Ecclesiastes 4 provides us with a significant contrast to the uplifting, hope-filled promises of chapter 3. But it refocuses our attention on the fact that we live in a world under the sun, and we must compare carefully, making our choices, understanding some of the pit falls and difficulties those choices may entail. If we make the wrong choices, they will produce the vanities Solomon so frequently admonishes us of in this chapter.