



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. **Wisdom & Folly (10:1-7)**

B. **Wisdom for Work (10:8-11)**

C. **Wisdom & Folly (10:12-15)**

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 10:1-15

Opening: Psalm 7

¹O LORD my God, in you do I take | refuge;*
save me from all my pursuers and de- | liver me,

²**lest like a lion they tear my | soul apart,***
rending it in pieces, with none to de- | liver.

³O LORD my God, if I have | done this,*
if there is wrong | in my hands,

⁴**if I have repaid my friend with | evil***
or plundered my enemy with- | out cause,

⁵let the enemy pursue my soul and over- | take it,*
and let him trample my life to the ground
and lay my glory | in the dust.

⁶**Arise, O LORD, in your anger;**
lift yourself up against the fury of
my | enemies;*
awake for me; you have appointed a
| judgment.

⁷Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered
a- | bout you;*
over it re- | turn on high.

⁸**The LORD judges the | peoples;***
judge me, O LORD, according to my
righteousness and according to the integrity
that is | in me.

⁹Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
and may you establish the | righteous—*
you who test the minds and hearts,
O | righteous God!

¹⁰**My shield | is with God,***
who saves the up- | right in heart.

¹¹God is a | righteous judge,*
and a God who feels indignation | ev'ry day.

¹²**If a man does not repent, God will | whet his**
sword;*
he has bent and read- | ied his bow;

¹³he has prepared for him his deadly | weapons,*
making his arrows | fiery shafts.

¹⁴**Behold, the wicked man conceives | evil***
and is pregnant with mischief
and gives | birth to lies.

¹⁵He makes a pit, digging | it out,*
and falls into the hole that | he has made.

¹⁶**His mischief returns upon | his own head,***
and on his own skull his violence | descends.

¹⁷I will give to the LORD the thanks due to his | righteousness,*
and I will sing praise to the name of the LORD,
the | Most High.

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 10:1-15

10:1: Flies in the ointment

Is the size of a fly (dead or living) proportionate to the amount of ointment it can ruin? What does this suggest about the notion that just a little sin or false doctrine is tolerable? Compare St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:6.

Luther: "This is a comfort against these troubles in the world... And so when you see a wicked scoundrel having his own way in a council or in a senate, forget about your advice and put aside your wisdom; for you see that they are not welcome, and you will only make yourself miserable. It is better for you to be a little foolish and to let them continue in their folly, for they will not listen to you, and you cannot break through by force. A fool cannot be changed by any advice unless you tell him what is already in his heart. After you have given your advice and have done what you can, you should let them go. For if you wanted to break through, you would only stir up the hornets, run into an angry she-bear, and bring upon yourself all kinds of unnecessary danger. This advice is very good for us who have our existence in a world that is as evil as it is ungrateful, a world that does not listen regardless of what we advise or say or warn," (AE 15:157).

How do Matthew 10:14 and Titus 3:10 support Luther's comments?

How does Solomon's statement, "A little folly outweighs wisdom and honor" support with what he says in 10:5-7? How do we know that folly's relative advantages are limited to life "under the sun"? See Proverbs 10:8, 10; 18:7; 19:3.

10:2: Right & Left

Biblical texts tend to make positive associations with the right side and negative associations with the left (compare Genesis 48:14-19; Matthew 25:33). With what does Solomon associate right and left in Ecclesiastes 10:2? What basic contrast does he observe between the wise & foolish in this verse?

10:3: The folly of the foolish

How can observing the actions of the foolish benefit the wise? Compare 1 Corinthians 10:1–6.

10:4: “Do not leave your place”

How is what Jesus tells St. Paul in Acts 26:14 true also of the foolish in their folly?

Luther: “A large part of wisdom is the ability to overlook things or to yield. For this restrains great evils, which are put to rest by being quiet, that is, by yielding, even though ultimately they come to rest on their own; on the other hand, they will stir up huge upheavals if you insist upon taking a stand against them,” (AE 15:158).

How does Luther’s advice agree with our Lord’s example in John 19:9 and what the apostle says in 1 Peter 2:23?

10:5–7: The prosperity of the foolish

What do these verses teach about the fairness of life? Even if wisdom doesn’t yield worldly benefits, why does Jesus say we should continue along that path? See Matthew 6:5–6, 16–18. What does Scripture tell us to expect from the world? See 1 John 3:13; John 15:18.

Luther: “It as though [Solomon] were saying, “Those who ought to be under someone else’s rule are the ones I see reigning and in high position, namely, slaves and fools. On the other hand, I have seen the wisest of men in poverty, with hardly enough to eat... Just remember that this is how the world is governed,” (AE 15:159).

10:8–11: Wisdom for the workplace

What do verses 8–9 teach about the reality of work in a fallen world? What do verses 10–11 teach about the value of planning ahead? Compare our Lord’s words in Luke 14:28–32. How does this apply to faith in Christ? See Luke 14:26–27, 33.

What was the attitude of the people in the 8th century, which was a time of relative prosperity? See Amos 9:10. What was God’s response to them? See Amos 6:4–8.

Luther: “Demipho in Terence’s *Phormio* has wisely warned about this when he says: “Therefore when things are going well, all men should above all think about how they will bear the opposite kind of fate—danger, condemnation, exile.” A man returning from a journey should always consider the possibility that his son has committed some sin or that his wife has died or that his daughter has been taken ill. These are common things and can happen, and therefore this should not be something novel for his spirit. Whatever happens beyond your expectation you should regard as gain, so that if something like this happens, you can say, “This is what I expected,” and can recall that nothing is happening to you which is contrary to general human experience... one cannot carry things out without

harm and danger. Therefore it is best to fortify one’s heart and to expect some difficulties, so that if anything succeeds well in the state, it will be a kind of miracle,” (AE 15:160–161).

10:11: “If the serpent bites before it is charmed”

Luther: “If you are the head of a household, you will do many things that will be displeasing to your wife, family, etc. Among these you will find someone who, if you do something good, will distort it and slander you; but if you do something wrong, they will betray you and carry the story to your neighbors and fellow citizens. This, too, you must bear. You may of course, resist it according to your ability, but what you cannot prohibit must be borne. Of course, it is tiring and difficult to be betrayed so bitterly by the mouth of evil-minded people even when you do not know about it, but what can you do about it?” (AE 15:162–163)

What advice does St. Paul give in Romans 12:17–21?

10:12: “The lips of a fool consume him”

How does Proverbs 18:2 characterize the foolish?

How do Proverbs 7:24, 9:9, 12:15, and 15:31 describe the wise?

What does 2 Timothy 4:2 suggest about the content of a wise person’s speech?



10:13: What happens as a fool multiplies his words

Notice the progression in this verse. What happens the longer a fool keeps talking? What can keep a person for persisting in folly and provide correction? See 2 Timothy 3:16.

10:14: Who can tell him what will be?

What does Acts 1:7 suggest about the importance of knowing the future or how something will turn out? What is our task when confronted with an uncertain future? See Acts 1:8.

10:15: “He does not know the way to the city”

Where, ultimately, is the citizenship of the Christian, and toward what city are we heading? See Philippians 3:20 and Revelation 21:2.

Closing: Triune God, Be Thou Our Stay (LSB, 505)

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