

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4

Oppressions increase vanity: In verses 1-3, the author considers the thought that oppression is so great in the world that the oppressed would actually be better off dead, thus rendering death more appealing.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of [such as were] oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors [there was] power; but they had no comforter.

There is an oppression that comes on good men from the worldly men.

There is also, an oppression that Satan tries to harass us all with.

The following is an example of oppression from the worldly.

Exodus 1:13-14 "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor:" "And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, [was] with rigor."

Rigor is defined:

1. Strictness or severity, as in temperament, action, or judgment;
2. A harsh or trying circumstance; hardship;
3. A harsh or cruel act.

Of that oppression which comes from Satan, is a spiritual oppression.

Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to help the believers overcome that oppression.

John 14:26 "But the Comforter, [which is] the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

John 16:7: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

Ecclesiastes 4:2 Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.

The dead have already run their race.

They do not have to face the problems of this life.

Solomon is speaking of the thoughts of his mind about this world, and the world to come.

Job had a very similar statement to say about this very thing.

Job 3:18 "[There] the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor." We find the blessedness of death for the believer in the following.

Revelation 14:13 "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed [are] the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

Ecclesiastes 4:3 Yea, better [is he] than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

(Verses 4-6), tell us that the enviable workaholic (verse 4), nor the lazy fool (verse 5), receives fulfillment in life; working to have enough to get by with is better than either extreme (verse 6).

It appears, that Solomon is looking back over his life and seeing the sorrows and injustices that men do against their fellowmen.

He dwells on the sadness of life.

He says it is better not to have been born, than see all of this sorrow.

This is generally, the way most people feel, when they are away from God.

It seems so futile to live, if there is no heaven.

"Evil work":

Earthly life can be so disheartening as to make non-existence preferable.

Even Job asked the question, "Why did I not die from my mother's womb?"

There is a great deal of sadness in this life.

The joy comes in feeling assured of your salvation.

Hope for the believer is in the resurrection to eternal life in Jesus.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This [is] also vanity and vexation of spirit.

This is speaking of a person working hard and becoming a success, and then, his neighbors become envious of his success.

Usually the person, who is envious, would not put out the effort it took to be a success.

The very first time this happened, was between the two brothers, Cain and Abel.

Cain was jealous, because God accepted Abel's offering, and did not accept his.

He became so envious, he killed his brother.

Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, because they envied his relationship with his dad.

Even the men of the temple envied Jesus, and had Him destroyed.

Mark 15:10 "For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy."

Solomon says, you have trouble in this life, but the most trouble comes when you are successful, and your friends begin to envy you.

The lack of satisfaction with life leads some to conclude that everyone else has it better.

Ecclesiastes 4:5 The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

Verse 4 spoke of success causing people to envy you, and eventually caused sadness.

Now, Solomon contrasts that with someone who is too lazy to work.

He is saying, is this better?

He speaks of the person being destructive to himself (eateth his own flesh).

Even the man who settles into idleness, living on what he takes from others, is self-tormented and never satisfied (Isaiah 9:20 and 44:20).

Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better [is] a handful [with] quietness, than both the hands full [with] travail and vexation of spirit.

Solomon is saying, that many times with great wealth and success, goes much unhappiness.

Your friends and loved ones' envy and sometimes even despise you, when you are more successful than they are.

He has decided it is better to have less, and have your friends.

Proverbs 15:16 "Better [is] little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith."

2 Thessalonians 3:12 "Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."

Verses 7-12

Tells us the toil of the miser is futile, especially when he toils only for himself.

On the other hand, two are better than one because they have a good return (verse 9); they can help each other (verse 10); they can provide mutual warmth (verse 11); and they double their strength, or triple it, as in the case of three friends (verse 12).

Ecclesiastes 4:7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.

In our society today, we would say Solomon was experiencing deep depression.

He believes that human efforts are all in vain.

Ecclesiastes 4:8 There is one [alone], and [there is] not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet [is there] no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither [saith he], For whom do I labor, and bereave my soul of good? This [is] also vanity, yea, it [is] a sore travail.

This is speaking of loneliness.

This too, is strange coming from Solomon.

