



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. The Ungodly Woman (7:23-29)

B. Obey the Authorities (8:1-9)

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 7:23-8:9

Opening: Psalm 146

¹ Praise | the LORD!*
Praise the LORD, | O my soul!

² **I will praise the LORD as long | as I live;*
I will sing praises to my God while I have
my | being.**

³ Put not your trust in | princes,*
in a son of man, in whom there is no
sal- | vation.

⁴ **When his breath departs, he returns | to
the earth;*
on that very day his plans | perish.**

⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of |
Jacob,*

whose hope is in the | LORD his God,
⁶ **who made heaven and earth, the sea, and
all that is | in them,*
who keeps faith for- | ever;**

⁷ who executes justice for | the oppressed,*
who gives food to the | hungry.

**The LORD sets the prisoners free;
⁸ the LORD opens the eyes | of the blind.*
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed
down; the LORD loves the | righteous.**

⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners; he
upholds the widow and the | fatherless,*
but the way of the wicked he brings
to | ruin.

¹⁰ **The LORD will reign for- | ever,*
your God, O Zion, to all generations. |
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 7:23-8:10

7:24: What has been is what will be

Despite his wisdom (or perhaps because of it), Solomon continues to express the limitations of human wisdom; compare the poem in Ecclesiastes 3:1-9, and especially its conclusion in v. 10-11.

7:26-28: Making sense of women

Of all the deep things (v. 24) Solomon has investigated, woman perhaps remains the most elusive. What does Solomon conclude about the pervasiveness of wise women? See 7:28 and Proverbs 31:10. What does our Lord say makes one wise? See Matthew 7:24-27.

How should Christian marriage reflect the love of God for Israel? See Isaiah 61:10, 62:5, Jeremiah 33:11 and Psalm 45.

7:29: "They have sought out many schemes"

Setting aside his investigation of women, Solomon continues by drawing a conclusion that applies to both genders. Compare Ecclesiastes 7:20 and Romans 5:12-21.

Luther: "God has placed man into things, has given him certain works and a certain task. But man does not remain in these tasks, but by his lusts he seeks for those that belong to someone else. God made man upright, straightforward, to look at what is in front of him and before his eyes, that is, at the things that are present, and to be content with these. But man, forsaking this uprightness, argues about the things that are in the future. Therefore Solomon wants to say, "On the basis of my investigation I have found that no one lives content with his lot, but that everyone has crossed and oblique eyes... they occupy themselves with many plans and with anxious thoughts about how they will govern everything in the future, meanwhile neglecting the things that are present and that God has put before their very eyes. Thus a woman pursues a man's job, and a man pursues a woman's job," (AE 15:133).

What does Luther identify as the source of discontentment? How does St. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7:17-20 agree?

How does the account of Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 illustrate Luther's point? See especially Judges 4:6–9, 14. How is this also illustrated in Genesis 3:6?

8:1: "Who is like the wise?"

In what areas of life do the wise have an advantage over the foolish? See Ecclesiastes 5:10, 4:4, and 9:7.

8:1: "A man's wisdom makes his face shine"

Luther: "A wise man, however, always goes about with a serene countenance, because he does what he can. The wicked man always has a hateful and cloudy countenance. This is therefore a kind of proverbial saying, as though he were saying: "One can readily tell by the eyes where there is a happy heart." Wicked men almost always have a rumpled forehead; for as their heart is, so their face is... a man who has a happy face is also pleasant to others and makes others happy. His conduct is joyful and happy. In this way also this is a flourish in praise of wisdom," (AE 15:134–135).

8:2: "Keep the king's command"

In Ephesians 6:1–9, St. Paul discusses the implications of keeping the Fourth Commandment in a variety of contexts. How does his statement in Ephesians 6:7 encourage us to obey the authorities?

Luther: "For he who swears to the magistrate, swears not to man but to God. Here you see in a remarkable way that political obedience is included in obedience to God," (AE 15:135).

8:3: The king does as he pleases

Notice the contradictory sounding advice in this verse (remain in the king's presence as long as you can/depart as soon as possible). Here Solomon is explaining the best course of action in different circumstances. When might it be best to remain in the presence of a leader? To flee or disobey? For an example of the former, see Esther 7. For an example of the later, see Daniel 3. For a similar paring of opposite courses of action, see Proverbs 26:4–5.

Why should Christians obey the authorities? See Romans 13:1

–7. For exceptions, see Daniel 3; Exodus 1:15–21; Acts 5:27–29.

What conclusion did Solomon draw about those places where you would expect to find justice? See Ecclesiastes 3:16. For a related idea, see Isaiah 5:1–7. What can help us cope with injustice and ultimately deliver us from evil? See Ecclesiastes 7:18.

8:6: "man's trouble lies heavy on him"

Luther comments that the reward for disobedience is "that he will become involved in many evils and will bring many afflictions and calamities upon himself," (AE 15:137).

How does Exodus 20:12 affirm that keeping God's commandments is in our best interest? Why does failure to keep them result in "calamities and affliction"?

Luther: "And who can tell him what will be? That is, the disobedient man does not know what lies in the future. By his dis-

obedience he yearns for all sorts of things and hopes that he will achieve great things, but he is deceived. He promises himself that he will go unpunished; but when he least expect it, his appointed time of judgment arrives, and he perished in his disobedience. In short, the wicked man despises obedience in the present and overlooks punishment in the future; on the other hand, the wise man does not act this way but knows what evils await those who are disobedient, and therefore he is obedient," (AE 15:138).

Closing: O God of Love, O King of Peace (LSB, 751)

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