

I Intro. (Nov. 16, 2008)

Ignorance of the future has been Solomon's theme since Ecc. 9:1, and this is his last section on it. Four times in here in 11:1-6 he says, "you do not know." This should not be stultifying though. We should get involved in ventures and diversify our investments (11:1-2). Storms might come and do irreversible damage, but one should plant anyway (11:3-4). Further, one's profound ignorance of what God is doing should not lead to idleness, but diligence (11:5-6). Not being diligent guarantees failure.

II "Be Disciplined Even Though You Do Not Know the Future" (Ecc. 11:1-6).

A. We should get involved in ventures and diversify our investments (11:1-2).

1. (vs. 1) This is a favorite verse among the Charismatics and Pentecostals today. However, the reference is probably "not to charitable acts,"<sup>1</sup> which God rewards with riches to the giver. Dr. Constable says, "If you follow the advice in this verse literally you will experience disappointment."<sup>2</sup> Rather the meaning is that "people should engage in diligent, active labor. Like the benefits that come from the seafaring trade of foodstuffs, so active involvement in business gives a promise of some return (v.1; cf. 1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:22; Ps. 107:23 for references to maritime trade)."<sup>3</sup> Solomon is urging risk taking to get involved in a business enterprise. He believes it will succeed, but it might take quite some time: "for you will find it after many days." The necessity of endurance is enough by itself to discourage most people from ever beginning. Solomon was a self-starter who "owned a fleet of merchant ships (1 Kings 9:26-28) that helped add to his great wealth. Life is like that: you have to launch out by faith if you hope to get anywhere."<sup>4</sup>

2. (vs. 2) Of course, one must be reasonable in his pursuits, undertakings, and business ventures. Fundamental to success is diversification: "Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight." This is a statement most likely not intended to be taken with wooden literalism, "but means 'plenty and more than plenty,' 'the widest

possible diversification within the guidelines of prudence. . . . Seven means 'plenty,' and eight means, 'Go a bit beyond that.'"<sup>5</sup> Dr. Glenn says the meaning may be, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Invest in several interests so that if one fails, you will still be able to carry on with the others."<sup>6</sup> If the NIV translation be accepted, "Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land," then the meaning is "that we should show uncalculating kindness while we can, because a time of calamity and misfortune may come when this will not be possible. Most people save for a rainy day; this verse counsels to adopt a spirit of unrestricted liberality because of the uncertainties of life."<sup>7</sup> So one lexicon says on the term "portion," "of food...so (of unrestricted charity)."<sup>8</sup> There is good counsel in that, but it seems less likely that this is what Solomon is discussing *in context*.

In either case, the reason for doing so follows; "for you do not know what misfortune," or "misery, trouble, disaster"<sup>9</sup> "may occur on the earth." For example, who could have predicted the current financial and credit crisis in our country, which has now spread around the world? No wonder Prov. 23:5b says, "*wealth* certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies *toward* the heavens." Then there is Paul's statement of 1Tm. 6:17, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the **uncertainty** of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (bold added). Ironically both generosity and diversification make sense.

B. Storms might come and do irreversible damage, but one should plant anyway (11:3-4).

1. (vs. 3) We move here to the example of sowing and reaping. Sometimes the "clouds are full," so precipitation occurs and "they pour rain upon the earth." There is no stopping it. Man can only watch it happen even if conditions are stormy and perhaps "a tree falls" who knows what direction, "toward the south or toward the

<sup>1</sup>Tom Constable, Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003). Ec 11:1.  
<sup>2</sup>Tom Constable, Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 11:1.  
<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 1:1002-1003.  
<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W. With the Word Bible Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1991. Ec 11:1.

<sup>5</sup>Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 11:1.  
<sup>6</sup>MacDonald, William and Arthur Farstad. Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995. Ec 11:2.  
<sup>7</sup>MacDonald, William and Arthur Farstad. Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995. Ec 11:2.  
<sup>8</sup>Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles Augustus Briggs. Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. electronic ed. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000. 324.  
<sup>9</sup>Holladay, William Lee, Ludwig Köhler and Ludwig Köhler. A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. Leiden: Brill, 1971. 343.

north.” It depends on the wind and on the root system, and perhaps on the amount of wash that weakens the ground at the base of the tree. But “wherever” it “falls, there it lies.” It is not going to replant itself, no matter how great the odds believed in by the most naïve evolutionist. Its demise is final. This reality creates such consternation in some people that they are almost rendered immobile by it. Calamities can and do happen.

2. (vs. 4) Consequently, when it comes time to plant, “He who watches the wind will not sow.” He will always be wondering if a storm is going to blow up, or simply that the wind speed will be too great and blow the seed all around, because much planting in those days was done simply by broadcasting the seed. If he finally does get a stand, when it comes time to harvest, he will go through a similar cycle all over again. He will constantly be holding back, looking “at the clouds” and wondering if it might rain and interfere with the harvest, and perhaps dampen the seed and ruin it. So as a result, “he will not reap.” The irony in all of this is that the fear of failure guarantees failure.

C. Ignorance of what God is doing should not lead to idleness, but diligence (11:5-6).

1. (vs. 5) Solomon does not advocate disregarding the facts or reality itself. He believed in facing the facts head-on. It is true enough that “you do not know the path of the wind,” and what weather might develop thereby, or “how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman” (Cf. Ps. 139:13-16). By the way, we still do not know this in spite of PET (positron emission tomography), CAT (computerized axial tomography) scans or what have you. Growth itself largely remains a mystery.

(Some MSS read, “the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child,”<sup>10</sup> but this does not take into account the connection of this verse with the previous in the word “wind.”)

Undeniable ignorance of these very present and familiar things, anticipates an even more profound ignorance of what God is doing: “so you

do not know the activity of God who makes all things.” Who could possibly deny that?

2. (vs. 6) What should our response be to these things? Should we simply sit down and do nothing because it is useless since we do not control the future and therefore we do not know what is coming? Not according to Solomon.

He exhorted, get to work! “Sow you seed in the morning, and do not be idle in the evening.” Get out there and do something! Why? Sow every chance you get because “you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed.” If you only sowed in the morning, and yet the evening sowing did much better, you might well wish you had also sown in the evening and not taken the rest of the day off. On the other hand if “both of them alike” are “good” so much the better!

Can sowing at a particular time of day be that critical? Yes, particularly where seed is broadcast, moisture levels dramatically affecting germination and rooting can change in a few hours.

### III Conc.

While Solomon frames much of his discussion around farming, there are any number of applications to other disciplines or areas of interest. For example, whether or not a young person follows through on his education can be critical later in life. But the expense of securing one is great, and the effort in completing one’s degree is great, so many people find reasons not to do it. Yes, some succeed without it, but many if not most regret not doing it if they indeed don’t. Life can be filled with “if only’s.” I think Solomon is trying to help his readers cut back on those by saying that even though you do not know the future, and there might be many things that can go wrong, work hard, diversify and see what happens. This gives one the best opportunity to succeed.

<sup>10</sup>Chip McDaniel and C. John Collins, The ESV English-Hebrew Reverse Interlinear Old Testament (Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2006; 2006). Ec 11:5.