

# Proverbs 30:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear:

## Analysis

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**For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear.**

Another numerical proverb introduces social disruptions that violate natural order. Ragaz (רָגַז, disquieted) means to quake, tremble, be agitated. Lo tukhal se'et (לֹא תִכָּל שֵׂאֵת, cannot bear) expresses intolerable burden. The earth itself (eretz, אֶרֶץ) personified cannot endure these inversions of proper order.

This proverb assumes divinely-ordained social structures. While not endorsing sinful hierarchies or oppression, Scripture recognizes that certain role reversals create social chaos. The wisdom here is sociological: when fundamental structures invert, society destabilizes. The Old Testament frequently uses cosmic imagery for social disorder—earth mourning (Jeremiah 4:28), land vomiting out inhabitants (Leviticus 18:25), creation groaning (Romans 8:22). These four scenarios represent unqualified persons suddenly assuming positions requiring wisdom, character, or resources they lack.

## Historical Context

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Ancient Near Eastern societies were rigidly hierarchical. Social mobility was extremely limited. Birth determined status. The scenarios Agur describes would represent radical upheavals threatening social stability. While modern democratic sensibilities resist such hierarchy, the wisdom principle remains: authority requires character, competence requires training, relationships require maturity, inheritance requires stewardship. Sudden elevation of unqualified persons creates

instability. Israel's history demonstrates this: Jeroboam (servant elevated to king) led Israel into idolatry (1 Kings 12:25-33). Athaliah (usurper) nearly destroyed David's line (2 Kings 11). The principle isn't defending unjust hierarchies but warning against unprepared persons assuming roles beyond their readiness.

## Related Passages

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**James 2:17** — Faith and works

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## Study Questions

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1. How does this proverb's emphasis on proper qualification and preparation challenge both unearned privilege and unwise elevation of the unprepared?
2. What character qualities and competencies are necessary before assuming increased responsibility in family, work, or church—and are you pursuing these?
3. How does Jesus's reversal of worldly power structures (Matthew 20:25-28) differ from the chaotic inversions Agur warns against?

## Interlinear Text

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תַּחַת	שְׁלוֹשׁ	כִּי גִזָּה	אֲרֶץ	וְתַחַת	אֲרֶבֶב ע	לֹא
H8478	<b>For three</b>	<b>is disquieted</b>	<b>things the earth</b>	H8478	<b>and for four</b>	H3808
	H7969	H7264	H776		H702	
תּוֹכֵל	שָׂאת:					
<b>which it cannot</b>	<b>bear</b>					
H3201	H5375					

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