

Ecclesiastes 4:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king,
who will no more be admonished.

Analysis

Better is a poor and a wise child (טוב יֶלֶד מַשְׁקֵן וְחִכָּם) —the Hebrew yeled means 'youth' or 'boy,' while misken denotes being lowly or poor. **Than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished** (מְלָךְ, זָקֵן וְכָסֵל אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעַ לְהִזָּהֶר עַד) —one who 'knows not to be warned anymore,' having become unteachable through pride.

Qoheleth establishes a paradoxical comparison: poverty combined with wisdom and youth surpasses wealth, power, and age when the latter is marked by foolishness and obstinacy. The phrase 'will no more be admonished' (lo-yada lehizaher) is particularly damning—the old king has become unreceptive to counsel, the cardinal sin of wisdom literature. Proverbs repeatedly exalts the teachable spirit (Proverbs 12:15, 'the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice'). This anticipates Jesus's warning that 'whoever humbles himself like this child is greatest' (Matthew 18:4).

Historical Context

This may allude to specific historical figures—some suggest Rehoboam (Solomon's son who rejected elder counsel, 1 Kings 12), or perhaps Solomon reflecting on his own later spiritual decline. The ancient Near East honored age, making this reversal striking.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 – Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What signs indicate you're becoming 'old and foolish' in spirit—resistant to correction regardless of chronological age?
2. How does pride masquerade as experience, preventing necessary course corrections?
3. In what areas might God be calling you to maintain the 'poor and wise child' posture of humility?

Interlinear Text

אָשָׁר	וְכָסֵל	זֶלֶן	מִתְלֶךְ	מִתְמַסֵּךְ	וְבָטָן	לְדִבָּר	מִתְמַמֵּן	מִתְמַמֵּן	וְבָטָן	זֶלֶן	וְכָסֵל	אָשָׁר
Better	child	is a poor	and a wise	king	than an old	and foolish						H834
H2896	H3206	H4542	H2450	H4428	H2205	H3684						

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 25:16 (Kingdom): And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbare, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.

Proverbs 19:1 (Parallel theme): Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool.

