



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. 4:7-12: The Curse of Isolation
- B. 4:13-16: Bad Politics
- C. 4:17-5:7: Reverence before God
- D. 5:8-9: The True King

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 4:7-5:9

Opening: Psalm 132

¹Remember, O LORD, in David's | favor,*
all the hardships | he endured,

²**how he swore | to the LORD*
and vowed to the Mighty One of | Jacob,**

³"I will not en- | ter my house*
or get in- | to my bed,

⁴**I will not give sleep | to my eyes*
or slumber to my | eyelids,**

⁵until I find a place- | for the LORD,*
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of | Jacob."

⁶**Behold, we heard of it in | Ephrathah;*
we found it in the | fields of Jaar.**

⁷"Let us go to his | dwelling place;*
let us worship at his | footstool!"

⁸**Arise, O LORD, and go to your | resting place,*
you and the ark | of your might.**

⁹Let your priests be clothed with | righteousness,*
and let your saints | shout for joy.

¹⁰**For the sake of your servant | David,*
do not turn away the face of your a- | nointed
one.**

¹¹The LORD swore to David a sure oath
from which he will | not turn back:*
"One of the sons of your body
I will set | on your throne.

¹²**If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies that I shall | teach them,*
their sons also forever
shall sit | on your throne."**

¹³For the LORD has chosen | Zion;*
he has desired it for his | dwelling place:

¹⁴**"This is my resting place for- | ever;*
here I will dwell, for I have de- | sired it.**

¹⁵I will abundantly bless her pro- | visions;*
I will satisfy her | poor with bread.

¹⁶**Her priests I will clothe with sal- | vation,*
and her saints will | shout for joy.**

¹⁷There I will make a horn to sprout for | David;*
I have prepared a lamp for my a- | nointed.

¹⁸**His enemies I will | clothe with shame,*
but on him his | crown will shine."**

**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 4:7-5:9

4:7-12: Loneliness & Companionship

What does Genesis 2:18 teach about isolation? With whom do Christians have fellowship? See Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9, and 1 John 1:3.

Solomon identifies two different vanities associated with loneliness, one in 4:7-9 and another in 4:10-12. What are they?

How do Christians serve the Lord, according to Matthew 25:31-40, John 13:12-15, and 1 Peter 4:10-11?

4:8: "His eyes are never satisfied with riches"

Whom do such people serve, according to Romans 16:18? How does our Lord describe money in Matthew 6:24?

What abuse of wealth is described in Isaiah 5:8, and what consequence does this abuse bring? According to Leviticus 25:6-7, what is the purpose of the land, and for whom is this given?

The love of riches is one of the most common vices in the world, as Luther points out: "Why are you laughing? With no more than a change of names, the story could be told about you. With your moneybags filled from all over, you restlessly open your mouth for more; yet you are forced to refrain from touching it as though it were something sacred, or you must merely enjoy it as though it were a picture," (AE 15:68).

Why are the wealthy not satisfied with their riches, according to Solomon in Ecclesiastes 4:8? What additional reasons does Luther give in the above quote?

4:12: "A threefold cord is not quickly broken"

Luther highlights the benefits of working together in society by relating a common proverb: "In society there is mutual help, common work, common solace; meanwhile, the life of the miser is a sorry one, useless and afflicted, and finally he must come to a miserable end. This, then, he establishes with a proverb, which seems to be taken from this source: A certain wise father, when he was about to die, commands his sons to be present. He gives them a bundle of sticks to break. Although they could not break them all at the same time, they did break them individually. In this way he taught his sons that their riches would be secure if they were in concord with one another and mutually assisted one another. For through concord small things grow, but through discord they are scattered and brought to naught," (AE 15:69).

Life together is just as essential in the Church as it is in society. What is the condition for the fulfillment of Christ's promise in Matthew 18:20? For what reasons do we come together, according to Hebrews 10:19-

How is suffering beneficial for our life together, according to 2 Corinthians 1:3–7?

