



Overview

Author: King Solomon

Date: c 931 BC (end of Solomon's reign)

Purpose: to reveal the vaporous nature of life without God; to instruct us to use what we have been given in thanksgiving to God; to encourage enjoyment of and contentment with present blessings.

Outline:

I. 1-2 Solomon's Quest for Wisdom

II. 3:1-12:8 Pearls of Wisdom

- A. **The Joys of Youth (11:7-10)**
- B. **The Woes of Old Age (12:1-8)**
- C. **The Pursuit of Wisdom (12:9-12)**
- D. **Fear God & Keep His Commands (12:13-14)**

III. 12:9-14 Postscript

(Adapted from James Bollhagen. *Ecclesiastes*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: CPH, 2011)

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Around the Word Bible Study

Trinity, 2015

Contentment Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:14

Opening: Psalm 128

¹Blessed is everyone who | fears the LORD,*
who walks | in his ways!

²**You shall eat the fruit of the labor | of your hands;***
you shall be blessed, and it shall be | well with you.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
with- | in your house;*
your children will be like olive shoots
around your | table.

⁴**Behold, thus shall the | man be blessed* who | fears the LORD.**

⁵The LORD bless you from | Zion!*
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days | of your life!

⁶**May you see your children's | children!***
Peace be upon | Israel!
Glory be to the Father and | to the Son* and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.

Read Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:14

11:7-8: Life, Light, & Darkness

How does Solomon use light and darkness to describe life in this world? On the whole, how does he characterize life, and how does this point to the need for a Savior? Compare Romans 8:18-23. How does what Solomon says here in Ecclesiastes 11:7-8 correspond to what St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:26-31?

11:8: "The days of darkness will be many"

How does 1 Peter 2:9 indicate that Christians are not to retreat from the world?

What two things does Ecclesiastes 11:8 say we should do as we live in this world?

It can be difficult to rejoice in all of the years God gives us, especially since "the days of darkness will be many." Luther gives some practical advice for maintaining a joyful spirit at all times: "...if you want to live happily, listen to what I am writing to you and teaching you, so that you do not go too far astray. Live in such a way that you are a despoiler of the world and that you conquer its malice." Here you see what he calls "the contempt of the

world"—not that we human beings should run away but that we should carry on within the world, in the midst of dangers, yet in such a way that we preserve a quiet and peace heart in every adversity. Therefore he says: "If you want to attain this goal, to have a quiet heart in the midst of evil, get used to evil from your very boyhood. Then you will be able to anticipate danger securely," (AE 15:167).

11:9: Rejoice, but not too much

What attitude did the Israelites take in Isaiah 56:12? How does Ecclesiastes 11:9 discourage hedonism?

11:10: "Remove vexation from your heart"

Luther: "It is as though he were saying: "As I want you to be restrained by the fear of God, so that you do not follow your wicked and harmful desires, so I want to preserve you from being troubled by sadness and broken up by adversity. Therefore remove anger from your spirit, that is, accustom yourself not to become angry or to be overcome by indignation when you see that everything is going very badly. If something sad happens, know that this belongs to the world. Let other people envy and hate, but you refuse to do so, because such things destroy a happy life; as the proverbs says, (Prov. 14:30), "envy is the rottenness of the bones." Envy is a disease that corrodes and melts things. Preserve your heart for me in its integrity, and to do not corrupt it with too many desires of this world or sorrows," (AE 15:178).

How does Isaiah 53:6 indicate that our desires can be wicked and harmful and warn us against indulging them? See also Genesis 6:5, Psalm 14, and Jeremiah 17:9. What can keep us from walking in the darkness? See Psalm 119:105.

See Ephesians 4:26-27. How does failing to heed this admonition "give opportunity to the devil" and make it impossible to "remove vexation from your heart"? Forgiveness and setting aside anger is at the very heart of the Gospel message, for that is what God has done for you in Christ Jesus. See Romans 3:21-25 and Matthew 18:21-35.

How do Mark 4:18-19 and 1 John 2:16-17 warn us against clinging too tightly to the world and encourage us to maintain a joyful spirit when things are going badly?

12:1-7: The woes of old age

How do these verses characterize old age? What images does Solomon employ to describe the aging process?

According to Ecclesiastes 12:7, what happens to the body and soul at the time of death?

12:8: "Vanity of Vanities"

As his investigation ends, Solomon reaffirms the vanity of life "under the sun." Chrysostom says, "There was no one who lived in greater luxury, or higher glory. There was no one so wise or powerful, no one who saw all things so succeeding to his heart's desire. What then? He had no enjoyment from all these things. What after all does he say of it himself? "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Vanity not simply but superlatively. Let us believe him, and lay hold on that in which there is no vanity, in which there is truth; and what is based upon a solid rock, where there is no old age, nor decline, but all things bloom and flourish," (Bollhagen, 421).

12:12: "Beware of anything beyond these"

What does this verse teach about looking for divine guidance apart from the Word of God? See also Hebrews 1:1-2. How does this passage affirm that in times past, God spoke directly to His people (e.g., through dreams and visions: Joseph, Daniel, etc.), but that "in these latter days" He is no longer saying new things? See also Revelation 22:18-19, 2 Peter 1:18-19, and stanza 1 of the hymn, "How Firm a Foundation" (LSB, 728). What is the task of the preacher? See 1 Corinthians 11:23. Notice the great care St. Luke takes (Luke 1:1-4) to ensure that his hearer(s) would have certainty concerning their catechesis. How does enthusiasm (listening for the voice of God apart from Scripture) create doubt concerning catechesis?

See the following passage from the *Smalcald Articles*: "All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts, and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit, and nevertheless he accomplished this through other outward words. Just as also our enthusiasts [at the present day] condemn the outward Word, and nevertheless they themselves are not silent, but they fill the world with their pratings and writings, as though, indeed, the Spirit could not come through the writings and spoken word of the apostles, but [first] through their writings and words he must come. Why [then] do not they also omit their own sermons and writings, until the Spirit Himself come to men, without their writings and before them, as they boast that He has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures?," (III, VIII:6-7).



How does the fact that the enthusiasts felt compelled to preach and teach undermine their argument that the Holy Spirit speaks to men directly?

"In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning [from the first fall] to the end of the world, [its poison] having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power [life], and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mahomet. Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments," (III, VIII:9-11).

12:13: "Fear God and keep His commandments"

Luther: "That is, this is the summary of it all: Fear and worship God and keep Him in view; thus you will observe everything that I have set forth in this book. For unless someone fears God, he will not be able to observe any of these things. He has cited examples of men who lived wisely and excellently, without fear, but who, when evil times came, were nevertheless not used to it and brought affliction upon themselves. But those who fear God are able to despise and make fun of every evil and adversity when it comes, and to give thanks if it does not come," (AE 15:186).

How do Luther's words serve as a call to repentance? Compare our Lord's words in Matthew 6:25-34. What is the relationship between faith and contentment? When you experience discontentment, what does this reveal about the state of your faith?

12:14: "Every secret thing"

What does this verse say about those who put forward the appearance of righteousness? See also Psalm 26:4, Matthew 23:13-28, and 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Closing: The Man is Ever Blessed (LSB, 705)

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