

Fact Sheet for “Business”

Ecclesiastes 11:1-6

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Solomon in Ecclesiastes has been saying that it is not possible for us to see God’s whole plan. Even Solomon in his wisdom could not see it. We need to trust Him and accept His design in life. At the same time we are to pursue righteousness and turn away from sin. We are also to use wisdom in our daily business activities.

**ESV ¹ Cast your bread upon the waters,
for you will find it after many days.**

This may at first sound like you are feeding the fish, but the imagery may well be that of a merchant who uses his capital for trade, including trade across the seas.

NIV Ecclesiastes 11:1 Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return.

The NET Bible and the New Living Translation have something similar. We have a saying that goes right along with this verse, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” Even though we don’t understand God’s plan for the world, and for us individually, there is wisdom in taking thoughtful financial ventures.

**² Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,
for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.**

There is another saying we have. “Don’t put all of your eggs in one basket.” Be sensible and don’t risk everything on one venture. Again, we don’t know what God has planned. We may choose a path, planning and hoping for it to turn out well, but God may have a different plan. I always seem to think of one particular example of God’s plan versus our plans, and it is not financial. At the end of WWII and with the rise of the communist party in China many Christian missionaries were expelled. This appeared to be a disaster for the church. But God had a different plan. The Chinese church was forced to stand on its own and number of Christians there multiplied exponentially. We don’t know God’s plan, but there is wisdom in financially spreading our risk. Don’t sink everything you own in one type of investment.

**³ If the clouds are full of rain,
they empty themselves on the earth,
and if a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.**

This is what clouds do. They rain. Why do trees normally fall? They usually fall in a high wind.

**⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow,
and he who regards the clouds will not reap.**

The wind can blow trees down. Clouds can produce rain. If the farmer is always afraid of what could happen he will never sow or reap. This is seen in another translation.

NLT Ecclesiastes 11:4 Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant. If they watch every cloud, they never harvest.

I find that people sometimes let the fear of what *could* happen paralyze them.

If the weather report calls for ice in the evening, but it is not showing up yet, then I get asked if I am going to cancel AWANA.

A couple of years ago we heard that the swine flu virus was rampant in Mexico. We were scheduled to vacation there during that scare, but the flu wasn't in the area we were going to. Many people canceled their vacation. We did not and had a great time. There were very few tourists, and the jumbo jet we flew back on had about 20 passengers on board. And while we were gone two people in Cottage Grove got the swine flu!

Wind and rain, and other events, do happen but don't let your fears paralyze you! Use wisdom and not just fear in moving forward.

⁵ ¶ As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

I have often said that it is good to have multiple translations around to compare. This is a great example of a verse that you should compare with several other versions. Take a close look at the wording of this verse in the ESV. When does it seem that the spirit comes to the child in the womb? Does it come after the child's bones have been formed? Is there another way of looking at the verse?

What is the difference between a human egg that was fertilized a second ago and you? It is age and place of residence! People are people from the moment of fertilization.

So does the spirit come later??? Here is the KJV rendering.

^{KJV} **Ecclesiastes 11:5** ¶ As thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit, *nor* how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.

(The words in italics indicate that these words do not appear in the Hebrew. They were added to the English by the KJV translators to try to smooth out the Hebrew.) The ESV and the KJV scholars were translating from the same Hebrew but had different English wording. Here is the NAU, again translating from the same Hebrew.

^{NAU} **Ecclesiastes 11:5** ¶ Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

(Again, notice the italics.) The NAU rendering would connect this verse with verse 4.

⁴ He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.

In the NAU the English word "wind" is used instead of the word "spirit", as it is also in the NET, NIV, NKJV, and NLT. Why? It is because the same word translated as "spirit" can also be translated "wind". And it is the same Hebrew word in verses 4 & 5. Here's the point. There are two translational issues here. 1st – Whether it is "wind" or "spirit" this doesn't change one bit of theology. We don't know the way of either. However the translation "wind" fits the context very well. 2nd – The ESV rendering that may, at first glance, lead you to believe that the spirit comes to the baby mid-way through the pregnancy is not the best way to view this verse. Here's the wisdom Solomon is communicating. As you don't know the way of the wind, the rain, or the formation of a child in the womb, so you certainly don't know the work of God who makes everything! You don't know what His plan for tomorrow will bring. Therefore...

⁶ ¶ In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

We don't know what God's plan will call for. We don't know how our business ventures will turn out. Likewise we don't know who will be our next president. But trust God, pursue righteousness, and use wisdom. This is our best approach.