



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 (8:10-9:6)**

B. **The Simple Life of Wisdom (9:7-18)**

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 8:10-9:18

Opening: Psalm 73

¹Truly God is good to | Israel,*
to those who are | pure in heart.

²**But as for me, my feet had almost |
stumbled,*
my steps had | nearly slipped.**

³For I was envious of the | arrogant*
when I saw the prosperity of the | wicked.

⁴**For they have no pangs | until death;*
their bodies are | fat and sleek.**

⁵They are not in trouble as | others are;*
they are not stricken like the rest of | man
kind.

⁶**Therefore pride is their | necklace;*
violence covers them as a | garment.**

⁷Their eyes swell out through | fatness;*
their hearts overflow with | follies.

⁸**They scoff and speak with | malice;*
loftily they threaten op- | pression.**

⁹They set their mouths against the | heavens,*
and their tongue struts | through the earth.

¹⁰**Therefore his people turn | back to them,*
and find no | fault in them.**

¹¹And they say, "How can | God know?*"
Is there knowledge in the | Most High?"

¹²**Behold, these are the | wicked;*
always at ease, they increase in | riches.**

¹³All in vain have I kept my | heart clean*
and washed my hands in | innocence.

¹⁴**For all the day long I have been | stricken*
and rebuked every | morning.**

¹⁵If I had said, "I will | speak thus,"*
I would have betrayed the generation of
your | children.

¹⁶**But when I thought how to under- | stand
this,*
it seemed to me a | wearisome task,**

¹⁷until I went into the sanctuary | of God;*
then I dis- | cerned their end.

¹⁸**Truly you set them in slippery | places;*
you make them fall to | ruin.**

¹⁹How they are destroyed in a | moment,*
swept away utterly by | terrors!

²⁰**Like a dream when | one awakes,*
O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you
despise them as | phantoms.**

²¹When my soul was em- | bittered,*
when I was | pricked in heart,

²²**I was brutish and | ignorant;*
I was like a | beast toward you.**

²³Nevertheless, I am continually | with you;*
you hold my | right hand.

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

²⁵Whom have I in | heaven but you?*"
And there is nothing on earth that I desire
be- | sides you.

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

²⁷For 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.
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 8:10-9:18

8:10: Wickedness in the Holy Place

The presence of wickedness in places where you would expect to find righteousness & justice has come up before in Ecclesiastes (see 3:16; 4:1, 13-16). This time the wickedness is in the temple. What consolation did Solomon offer for this predicament in 3:17?

How does our Lord apply Solomon's teaching from Ecclesiastes 3:17 to the life of the church, and, to the point of Ecclesiastes 8:10, resolve the problem of wickedness among God's people in Matthew 13:24-30? How does Psalm 73 address the prosperity of the wicked?

8:11: Delayed Judgment

The Israelites experienced a period of peace and prosperity during the lifetime of the 8th century prophet Amos. How were the leaders of the nation living at this time, and what did they think about their standing before God? See Amos 6:1-7; 9:10.

What encourages the wicked to persist in their evildoing, according to Ecclesiastes 8:11?

Why does God delay judgment? See Jonah 1:1–2; 3:4–5; 4:1–2. Compare also 2 Peter 3:9. Why is God so patient with the wicked? See Jonah 4:5–11.

8:12–13: Injustice & Faith

Solomon discovers no easy answers to the dilemma of the prosperity of the wicked (who “prolong their days as a shadow”; v. 13). God does not leave us entirely without consolation, however. Where is that consolation found, according to Ecclesiastes 8:12–13? Note especially the tense of the verbs. Compare also Ecclesiastes 3:14; 5:7; 12:13.

8:14: Another vanity

What does Solomon observe in 8:14 about how God appears to treat those whom He regards as righteous by virtue of their faith in Christ?

8:15: “And I commend joy”

What does Solomon identify in 8:15 as the source of joy “under the sun”? What is the greater living hope and eternal inheritance that we have beyond this life under the sun? See 1 Peter 1:18–19? How does what we learn in Psalm 57:1–3 and Luke 18:10–14 make this joy sound even sweeter? In other words, though God’s Law burns like fire and smashes our stony hearts into pieces (Jeremiah 23:29), how does hearing the Law in its full sternness serve the proclamation of the Gospel? Compare Luke 7:36–50.

8:16–17: The Limitations of Wisdom

What does Solomon conclude about wisdom in these verses? How does this relate to St. Paul’s teaching in Romans 11:33?

9:2: “It is the same for all”

What question were the people asking of God in Malachi 3:13–15? How does God characterize this attitude in Isaiah 1:12–13?

9:5: “The dead know nothing”

How do Ecclesiastes 7:18, 8:12, and 12:13–14 assure us that Solomon is not denying the resurrection but is speaking once again of life “under the sun” in 9:5? Compare also Romans 6:5 and Hebrews 9:27–28.

How does faith in Christ inform how we live in the present? See John 9:4; Philippians 1:22.

9:7–10: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes

Sometimes Ecclesiastes gets a bad rap and is seen as being nothing but pessimistic. How does Solomon affirm the existence and goodness of God and His creation in 9:7–10 and 2:24? Why is Solomon’s conclusion in 9:4 surprising given the vanity of life and some of his more critical observations?

What motivates the unbeliever in this life? See Isaiah 22:13. How does St. Paul evaluate this lifestyle in 1 Corinthians 15:19? What does Ecclesiastes 9:10 have to say about mediocrity?

9:8: White Garments & Oil

Why is it so difficult to heed Solomon’s admonition in 9:8? What makes joy possible even in the midst of sadness? See 2 Samuel 12:20–23. How does our Lord instruct us to present ourselves before other people when we find ourselves in unpleasant circumstances? See Matthew 6:16–18.

Luther summarizes Solomon’s thought in 9:8 as follows: “You are living in the midst of vanity. Therefore enjoy life, and do not let yourself come to run through your indignation, but drive the grief from your mind. You cannot mock the world more effectively than

by laughing when it grows angry. Let it be enough for you that you have a gracious God. For what is the malice of the world in comparison with the sweetness of God?” (AE 15:149).

9:13–15: An Improbable Victory

For all of its limitations, wisdom is still better than folly and can be beneficial. How does 9:13–15 relate to the account of Moses & Pharaoh (Exodus 3–14), David & Goliath (1 Samuel 17) or of our Lord’s ministry (see 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Colossians 2:3, especially noting the word “hidden”)?

9:17: Wisdom & Folly

What does this verse teach us about the nature (and volume!) of the wise and foolish? How is the Gospel characterized in 1 Kings 19:9–12 and Psalm 46:10?

What keeps the foolish from listening? See Proverbs 18:2. Luther: ““A fool does not hear unless you tell him what is already in his heart.” The reason is this: because his own feelings are predominant in the heart of a fool, he does not hear whatever you say, unless you say what he wants. They do not hear because they are preoccupied with their own feelings or with their own wisdom. You will accomplish nothing else, and you will not be heard where there are not quiet hearts, that is, hearts that have not been made blind by their own feelings,” (AE 15:155).

Closing: From God Can Nothing Move Me (LSB, 713)

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