

Ecclesiastes 4: 13 and 14; "A Poor but Wise Youth", A Bible Study
prepared for the Evening of February 17th, 2010,
and delivered at the Rendall Home.

The key to understanding verses 13-16 is the phrase, "who will be admonished no more." It is better to be poor but wise youth, and to receive admonition; than it is to be an old rich king and to be foolish and not receive admonition. I think that Solomon was thinking about himself, in certain ways, when he wrote these words. He is indeed putting these words forward as a proverb of objective truth, and setting them forth in a hypothetical situation; but we have seen him use his own experience at many points in this book to prove the point that he has been trying to make about the vanity of life apart from God. He has often been using his own experience as king to show us more about how we should live our lives. How much we need the wisdom and the counsel of God in order to live our life in such a way that it will be lastingly profitable to God and ourselves! Solomon was a young man who almost did not become king when he was a youth, but it was because the Lord worked in the heart and mind of his father David, who was king before him; to receive admonition; that he became king and so many other good things happened for the kingdom of God in His own generation. There are a couple of things that might prevent us from seeing Solomon as the person being referred to in these verses. The first is the description of the youth who is being spoken about as being "poor". Could Solomon in any sense of the word be considered "poor" when he was a youth growing up? And then secondly is the phrase, "coming out of a prison". Was Solomon ever in a prison when he was a youth? I want to deal with those questions first. So this evening we will look at Solomon as a poor but wise youth. Then the next time we look at these verses we will look at Solomon as an old and foolish king. And then we will also see, in our next study, how he once again became wise by admonition.

First of all – Let's look at Solomon when he was a poor but wise youth.

"Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more." "For he comes out of prison to be king, although he was born poor in his kingdom." I think that this is a better translation in verse 14 than the King James which says, "For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becomes poor." I think that the context of this verse is the contrast of the poor and wise youth with the old and the foolish king; not with someone else, born in his kingdom, who becomes poor. The King James version's rendering of this verse, I believe, confuses the issue. The issue is really the poverty of the youth; not the poverty of the people under his rule. The New American Standard says, "For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom." This is, I believe, the correct translation. When I think of Solomon as a youth, I think of him as being poor in certain definite ways which I

think that I can explain biblically. Turn with me to 1st Kings Chapter 1. I want to look at David's part in all these things related to Solomon's being both poor and wise. Verse 1 says, "Now King David was old, advanced in years; and they put covers on him, but he could not get warm." Here we find that Solomon's father, King David, is getting on in years. He is an old king, but he is not a foolish king as we shall see, although he had not raised some of his sons in the right way. Look at verse 5. "Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king'; and he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him." "(And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, 'Why have you done so?' "He was also very good looking." "His mother had borne him after Absalom.)" "Then he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar the priest, and they followed and helped Adonijah." "But Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and the mighty men who belonged to David were not with Adonijah." Look at verse 11 – "So Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, 'Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king, and David our lord does not know it?' "Come, please, let me now give you advice, (let me admonish you) that you may save your own life and life of your son Solomon." "Go immediately to King David and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord, O king, swear to your maidservant, saying, 'Assuredly your son Solomon shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne?' "Why then has Adonijah become king?" "Then while you are still talking there with the king, I also will come in after you and confirm your words." You see, King David had already declared his will in relation to who was to reign in Israel following his death; it was to be Solomon. But he had only declared it to some people, and not to all the people. So Adonijah thought that since he was David's oldest living son; that since he appeared to stand at the head of the line of those who should succeed; that he would declare himself king. By the way, it is not a good thing in a young man, or an older man for that matter, to be going about to set themselves up in authority either in the church or in political matters. It is a good quality in a man if he can take his seat at the bottom of the table, and then when he is asked to move up; he can do so with a clear conscience in the sight of God and men. Exercising authority among men is not a matter of a person's declaring themselves to be that authority. Oh, it is true that Adonijah took counsel with those he knew would favor him; Joab, Abiathar, and others. But he did not confer with the one who he needed most to confer with, and to be admonished by. He did not confer with his dear dad, the king. How often young men make this kind of mistake. They will only confer with those who will approve of their plans when their plans only speak of their selfish ambition and pride. And they do not confer with their parents or those who are in legitimate Biblical authority over them. Adonijah, it says, "exalted himself."

