



Around the Word  
**BIBLE STUDY**  
 Eastertide, 2015

Contentment  
**Ecclesiastes 1:12-18**

**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

A. 1:1-11: Preliminary Observation: Worldly Life is Vaporous

B. **1:12-18: The Task at Hand**

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

III. 12:9-14 Postscript

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

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**Opening: Psalm 147**

<sup>1</sup>Praise the LORD!

For it is good to sing praises | to our God;\*  
 for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is | fitting.

<sup>2</sup>**The LORD builds up Je- | rusalem;\***  
**he gathers the outcasts of | Israel.**

<sup>3</sup>He heals the broken- | hearted\*  
 and binds | up their wounds.

<sup>4</sup>**He determines the number | of the stars;\***  
**he gives to all of | them their names.**

<sup>5</sup>Great is our Lord, and abun- | dant in power;\*  
 his understanding is beyond | measure.

<sup>6</sup>**The LORD lifts up the | humble;\***  
**he casts the wicked | to the ground.**

<sup>7</sup>Sing to the LORD with thanks- | giving;\*  
 make melody to our God | on the lyre!

<sup>8</sup>**He covers the heavens with clouds;**  
**he prepares rain | for the earth;\***  
**he makes grass grow | on the hills.**

<sup>9</sup>He gives to the | beasts their food,\*  
 and to the young ravens | that cry.

<sup>10</sup>**His delight is not in the strength | of the horse,\***

**nor his pleasure in the legs | of a man,**  
<sup>11</sup>but the LORD takes pleasure in those who | fear him,\*  
 in those who hope in his | steadfast love.

<sup>12</sup>**Praise the LORD, O Je- | rusalem!\***  
**Praise your God, O | Zion!**

<sup>13</sup>For he strengthens the bars | of your gates;  
 he blesses your children with- | in you.

<sup>14</sup>**He makes peace in your | borders;\***  
**he fills you with the finest | of the wheat.**

<sup>15</sup>He sends out his command | to the earth;\*  
 his word runs | swiftly.

<sup>16</sup>**He gives | snow like wool;\***  
**he scatters hoarfrost like | ashes.**

<sup>17</sup>He hurls down his crystals of | ice like crumbs;\*  
 who can stand be- | fore his cold?

<sup>18</sup>**He sends out his word, and | melts them;\***  
**he makes his wind blow and the | waters flow.**

<sup>19</sup>He declares his word to | Jacob,\*  
 his statutes and rules to | Israel.

<sup>20</sup>**He has not dealt thus with any other | nation;\***  
**they do not know his just decrees. |**  
**Praise the LORD!**

**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 1:12-18**

**Solomon's quest for wisdom (v. 13)**

Today it is common to speak of emotions as coming from the heart. In Hebrew thought, however, the heart was seen as the source of intellect. What does Solomon's example here suggest concerning the relationship between faith and reason?

How is Solomon limiting his quest for wisdom at this point? Compare also James 3:15.

Note the 11-fold repetition of the 1st person pronoun ("I", "me", "my"), which reinforces the notion that Solomon is (at this point in his investigation) considering human, not divine, works.

Where is true wisdom found? (see Luke 11:31)

**"An unhappy business" (v. 13)**

Why does Solomon describe the things we do as an "unhappy business"? See v. 14 and Psalm 33:10.

See Matthew 6:24-34. What causes us to worry? See especially verse 30.

Where is peace found? See Matthew 10:29-31.

Luther: "Let us learn, therefore, to submit ourselves to the counsels of God and to refrain from the cares and thoughts that God has not commanded. There is nothing safer or more acceptable to God than if we refrain from our own counsels and rely on His Word. There we shall find sufficient guidance about what we ought to do. His commands to us are faith, love, and bearing the cross. With these things, I say, we can happily occupy ourselves. Let us deal with everything else as it comes into our hands, leaving to Him the concern about its outcome," (AE 15:25).

What does Luther mean when he urges us to refrain from our own counsels?

With what should we happily occupy ourselves, according to Luther?

Has there ever been a time when you haven't been

happy about occupying yourself with “faith, love, and bearing the cross”? Why?

