

## **Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 — Understanding “For Out of Prison He Came to Be King”**

### **Ecclesiastes 4:13 (NIV)**

*“Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning.”*

*Verse 14:*

*“[For] he came out of prison to become king; even though he was born poor in his kingdom.”*

*Verse 15:*

*“I saw all the living who walk under the sun, how they were held fast by the young man, the second who stood in his place.”*

### **Verse 16:**

“Those who come after will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

Theological Explanation:

**Verse 13** emphasizes the supreme value of **wisdom** over human titles, age, or status. In biblical theology, wisdom is not just intellectual knowledge but the ability to live rightly before God and others. The verse contrasts a *poor but wise youth* with an *old and foolish king* who refuses to accept correction. This rejection of counsel is a serious spiritual flaw (cf. Proverbs 1:7; 9:10), as wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord and a humble heart willing to learn (Proverbs 13:1).

Biblical examples of foolish rulers who ignored divine warnings include Rehoboam (1 Kings 12), Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4, early reign), Belshazzar (Daniel 5), Ahab (1 Kings 16-22), and Herod (Acts 12). Their stubbornness brought judgment and calamity on their nations, showing how vital it is for leaders to remain humble and obedient to God.

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**Verse 14** highlights the paradox of worldly success and divine sovereignty. The “young man who came out of prison to become king” likely alludes to figures like **Joseph** (Genesis 41), who was imprisoned unjustly yet raised to Pharaoh’s right hand, and **David**, a shepherd boy

who became king despite humble origins (1 Samuel 16). This illustrates that **God’s providence is not limited by human status**; He exalts the lowly and humbles the proud (Psalm 75:6-7; Luke 1:52).

This verse warns against assuming success is guaranteed by birth or rank. True elevation comes from God’s sovereign hand, not merely human achievement.

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**Verse 15** describes the fleeting nature of human allegiance. After one ruler rises and gains loyalty, another soon follows, and people transfer their support. This portrays the **transient and unstable nature of earthly power** (cf. Psalm 146:3-4). Even the strongest leaders cannot hold favor forever, for all are subject to change and eventual replacement.

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**Verse 16** concludes with the sobering truth that no human reign brings lasting joy or satisfaction. The preacher calls it “vanity” (Hebrew *hevel*), a key theme in Ecclesiastes meaning “meaninglessness” or “breath” something fleeting and insubstantial (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12). The phrase

“striving after wind” echoes human efforts to find lasting significance in earthly things, which ultimately fail.

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Summary and Spiritual Reflection:

This passage reminds believers that **earthly honor, status, and success are temporary** and often unpredictable. Human praise is unreliable and fades with time. The ultimate **source of true wisdom and lasting security is God** (Proverbs 2:6).

The cyclical rise and fall of leaders point to the vanity of placing hope in mortal rulers. Instead, Christians are called to place their hope in **Jesus Christñ the eternal King** who alone is wise, just, and faithful forever (Revelation 19:16). Unlike earthly kings, Jesus never loses favor, never grows tired, and offers eternal life to all who trust in Him (John 10:27-30; Hebrews 13:8).

If you have not yet accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, this is an invitation to open your heart to Him, receive His wisdom, and find eternal life (John 1:12).

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**May the Lord bless you richly as you seek true wisdom in Him!**

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