David was partially at fault for this because it says in verse 6, "And his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, 'Why have you done so?' "He did not admonish him as he ought to have; and so Adonijah was not a wise youth. He did not teach his son how important things should be done. There was a right way and a

wrong way to go about inquiring into these things and Adonijah did not do it. He would not be admonished. To be admonished is to be taught the right thing to do by the proper authority figure. But you do find that David was not an old and foolish king. Admonition is most definitely needed for those who do not know what they need to do, in order to make the right choice about what should be done in relation to important matters that affect the welfare of a nation, or the welfare of the kingdom of God. Listen to Bathsheba's speech to David. Verse 17 says, "Then she said to him, 'My lord, you swore by the Lord your God to your maidservant, saying, 'Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.'" "So now, look!" "Adonijah has become king; and now, my lord the king, you do not know about it." "He has sacrificed oxen and fattened cattle and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of the army; but Solomon your servant he has not invited." "And as for you, my lord, O king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, that you should tell them who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him." "Otherwise it will happen, when my lord the king rests with his fathers, that I and my son will be counted as offenders. (that is: that they would be banished out of the kingdom, or put to death) This admonition was confirmed by another, by Nathan the prophet, who came in and basically spoke the same words to David as Bathsheba did; just so that he would know that this was something that he really needed to do, and that God's will was greatly involved in it. Spiritual admonition; right admonition is always interested in doing things in the right way; the Bible way; and not just in our own personal way; going about to establish our personal interests.

But it is in this way that Solomon was poor. He had been promised the kingdom, but could not establish it himself. Even his mother who had been promised that he should be king over it; she could not establish it unless she could persuade the king through admonishing him. But thanks be to God; David was not an old and foolish king who would no longer be admonished. He received it, and acted upon it, and Solomon became king. Solomon was poor in this sense; that he could do nothing to bring himself into the kingship. A person can reasonably be considered to be poor when he does not have the resources to do what he knows that he has been called and appointed to do, and what he knows that he should do, in the sight of God and men. Then, too, he was poor because he was inexperienced in being able to rule the people. It is in this sense that I think that Solomon was in a prison of sorts. He was locked up by the circumstances in which he found himself. Look over with me at 1 Chronicles Chapter 28, verse 9. "As for you my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts." "If you seek Him, He will be found by you, but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever." "Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong and do it." This was quite a privilege and quite a calling; to build the temple of the Lord. How could Solomon do it? By knowing the Lord and by seeking the Lord. This his father admonished him to do. What a father may have failed to do in

the past with his other older sons, he may do with the one who is younger. Look over at Chapter 29, verse 1. "Furthermore King David said to all the assembly: 'My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced; and the work is great, because the temple is not for man but for the Lord God.'" How was Solomon to do this? How was he to come out of the prison that he was in; of being called to such a great work and being inexperienced. The only way to gain experience is to get experience; but he did not have the time and the years to accumulate it. But he did do what his father had admonished him to do. He did not do what Adonijah did. He did not say, "I will be king, and I will do it by my own will and determination that it should be so. No, he sought God.

Look over at 2nd Chronicles 1, verse 1. "Now Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and the Lord his God was with him and exalted him exceedingly." If you are going to be exalted, it is always right to let God do it. This is what you should do. Look down at verse 6. "And Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before the Lord, which was at the tabernacle of meeting, and offered a thousand burnt offerings on it." You can see, here, that Solomon was very strong in the worship of God; in giving God his due, and the glory due His name. This is how you too ought to be if you would be a wise youth. Be devoted to God in His worship. But there is something more that you need to do. You need to learn to pray. Verse 7 – "On that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, 'Ask!' "What should I give you?" "And Solomon said to God: 'You have shown great mercy to David my father, and have made me king in his place.'" "Now, O Lord God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude." "Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?" This was the perfect thing to ask God for. Verse 11 says, "Then God said to Solomon: 'Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king—wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like.'" Here is how a poor youth became wise. It was because he learned to be admonished by an old and wise king; his father. He pleaded the promises given to his father. He picked up the baton of the holy desires and passion which David had for the worship of God; to build a temple for the Lord his God; and he ran with it. Let me ask in closing to each one of us here. Do you cry to God for wisdom so that you might glorify God with your life? It does not matter what stage of life that you are in. God is looking at your heart. And He is looking at it to see that which you want most to do and most to accomplish. If you go about to do what you desire most in your life to glorify God; then God will bless you with wisdom and with answers to your most deeply desired prayers. The key to all of it will be—will you be admonished by those who have the true Biblical authority over you? The Lord will know if you are proceeding in the right way when you will do things His way; in

accordance with His Word, and His heart as revealed in the Word. The next time that we are together we will look at Solomon as an old and foolish king, and how he came back from it.