He is surrounded by wives and concubines, but feeling very alone.

He believes to be alone is no good, because you have no family.

This shows the despair of a man who has had wealth, wisdom, fame, and even all the worldly things his heart desired, and still finds no satisfaction.

What he is looking for?

Peace comes from God and not in things.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two [are] better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor.

The reward he is speaking of here is a sharing.

They can share their successes.

In fact, they can even console each other in their failures.

Two are better than one, if they are of one accord.

Ecclesiastes 4:10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him [that is] alone when he falleth; for [he hath] not another to help him up.

The verse above, is not necessarily speaking of a wife, but it could be applied thusly.

Genesis 2:18 "And the LORD God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him."

The Lord sent ministers out two by two.

I believe the following Scripture is why He did this.

Matthew 18:19 "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Mark 6:7 "And he called [unto him] the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits;"

The number "two" means agreement.

This is speaking of one helping the other and them being in agreement.

Ecclesiastes 4:11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm [alone]?

The body puts off a certain amount of heat, and two in a bed together can stay warmer than just one.

The robe many of the Israelites wore served as a blanket to sleep under, as well.

Two blankets are warmer than one.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

This is speaking of the strength that comes with the bonding of two, or three, together.

The following Scripture tells us something of the strength of more than one.

Deuteronomy 32:30 "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?"

Ecclesiastes 4:13 Better [is] a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished.

The problem with the king is he has become hardened in his heart, and is not aware of his need to repent.

Sad as it is, if he dies in this condition, he would go to hell.

The fact that he had been king would not help him at all.

This wise child is still teachable and is wise enough to realize he needs a Savior.

Proverbs 28:6 "Better [is] the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than [he that is] perverse [in his] ways, though he [be] rich."

The cherished popularity of kings is precarious and short lived.

Ecclesiastes 4:14 For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also [he that is] born in his kingdom becometh poor.

The best example of this is when Joseph was in jail in Egypt for something he did not do, and was brought out of prison to reign as second in command.

Ecclesiastes 4:15 I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead.

This has so many suggestions.

The firstborn was thought to be the one who would reign in his father's stead.

This was not so in many instances.

Jacob and Esau are a very good example of this.

Jacob was the second born, but received the favored son's blessing.

This could, also, apply to Ephraim and Manasseh.

Ephraim was the second son, but received the right hand blessing.

It is a type and shadow of the Jew and the Christian.

The natural Jew was God's first choice, but the Christians, second choice, received Jesus more readily.

This scripture refers to the legitimate successor to the “old and foolish king”, as opposed to the “poor yet wise lad” (verse 13), who rises on his ability to reign.

Ecclesiastes 4:16 [There is] no end of all the people, [even] of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also [is] vanity and vexation of spirit.

We see in this, the multitude that came to follow the second.

In Joseph's case, the Egyptians were dependent on the second in command for food.

Joseph's help was soon forgotten after the famine was over.

The king who reigned later forgot all the blessings Joseph had brought.

They did not remember him.

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4 Questions

1. Where can oppression on a good man come from?

2. Jesus sent the _____ to the Christians to comfort them.
3. Why did Solomon praise the dead?
4. Blessed are the dead which _____ in the Lord.
5. What does Solomon seem to be doing?
6. How do most people, who are away from God, feel?
7. What question did Job ask, in despair?
8. Hope for the believer is in the _____ to _____ in Jesus.
9. What happens, many times, when a person is successful?
10. Who were the first examples in the Bible of jealousy?
11. What did the jealousy lead to?
12. What type of person is verse 5 speaking of?
13. With _____ they work, and eat their own bread.
14. In our society today, we would say Solomon was experiencing _____.
15. Why is it strange to think of Solomon as being lonely?
16. What is he looking for?
17. Where is the only place to find it?
18. Why are two better than one?
19. That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, what will happen?
20. How did Jesus send out the apostles?
21. What is verse 12 speaking of?
22. What is the problem with the king in verse 13?
23. Who is the best example of the one mentioned in verse 14?
24. Name some of the examples, where the second born received the first born blessing.
25. Who are these a type and shadow of?