



## 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

III. 12:9-14 Postscript

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

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# Around the Word BIBLE STUDY Eastertide, 2015

# Contentment Introduction to Ecclesiastes

**Introduction** Luther: "The summary and aim of this book, then, is as follows: Solomon wants to put us at peace and to give us a quiet mind in the everyday affairs and business of this life, so that we live contentedly in the present without care and yearning about the future and are, as Paul says, without care and anxiety (Phil. 4:6)," (AE:15, 7). Thus, the goal of Ecclesiastes is to promote enjoyment in every moment of life. Again, Luther: "The important thing is that we have a tranquil and quiet heart and a mind filled with joy, that is, that we be content with the Word and work of God," (Ibid., 10).

### Opening: Psalm 16

Preserve me, | O God,\*  
for in you I take | refuge.

**I say to the LORD, "You | are my Lord;\*  
I have no good a- | part from you."**

As for the saints | in the land,\*  
they are the excellent ones,  
in whom is all | my delight.

**The sorrows of those who run after another  
god shall | multiply;\***

**their drink offerings of blood I will not  
pour out  
or take their names | on my lips.**

The LORD is my chosen portion | and my cup;\*  
you | hold my lot.

**The lines have fallen for me in pleasant |  
places;\***

**indeed, I have a beautiful in- | heritance.**

I bless the LORD who gives me | counsel;\*  
in the night also my heart in- | structs me.

**I have set the LORD always be- | fore me;\*  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not  
be | shaken.**

Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being  
re- | joices;\*  
my flesh also | dwells secure.

**For you will not abandon my soul | to Sheol,\*  
or let your holy one see cor- | ruption.**

You make known to me the | path of life;\*  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures for- | ever-  
more.

**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.**

### Who am I? The Identity Question

2 approaches:

1) Where do you come from? Who are your parents/who are you related to? (Identity is something given to you)

2) What do you do? (Identity is something you create for yourself/achieve)

(False) Conclusion: Work is the most important thing in life. Make money so you can get the things you want and you will be happy.

### Science, Technology, & Atheism

Wisdom: learning to use the natural world for our benefit and advantage. From this comes the beginning of modern technology/science. Natural inquiry is a good thing! But like all good gifts, this too is subject to abuse.

Instead of fitting into our God-given place in creation we can easily use science and technology to try and take control of our lives, creation, and ultimately, God (see Genesis 11).

In a technologically advanced community God is often regarded as unnecessary. Human progress perpetuates our innate desire to be in control of our lives & destiny, the world, and the people around us (see Genesis 3).

We can easily begin seeking blessing from our achievements rather than from God (practical atheism). This is enthusiasm, or seeking blessing apart from God's appointed means (see *Smalcald Articles* III:VIII, 3-6). Science, politics, and all human efforts at managing the world can easily become our god. This is a major problem that Ecclesiastes seeks to address.

## Solomon's 2 Questions

See Ecclesiastes 1:3. What is the first topic Solomon investigates in his quest to find what profits a man?

See Ecclesiastes 1:17. What is the subject matter of Solomon's second area of inquiry?

## The Pursuit of Happiness

Humans lack the ability to create happiness. The pursuit of happiness prevents enjoyment of present blessings. We always seem to be looking toward the future: "I'll finally be happy when I graduate; get a job; get married; have kids; when the kids leave home; when I retire; when I die." Meanwhile, we become bored with what we have and continually grasp for other things. This is the "height of vanity" (Luther), that we cheat ourselves of the use of present goods and vainly are troubled about future ones.

The pursuit of pleasure removes all capacity for enjoyment. Everybody eats, but not everybody enjoys eating. Everybody works, but not everybody enjoys working. Luther: "When things come flowing in, boredom soon takes over; if they do not flow in, there is an insatiable desire to have them, and there is no peace," (10).

See Matthew 6:24–25. What two masters does our Lord identify here? What is the result of serving the wrong master? Note the connection between wealth and anxiety. The more you have, the more you will worry about losing it. See Matthew 19:16–30.

See Luke 12:15ff. What is the problem with amassing wealth? What is built up must be given to someone else (Ecclesiastes 2:18–19). Someone may take over the business but not be interested in caring for it (only ripping it off for profit).

Ecclesiastes warns us about looking to the future for enjoyment, but to find it in present blessings (see Ecclesiastes 9:7–10).

## Christians & the World

Some (e.g., Jerome) have read Ecclesiastes as a condemnation of the world and have encouraged Christians to retreat from it. What does *Augsburg Confession* XXVII.57 teach about fleeing from the world? Whom does God command us to serve in the 2nd Table of the Law?

What does John 17:15–18 teach us about our relationship to the world? Where is our true citizenship, according to Philippians 3:20? What guidance are we given in 1 Peter 1:17?

## Never Satisfied

Luther: "But if someone compares the good things he has with the bad things he does not have, he will finally recognize what a treasure of good things he has. Someone who has sound and healthy eyes does not estimate this blessing of God very highly nor take pleasure in it. But if he is deprived of them, what a treasure he would be willing to give in exchange for them! That

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## Contentment Intro to Ecclesiastes

is how it goes with health and with everything else. If God were to give me the eloquence of Cicero, the power of Caesar, or the wisdom of Solomon, I would still not be satisfied. We are always looking for something that is lacking, and we despise what is present," (AE 15:11).



## Summary statement of Solomon's observations:

See Ecclesiastes 2:24–26

## Closing Hymn: Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart

Lord, Thee I love with all my heart;  
I pray Thee, ne'er from me depart,  
With tender mercy cheer me.  
Earth has no pleasure I would share.  
Yea, heav'n itself were void and bare  
If Thou, Lord, wert not near me.  
And should my heart for sorrow break,  
My trust in Thee can nothing shake.  
Thou art the portion I have sought;  
Thy precious blood my soul has bought.  
Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord,  
Forsake me not! I trust Thy Word.

Lord, let at last Thine angels come,  
To Abr'ham's bosom bear me home,  
That I may die unfearing;  
And in its narrow chamber keep  
My body safe in peaceful sleep  
Until Thy reappearing.  
And then from death awaken me,  
That these mine eyes with joy may see,  
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,  
My Savior and my fount of grace.  
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,  
And I will praise Thee without end.

(Martin Schalling; tr. Catherine Winkworth, alt. *LSB* 708:1)

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