

# Ecclesiastes 4:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.

## Analysis

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**Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive**—facing relentless oppression without comfort (4:1), the Preacher reaches a shocking conclusion. The Hebrew shabach (שָׁבַח, praised/congratulated) doesn't advocate suicide but honestly confronts unbearable suffering's logic: death offers escape from perpetual injustice. The dead are 'already dead' (she-kevar metu, שֶׁקְבָּרָ מְתוּ) —their suffering is finished; the living 'yet alive' (achayim, אֲחַיִם) must endure ongoing torment.

This isn't the Bible's final word on suffering—Job, Psalms, Isaiah, and supremely Christ demonstrate redemptive purpose in suffering. But Ecclesiastes honestly voices the despair oppression produces 'under the sun' without eternal perspective. The verse validates sufferers' anguish without romanticizing it. Only resurrection hope transforms this calculation: death loses its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55), present suffering proves 'not worthy to be compared' with coming glory (Romans 8:18).

## Historical Context

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Ancient peoples living under brutal regimes—Assyrian deportations, Babylonian conquest, Persian subjugation, Greek tyranny—understood this sentiment viscerally. Slavery, forced labor, arbitrary execution made life for many a continuous nightmare. Job expressed similar despair: 'Why died I not from the womb?' (3:11). Jeremiah cursed his birth day (20:14-18). These weren't theological

errors but honest expressions of overwhelming suffering. Post-exilic Judaism grappled with covenant promises versus crushing realities. The New Testament introduces resurrection as game-changer: Paul could say 'to die is gain' not from despair but confident hope (Philippians 1:21).

## Related Passages

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**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. How does this verse give permission to voice honest despair while the gospel provides ultimate hope beyond despair?
2. When you encounter suffering that seems unbearable, how does Christ's resurrection transform death from preferred escape to defeated enemy?

## Interlinear Text

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וְשָׁבָּה כִּי	מֵתָּה אַתָּה אָנָּה	שָׁכַב רַ	מֵתָּה אַתָּה אָנָּה	מֵתָּה אַתָּה אָנָּה	מֵתָּה אַתָּה אָנָּה	מֵתָּה אַתָּה אָנָּה
<b>Wherefore I praised</b>	H589	H853	<b>dead</b>	<b>which are already</b>	<b>dead</b>	H4480
H7623			H4191	H3528	H4191	H2416
הַ פָּה אֲשֶׁר	מֵתָּה אַתָּה אָנָּה:	עָדָתָה:				
H834	H1992	alive	<b>which are yet</b>	H5728		
		H2416				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ecclesiastes 2:17** (Parallel theme): Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

