

# More Puzzling Matters

## Chapter 4:1-3

Injustice, swift, erect, and unconfined,  
Sweeps the wide earth, and tramples o'er mankind.  
Alexander Pope, in *The Iliad of Homer*

**It's unfortunate but true:** injustice and oppression seem to be a normal part of human life. The powerful abuse the weak and the rich mistreat the poor. Such has been the case from the beginning (e.g., Cain and Able), and will be true until the Lord puts a stop to it.

**Solomon, the Preacher,** begins the fourth chapter of Ecclesiastes by venting his frustration over the oppression of the weak. He goes on to talk about other puzzling matters, such as the futility of labor, the foolishness of independence, the futility of politics, and false worship.

### The Oppression of the Weak (4:1-3)

Perhaps Solomon heard reports that charged his government with injustice and oppression. He looked into the matter and found that such accusations were true. What is oppression? *When those in power take advantage of the weak.*

**What kinds of people are often oppressed and have no power to withstand?**

*Poor people, the elderly, the young, some races (in some places), handicapped.*

**What does Solomon say is true of the oppressed?**

*They were crying ("tears"); they had no comforter; they had no power.*

**What does he conclude about the matter?**

*It's better to be dead than to be oppressed. It's better yet not to have lived at all.*

**Why does he say that it's better not to have lived at all?**

*Because then one would not experience oppression.*

Solomon presents a dismal view of human life for those who are suffering oppression. Is Solomon advocating for suicide? Would he support euthanasia? *No, he's expressing a human/worldly point of view. Even Solomon the king didn't feel as if he could do anything to change the situation.*

**What is our responsibility to the oppressed according to the following verses?**

Psalm 82:3-4    Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.  
                         Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.

Isaiah 1:17      Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Jeremiah 22:3    Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do

no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.

Zech 7:9-10 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

### **The Futility of Politics (4:13-16)**

Perhaps a walk around the halls of government reminded Solomon about the story of the old king who was replaced by a young revolutionary.

Although Solomon was not subject to political campaigns or elections, he recognized that popularity is temporary at best. He seems to be describing an old leader who is no longer capable of governing, but refuses to take advice or to step down. A young revolutionary (KJV "child" is probably better "youth" or "young man") who comes to power may initially be more popular than an old, senile king, but he too will eventually be overthrown. People are fickle. Today's hero is tomorrow's bum. Popularity comes and goes. This fact drove Solomon to conclude that politics is so much "chasing after the wind" (KJV "vexation of spirit").

How important is popularity? *It's pretty important to some people. They want to fit in, be looked up to.*

**Why is it unwise to strive for popularity? *It's fleeting/temporary.***

***Exceptional Features of Ecclesiastes Four:***

1. Oppression is universal and depressing. Make sure that you are not the one doing the oppressing.
2. Advancing your career should not be the highest priority in your life. You should labor enough to provide for yourself and your family, but not so much that you have no time to enjoy life. It's foolish to seek great wealth.
3. There are many advantages of companionship and cooperation. Loners never get to enjoy the benefits that living with others bring.
4. Politics is as futile as chasing after the wind. It's impossible for a leader to please everyone. Popularity is temporary. Wealth and position are no guarantees of continued success.

**Conclusion:** The matters Solomon discusses in this section of Ecclesiastes certainly are puzzling. It's only when one "enters the house of God" to seriously consider such things that one can make sense of them all.

**For Further Discussion:**

1. Solomon condemns the oppression of the weak, but he doesn't say why God allows it. Why does such evil exist in a world under God's sovereign control? *We live in a fallen world in*

*which Satan has great influence. God allows evil people to do evil things, even to Christians. Even such evil and suffering forwards God's ultimate plan.*

2. Give some examples of how popularity rises and falls. *Politicians—President Bush was very popular during the Gulf War, but lost the election a year later; Media—TV, music, movie stars hot one month and cold the next.*

How should we handle the puzzling matters that trouble us? *We should bring them to the "house of God," i.e., we should look at them from God's viewpoint, let the Bible and theology tell us how to understand them.*