

Ecclesiastes 4:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun—the Preacher turns from judicial corruption (3:16) to systematic oppression. The Hebrew *ashukkim* (אֲשׁוּקִים, oppressions) describes exploitation, extortion, violent injustice perpetrated by the powerful. **Behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter**—the repetition of *menahem* (מְנַחֵם, comforter) emphasizes utter abandonment. Victims weep with no one to console or deliver them.

On the side of their oppressors there was power—*koach* (כֹּחַ, power/strength) concentrated in oppressors' hands creates hopeless asymmetry. The weak have no recourse, no advocate, no deliverer 'under the sun.' This bleak assessment drives readers toward God as ultimate Comforter and Deliverer. Jesus quoted Isaiah's 'comfort ye my people' (40:1) as his messianic mission (Luke 4:18)—the Messiah comes to liberate captives and comfort mourners when human systems provide no relief.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern societies operated on power hierarchies—kings, nobles, landowners exploited peasants, slaves, widows, orphans with minimal legal

protection. Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Canaanite systems institutionalized oppression. Israel's covenant law uniquely protected vulnerable populations (Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 24:17-22), but enforcement failed repeatedly. Prophets condemned Israel's oppression: 'They sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes' (Amos 2:6). The exile itself resulted partly from covenant violation through oppression (Ezekiel 22:29). First-century Palestine under Roman occupation embodied this verse—heavy taxation, arbitrary violence, systemic exploitation with no earthly comforter.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. Where do you witness oppression in contemporary society, and what responsibility do you bear as one who knows the divine Comforter?
2. How does Jesus's identification with the oppressed (Matthew 25:31-46) shape your response to systemic injustice?

Interlinear Text

אָשׁ רַ הַעֲשֹׂק יִם כֹּל אֶת וְאָרְאָה אֲנִי יֵשׁ בְּתִי
So I returned H7725 **and considered** H7200 **all the oppressions** H6217 H589 H853 H3605 H834

דְּמַעַת וְהִנֵּה הוּא הַשֶּׁשׁ מִשׁ תַּחַת בְּעֵשׂ יִם
and behold the tears H1832 **under the sun** H8121 **that are done** H6213 H8478 H2009

וּמִי ד מְנַחֵם: לָהֶם וְאֵין הַעֲשֹׂק יִם
and they had no comforter H5162 **and on the side** H3027 **all the oppressions** H6217 H369 H0

לְעֹשֵׂיָהֶם כֹּחַ וְאֵין לָהֶם
of such as were oppressed H6231 **there was power** H3581 H369 H0

מְנַחֵם:
and they had no comforter H5162

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 3:16 (Parallel theme): And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.

Ecclesiastes 5:8 (Parallel theme): If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.

Isaiah 5:7 (Parallel theme): For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

Isaiah 51:23 (Parallel theme): But I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over: and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over.

Isaiah 59:7 (Parallel theme): Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.

Psalms 12:5 (Parallel theme): For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

Psalms 42:3 (Parallel theme): My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

Psalms 42:9 (Parallel theme): I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

Job 35:9 (Parallel theme): By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry: they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty.

Matthew 26:56 (Parallel theme): But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.