Peter Chrysologus relates Solomon's comments in Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 to Christ's sending of the disciples two by two: "And he began to send them forth two by two." He sent them two by two that no one of them, being abandoned and alone, might fall into a denial, like Peter, or flee, like John (Mark 14:66–72, 50–52). Human frailty quickly falls if it proudly relies on itself, despises companions and is unwilling to have a colleague. As Scripture says, "Woe to him that is alone, for when he falls, he has none to lift him up." The same Scripture testifies how much one is strengthened by another's aid, when it states, "A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city," (Proverbs 18:19) (ACCS IX:238).

4:13: The foolish king who wouldn't take advice

How does Proverbs 1:7–8 characterize biblical wisdom? How is this reinforced by the Old Testament "creed" in Deuteronomy 6:4? Notice what verb Moses uses to characterize the Christian faith in this verse. See also Proverbs 10:14, 19; Proverbs 17:27–28, and James 1:19.

5:1: The house of God

Where is the presence of God located, according to 1 Kings 8:13, 23, & 27?

5:1: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God"

How were the Israelites failing to "guard their steps" when going to God's house? See Isaiah 1:12–13 and Amos 5:21–24; 8:4–6.

5:1: "To draw near to listen is better"

How does 1 Samuel 15:22 describe the direction of worship, and what is the proper Christian response to worship? How is this truth reinforced by our Lord's teaching in Luke 10:38–42?

5:3: On dreams

Upon what do some base their faith, according to Jude 1:8? What is the consequence of doing this, according to this verse? How does this agree with what Solomon teaches here in Ecclesiastes 5:3?

Can dreamers and false prophets perform signs, according to Deuteronomy 13:1? How are we to regard such visionaries and dreamers, according to Deuteronomy 13:1–5?

On the dangers of false prophets, see also 1 Kings 22, Jeremiah 29:8–9, and Zechariah 10:2. How does Ezekiel 13:8–11 characterize the message of false prophets?

Upon what should we base our faith? See 2 Peter 1:17–21. To whom should we listen? See Matthew 17:5. Where do we hear the voice of Christ? See Revelation 19:11–13 and Romans 10:14–17.

5:4–5: On vows

Compare the words of Solomon in these verses to our Lord's teaching in Matthew 5:33–37.

What do we learn about human words and intentions from Matthew 21:28–31? Matthew 26:33–35 and 26:69–75? Matthew 15:10–11?

5:8: "the oppression of the poor"

Why are the poor oppressed more often than the rich? See Isaiah 1:23; Proverbs 17:8, 23; Micah 3:5.

5:8: "Do not be amazed at the matter"

What temptation accompanies those who become powerful and hold high offices? See 1 Samuel 8:11–17; Amos 6:1–7.

Luther: "That is, do not torment yourself if you cannot change things, but

leave it to a higher judge. What a lesser person cannot do, he should think of as pertaining to a higher person. If the prince is evil, defer to the higher Prince, God. Thus if I become very vexed on account of the Sacramentarians and the sects who are disturbing the church of God and contaminating the Gospel, what shall I accomplish? Therefore I commit the matter to God the Judge, in whose hand everything lies. Although I myself lament it that souls are being deceived and led astray so miserably, I cannot do any more except to oppose them in accordance with my office and to



say: "Stop it! There has been enough error. Come to your senses!" When you have given this advice to the other person, you should commit the matter to God, in accordance with Paul's statement (Titus 3:10): "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject"; and again (2 Tim. 3:13): "Evil men will go on from bad to worse" and will not escape their judge. Everyone has his judge. If the assessor does not do it, the bailiff or the captain will. And if the latter does not judge him, the prince will do the judging. And if the prince neglects it also, the emperor will do it. If the emperor despises his duty, God will neither despise it nor neglect it. This is what he means when he says: "Above these there is a king over the whole land." (AE 15:84–5).

Closing: O Father, All Creating (LSB, 858)

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