



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. 2:1-8: Testing the World's Pleasures

B. 2:9-26: Quest for Wisdom, ct'd.

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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Around the Word BIBLE STUDY

Trinity, 2015

Contentment Ecclesiastes 2:9-26

Psalm 73:24-28

²⁴You guide me with your | counsel,*
and afterward you will receive me to |
glory.

²⁵**Whom have I in | heaven but you?***

**And there is nothing on earth that I desire
be- | sides you.**

²⁶My flesh and my | heart may fail,*
but God is the strength of my heart and
my portion for- | ever.

²⁷**For behold, those who are far from you shall |
perish;***

**you put an end to everyone who is
unfaithful | to you.**

²⁸**But for me it is good to be | near God;***

**I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
that I may tell of | all your works.**

**Glorify 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 2:9-26

Outline:

- Solomon's observation (our labor produces no enduring results) is confirmed (v. 9-11)
- Wisdom & Folly (v. 12-17)
- The futility of work (v. 18-23)
- Conclusion: enjoy what God has given you (v. 24-26)

v. 9: "So I became great and surpassed all who were before me"

Solomon reigned during what is sometimes called the "golden age" in Israel's history. How does 1 Kings 4:20-34 describe Solomon and life under his reign? What was the Queen of Sheba's impression of Jerusalem? See 1 Kings 10:6-9.

Didymus the Blind on Solomon's credibility: "No one who talks against wealth is heard if he is poor himself. But one who teaches this needs to have experienced all these human things himself. A teaching thus only reaches its goal and is successful if he who delivers it is acquainted with what he is rejecting," (ACCS IX:213)

v. 10: "And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them"

Sometimes Scripture provides us with positive examples for emulation (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9), and other times it urges us to learn from the mistakes of others (1 Corinthians 10:1-11). Evaluate Solomon's behavior

in light of Numbers 15:39 and 1 John 2:16. Are we to take Solomon's actions here as a positive example and "go and do likewise"?

Why can't the senses always be trusted to determine what is good and evil? See Jeremiah 17:9.

v. 10: "my reward for all my toil"

What is given to those who seek to earn a reward by works of their own hands? See Matthew 6:1-6. What reward is given to those who rely on the works of Christ? See Proverbs 22:4.

What makes the work of the Christian different from that of an unbeliever? See Colossians 3:17, 23-25.

v. 13: "more gain in wisdom than in folly"

Why is wisdom better than folly? See Proverbs 3:13-18, 4:18-19, and Galatians 6:7. What is the source of wisdom? See Proverbs 2:6. Even if wisdom had no worldly benefit at all, how does this truth alone (Prov. 2:6) make wisdom an infinitely valuable treasure?

v. 14: the Head of the wise

What makes the head/mind of a wise person different from that of a fool? See 1 Corinthians 11:3; 2:16. How does this make sense of what Jesus says in Matthew 13:13-14? How is it possible to have eyes but not see?

How does our Lord describe the wise and the foolish in Matthew 7:24-27?

v. 14: "why then have I been so very wise?"

What does Solomon say we should make of our own wisdom, and upon what should we rely? See Proverbs 3:5.

v. 14-16: Everyone dies

If the wise and the foolish experience the same outcome, does it matter whether we pursue wisdom or folly? See Romans 6:1ff.

Luther: "One should, therefore, travel by the middle way: affairs should be commended to the King, who has made us. If He has granted us some opportunity, let us use it; if He has given us something, let us accept it; if He takes it away, let us bear it. Whatever you can do, do; whatever you cannot do, leave alone. What you cannot budge, let lie. Wisdom is beneficial, then, if I do what I know is pleasing to God and commit to Him what He wishes to be accomplished through me. If we did this, then at last we would be truly wise," (AE 15:42). How is Luther's advice supported by St. Paul in

How does Psalm 49:10–20 agree with Solomon's teaching in Ecclesiastes 2:14–16? Though our wisdom and efforts cannot save us from death, to what hope are we directed in Psalm 49:15?