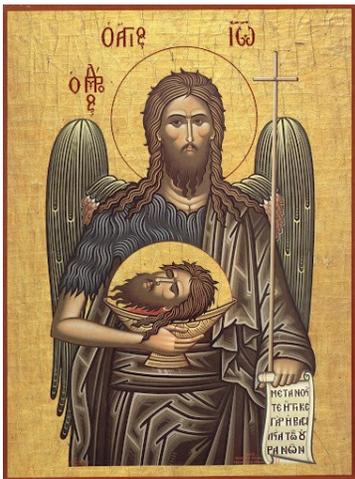
In light of the Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer (“Thy will be done”), what should we do when we find ourselves dissatisfied with how things have turned out? See Baptism, IV in the *Small Catechism*.

Luther: “It is impossible in human affairs to act so well that everything comes out right and no more evils remain. It is most right, therefore, to walk by faith, which permits God to reign and prays that the kingdom of God may come, but meanwhile tolerates and bears with all evils,” (AE 15:27).

What example is set for us in 1 Peter 2:23? See also James 4:14–15.

What injustice is recorded in Matthew 14:1–11? What was our Lord’s response? See verses 12–21.

Verse 13 is the first time the word “God” appears in Ecclesiastes. What does Solomon tell us about God here?



What does the First Article of the Creed (“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”) teach us about God’s authority over everything that takes place in His creation? See again Matthew 10:29.

See also 2 Corinthians 4:17, and Hebrews 12:5–11, and the collect “for pardon, growth in grace, and divine protection” in *Lutheran Service Book* (p. 309).

Is God responsible for evil? See Romans 8:20. What has He done to solve the problem of evil? See Romans 8:21–39.

What is a major difference between the old and new creations, according to Revelation 22:3?

### “What is crooked cannot be made straight” (v. 15)

What is crooked, according to Deuteronomy 32:5?

What does Ecclesiastes 1:15 teach us about all human efforts at achieving peace, justice, the environmental movement, etc.?

Why is this the case? See Genesis 6:5 and Jeremiah 17:9.

Does this mean we shouldn’t make an effort to live in peace with one another and the creation? On the proper relationship between man and the earth, see Genesis 2:15; between man and God, see Luke 2:14; and between man and man, see Romans 12:18.

What will ultimately achieve peace, justice, etc? See Isaiah 2:2–5.

In v. 15 Solomon diagnoses and articulates the problem, but is

powerless to do anything about it. What inability of ours is identified in Ephesians 2:1–3, 5a, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 12:3, and the first part of Luther’s explanation of the Third Article in the *Small Catechism*?

How can the crooked be made straight? See Isaiah 40:3–5 and Luke 24:47. How can those who are spiritually blind and dead believe in God? See Ephesians 2:4–10, 1 Corinthians 12:3, and Luther’s explanation of the Third Article in the *Small Catechism*.

### “I applied my heart to know wisdom” (v. 17)

Gregory of Nyssa: “It is Solomon who speaks these words. This Solomon was the third king of Israel, after King Saul and David, the chosen of the Lord. He succeeded his father on the throne and was proclaimed king when the power of the Israelites had already reached its height; he did not go on wearing his people out with war and fighting but lived in peace as far as lay in his power, making it his task not to acquire what did not belong to him but to enjoy what he already had in abundance... And thus, when he has matured in wisdom, he does not merely theoretically observe the passionate and irrational deception of mankind in the matter of bodily enjoyments but through the actual experience of each of the things they pursue recognizes their futility,” (ACC IX:205).

### “For in much wisdom is much vexation” (v. 18)

Luther: “For anyone who is very wise has many reasons to become angry, as one who daily sees many things that are wrong. Someone whose eyes are closed knows nothing and does not become indignant. Therefore learn to keep quiet, to commit the kingdom to God, and to pray: “Lord, Thy will be done.” Otherwise you will wear out your heart and your body, and you will waste time and eventually your life,” (AE 15:28).

What does Luther say can help prevent us from wearing out our heart and body? See also Ephesians 6:10–24 for further insight on the nature of worry and what can be done about it.

It seems counterintuitive that wisdom and knowledge would produce sorrow and pain. What do we learn about our Lord in 1 Corinthians 1:24?

What is the relationship between Wisdom Incarnate and sorrow & pain? See Isaiah 53:3–5.

What does Mark 10:15 and 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 teach about the nature of true wisdom?

### Closing Hymn: What God Ordains is Always Good (LSB, 760)

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