

Study of Ecclesiastes: Chapter 4
Questions for Discussion

1. Explain the intended meaning of verses 1-3 in light of the Koheleth's statement in chapter 9:2-6 and 11:7-8. Is there a contradiction? (vv. Job 3:11-19)

2. What is the Koheleth stating in verse 4 about labor and envy:
 - That man's labor is driven by envy (or rivalry) towards his neighbor?
 - That man's success causes his neighbor to be envious?

3. What is the fool's attitude towards labor? (vv. 5-6)

4. Does verse 6 represent a statement by the Koheleth or the fool's reasoning?

5. What motivates the one who has no one to work for under the sun? (vv. 7-8)

6. What does the Koheleth say about the value of friendship or unity? How does he illustrate this? (vv. 9-12)

7. How does the Koheleth illustrate the vanity of power? (vv. 13-16)

8. What characteristic of the old king is mentioned and why is it important? What can we learn from this? (vv. 13-16)

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Notes & Answers

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16 (ESV)

¹Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. ²And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. ³But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

⁴Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

⁵The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.

⁶ Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.

⁷ Again, I saw vanity under the sun: ⁸one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

¹³Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. ¹⁴For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. ¹⁵I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. ¹⁶There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

1. Explain the intended meaning of verses 1-3 in light of the Koheleth's statement in chapter 9:2-6 and 11:7-8. Is there a contradiction? (vv. Job 3:11-19)

Job 3:11-19 (ESV)

¹¹"Why^(A) did I not die at birth,
come out from the womb and expire?

¹²Why did^(B) the knees receive me?

Or why the breasts, that I should nurse?

¹³For then I would have lain down and been quiet;

I would have slept; then I would have been at rest,

¹⁴with kings and counselors of the earth

who^(C) rebuilt ruins for themselves,

¹⁵or with princes who had gold,

who filled their houses with silver.

¹⁶Or why was I not as a hidden^(D) stillborn child,

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as infants who never see the light?

¹⁷There the wicked cease from troubling,
and there the weary are at ^(E) rest.

¹⁸There the prisoners are at ease together;
they hear not the voice of ^(E) the taskmaster.

¹⁹The small and the great are there,
and the slave is free from his master.

Ecc 9:2-6 (ESV)

^{2(A)} It is the same for all, since ^(B) the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, ^(a) to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who ^(C) swears is as he who shuns an oath. ³This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that ^(D) the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and ^(E) madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. ⁴But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵For the living know that they will die, but ^(E) the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for ^(G) the memory of them is forgotten. ⁶Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.

Ecc 11:7-8 (ESV)

⁷Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to ^(J) see the sun.

⁸So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember ^(J) that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is ^(K) vanity.

2. What is the Koheleth stating in verse 4 about labor and envy:

- That man's labor is driven by envy (or rivalry) towards his neighbor?
- That man's success causes his neighbor to be envious?

Could be either, but verse seems to indicate the former

3. What is the fool's attitude towards labor? (vv. 5-6)

He avoids it to his own detriment....

4. Does verse 6 represent a statement by the Koheleth or the fool's reasoning?

I think it is the fool's reasoning

5. What motivates the one who has no one to work for under the sun? (vv. 7-8)

The illusion of riches / wealth (there is no satisfaction)

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6. What does the Koheleth say about the value of friendship or unity? How does he illustrate this? (vv. 9-12)

Two are better than one....

- Able to accomplish more
- One can pick up the other when they fall
- Can warm each other
- They are stronger together

7. How does the Koheleth illustrate the vanity of power? (vv. 13-16)

By talking about the old and foolish king who is no longer able to take instruction due to his power

8. What characteristic of the old king is mentioned and why is it important? What can we learn from this? (vv. 13-16)

See answer above