v. 16: "in the days to come all will be long forgotten"

Luther: "The descendants are not stirred by the example of their ancestors and are always interested in something new. Whatever present is boring, whatever absent is intriguing. And yet there is nothing new. For once it is present, it is already old; it brings no pleasure, and something else seems desirable. In sum, the ability to be content with what one has is simply a gift of the Holy Spirit and is impossible for the flesh, which is always being drawn away from what it has to the things that are to be and, in following the latter, loses the former and thus is deprived of the use of both. What happens to the greedy man in the case of money is what happens to the entire human race in the case of desires and plans; that is, they have nothing, even if they have everything," (AE 15:43).

v. 17: "So I hated life"

Here is another place where we might think Solomon is setting a bad example, but compare what Solomon says here with our Lord's words in John 12:25.

Without denying that every gift we have comes from God (James 1:17) and that we should enjoy these gifts (Ecclesiastes 2:24) and use them to serve others (1 Peter 4:10), in what sense should we "hate" our lives? See Matthew 16:24–26.

v. 17: On the vanity of toil

Ambrose: "We arise each day to eat and drink; yet no one is filled so that he does not hunger and thirst after a short time. Daily we seek profit, and to greed there is set no limit. "The eye will not be satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing," (Eccl. 1:8). He that loves silver will not be satisfied with silver. There is no limit to toil, and there is no profit in abundance," (ACCS IX:216).

Compare Ambrose's comments about toil having no limit with Ecclesiastes 2:23.

v. 18: "I must leave it to the man who will come after me"

How do Solomon's thoughts echo those of Job 1:21?

What happened with Solomon's kingdom (that for which Solomon toiled) after his death? See 1 Kings 12.

v. 21: You can't take it with you

In addition to the practical wisdom Solomon gives here, why is it foolish to cling to the world and its pleasures? See 1 John 2:17.

For an even greater injustice than what Solomon describes here in Ecclesiastes 2:21, see 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Peter 2:22–25.

v. 23: "For all his days are full of sorrow"

Compare Jeremiah's sorrow in Jeremiah 20:7–10. What different sources does the prophet identify as causing his sorrow and affliction? Notice

the "unexpected" source in v. 7–8 (but compare Matthew 16:24), and again in verse 10 (also unexpected, though from a different place). For a more traditional source of sorrow, see Psalm 17:9.

v. 24: Eating, drinking, & working

Compare the teaching of St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–11. To what, according to the apostle, should we aspire? See verse 11. How are we taught to do this, according to verse 9?

Both St. Paul and our Lord Himself base their teaching on the Old Testament. See Isaiah 54:13 and compare it to the teaching of St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–11 and to the teaching of our Lord in John 6:45.

What does our Lord connect with being taught by God? See John 6:48–58.



Compare also John 15:1–5, paying close attention to how the imagery Jesus uses here (the vine) compares to His teaching in John 6 (eating and drinking His flesh and blood) and Matthew 27:27–29. Compare also Exodus 24:11 and Deuteronomy 14:26b.

v. 24–26: "from the hand of God"

Keep these verses in mind as you read the rest of Ecclesiastes, as they serve as a summary of the whole book.

How does our Lord confirm these words from Solomon in Matthew 5:45? When we pray for "daily bread", for what are we asking? See Luther's explanation of the 4th petition in *The Small Catechism*. What blessings does Solomon identify as coming from the hand of God in these verses? Might they also be considered "daily bread"?

Luther: "Thus what sinners heap up belongs to the pious, because only they use it with thanksgiving and joy, even when they have very little. The impious, on the other hand, for all their anxiety and trouble, do not even use it. In short, the pious truly possess the whole world, because they enjoy it with happiness and tranquility. But the impious do not possess it even when they have it. This is the vanity which the impious possess," (AE 15:48).

To what disposition does St. Paul urge us in 1 Timothy 4:4–5?

Hymn: Come, Thou Precious Ransom, Come (LSB, 350)

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