



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

A. **2:1-8: Testing the World's Pleasures**

B. 2:9-26: Quest for Wisdom, ct'd.

II. 3:1-12:8 Pearls of Wisdom

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 Eastertide, 2015

Contentment Ecclesiastes 2:1-8

Opening: Psalm 37:1-16

¹Fret not yourself because of evil- | doers; *
be not envious of wrong- | doers!

²**For they will soon fade | like the grass*
and wither like the | green herb.**

³Trust in the LORD, | and do good;*
dwell in the land and befriend | faithfulness.

⁴**Delight yourself | in the LORD,*
and he will give you the desires | of your
heart.**

⁵Commit your way | to the LORD;*
trust in him, and | he will act.

⁶**He will bring forth your righteousness | as the
light,*
and your justice as the | noonday.**

⁷Be still before the LORD and wait patiently | for
him;*

fret not yourself over the one who prospers in
his way,

over the man who carries out evil de- | vices!

⁸**Refrain from anger, and for- | sake wrath!***
Fret not yourself; it tends only to | evil.

⁹For the evildoers shall be | cut off,*
but those who wait for the LORD shall inher- |
it the land.

¹⁰**In just a little while, the wicked will | be no
more;***
**though you look carefully at his place, he
will | not be there.**

¹¹But the meek shall in- | herit the land*
and delight themselves in a- | bundant peace.

¹²**The wicked plots against the | righteous*
and gnashes his | teeth at him,**

¹³but the Lord laughs at the | wicked,*
for he sees that his day is | coming.

¹⁴**The wicked draw the sword and | bend their
bows***

**to bring down the poor and needy,
to slay those whose way is | upright;**

¹⁵their sword shall enter | their own heart,*
and their bows shall be | broken.

¹⁶**Better is the little that the | righteous has*
than the abundance of many | wicked.**

**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 2:1-8

Pleasure: Solomon's plan "B" (v. 1)

Luther: "It is although he were saying: "Since anxieties and my own plans cannot achieve anything, I shall refrain from them. I shall turn to the right hand and make a more tranquil life for myself... let everything happen as it happens and chooses, and live a life of pleasure. But this too was no more successful than his earlier reliance on human wisdom and anxiety," (LW 15:28).

What was plan "A"? See Ecclesiastes 1:13.

Here Solomon's plan is to "test" pleasure to see if it will bring contentment. Is pleasure bad? See Genesis 2:8-10. When can pleasure become dangerous? See Genesis 2:16-17, 3:6 and Deut. 8.

In what or whom should we place our trust and find delight, according to Psalm 37:3-5? In whom does the Lord take pleasure, according to Psalm 147:11?

Luther: "This does not mean that happiness is condemned as something evil or vain. What is condemned is human striving and planning, when we ourselves want or try to create happiness without respect to the will of God... As it is a sin to invite anxiety and sorrow by our own counsels and also a sin to refuse to suffer them when they are imposed on us by God, so it is also to be condemned if we run away from happiness and do not accept it when it is given by God," (LW 15, 30).

On enduring suffering, see also 1 Peter 2:19-25 and 2 Timothy 4:5.

Luther: "Often dinner parties are arranged to create a happy atmosphere, with foods and entertainment intended to make the guests happy. But usually it comes out just the opposite way, and only seldom does a good party result. Either there are gloomy and solemn faces present, or something else upsets all the arrangements, especially when there is such deliberation and planning about how much fun it will be," (LW 15, 28).

Does your experience ring true to what Luther says here? Have you ever planned something carefully and it turned out to be a disaster? Why does this happen?

Luther: “Therefore, the best thing is to abide in the Word and work of God, to instruct the heart this way in how to be peaceful and content with the things that are present. If the Lord has given one a wife, one should now hold on to her and enjoy her. If you want to exceed these limits and add to this gift which you have in the present, you will get grief and sorrow instead of pleasure. One should therefore simply stick to what the Lord wills and gives. If you want joy and delight, wait to receive it from Him,” (LW 15, 30).

How is the fruit of the tree described in Genesis 3:6? How does the fall into sin illustrate the truth of Luther’s above comments, particularly his point that sorrow will result from transgressing God’s limits and seeking excess pleasure? See Genesis 3:7–24.

How do the limits God has set for us in His Law (e.g., the Ten Commandments) serve to protect us against grief and sorrow, while at the same time promote pleasure?

The problem of laughter (v. 2)

Solomon is not forbidding laughter or enjoyment (compare Ecclesiastes 3:4). Laughter and pleasure are problematic, however, when they become our highest good or ultimate goal in life. Why is laughter not the cure for all that ails us, according to Proverbs 14:13?

Basil the Great: “It is not unbecoming, however, to give evidence of merriment of soul by a cheerful smile... but raucous laughter and uncontrollable shaking of the body are not indicative of a well-regulated soul, or of personal dignity, or self-mastery,” (ACC IX:207).

If all else fails, drink! (Plan “C”) (v. 3)

Solomon is leaving no stone unturned in his quest for wisdom (see Ecclesiastes 1:17), even testing that which is obviously folly (2:3).

What does Proverbs 23:29–35 have to say about excessive consumption of alcohol? Does Scripture require total abstinence from alcohol? See 1 Timothy 4:1–5; 5:23; John 2:1–11.

Luther: [Solomon is here saying] “In the world and in human society, where I have lived, I find success neither in the anxieties with which I trouble myself as I seek to give counsel to others nor in my own pleasures. They are all useless. Therefore I shall undertake a rigid and austere way of life, one of total abstinence and strictness... This is not to say that abstinence is evil; what is evil is to seek it out by one’s own planning and to bind oneself to it as something necessary... God Himself says: “When you have it, eat; if you do not have it, abstain.” Therefore if you want to be abstinent, wait for the counsel of the Lord. He is able to cast you into prison, into hunger, into infirmity, and the like,” (LW 15:32–33).

In our culture of excess, Satan normally entices us with pleasure. But Christians be tempted to think they can make themselves holier by



renouncing the world and all pleasure. What does Ecclesiastes 2:24 have to say about this?

Why shouldn’t we, according to the above Luther quote, impose crosses on ourselves? Compare also Matthew 6:34.

See Matthew 19:16–24, especially Jesus’ command to the rich young man in verse 21. What was Jesus trying to get across to the rich young man? Compare Matthew 9:12–13.

What does our Lord teach about fasting in Matthew 6:16–18? What does Luther say about fasting in the *Small Catechism* (Sacrament of the Altar, “Who receives this sacrament worthily?”)?

Solomon’s great wealth (v. 4–8)

Note the natural progression beginning in verse 4 and continuing through verse 8. How are all of the things Solomon lists here related?

Bollhagen: “One should notice the chain reaction of events that follows: houses and vineyard (for his drinking?) led to further landscaping, which in turn required irrigation, and a vast corps of slaves was needed to maintain the whole enterprise. A man may speak of his possessions as his holdings, things under his control, but in reality his possessions can control him!” (*Concordia Commentary*, 88).

On contentment, see 1 Timothy 6:6–8.

Concubines (v. 8)

See 1 Kings 3:1 for a common political motivation for taking multiple wives.

What is the Bible’s attitude toward polygamy? See Deuteronomy 17:17.

See 1 Kings 11:1–3. What was the consequence of Solomon’s polygamy? What does this suggest for marriage today? See also 2 Corinthians 6:14.

Closing Hymn: What Is the World to Me? (LSB, 730)

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