

Ecclesiastes 7 Commentary

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| Place: "Under the Sun" |
| Decades of Searching (in the days of King Solomon) circa 936BC |
| King Solomon Author |

Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than a good ointment, And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth;

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:1 γαθ ν νομα π ρ λαιον γαθ ν κα μ ρα το θαν του π ρ μ ραν γεν σεως α το

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than good oil; and the day of death than the day of birth.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good reputation is better than precious perfume; likewise, the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of one's death than the day of one's birth.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:1 Better is a name than good perfume, And the day of death than the day of birth.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:1 Better a good name than costly oil, the day of death than the day of birth.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death, than the day of birth.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than good ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:1 A good name is better than expensive perfume, and the day you die is better than the day you're born.

- **name:** Pr 15:30 22:1 Isa 56:5 Lu 10:20 Heb 11:2,39
- **precious:** Ec 10:1 Ps 133:2 Pr 27:9 Song 1:3 4:10 Joh 13:2
- **the day:** Ec 4:2 Job 3:17 Isa 57:1,2 2Co 5:1,8 Php 1:21-23 Rev 14:13

Related Passages:

Proverbs 22:1 A good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.

**LEGACY OVER
LUXURY**

A good name is better than a good ointment - A "good name" refers to one's reputation, character, and moral integrity. It's what people think of when your name is mentioned. A "**good ointment**" (literally "fine oil") was costly, aromatic perfume or oil, used for anointing, refreshing, or burial. In ancient culture, perfume signified external appeal—beauty, status, pleasure. But Solomon says

internal character is far greater. The point of this passage is that true worth lies in character, not appearance or luxury.

Michael Eaton - In Israel a name was no mere label but intended to express an underlying nature. What is in view is not simply a good name (which may be undeserved), but a reputation which flows from character. Such a name was highly valued; even God at the time of the exodus 'got himself a name' (Neh. 9:10). (See further art. 'Name', IBD, pp. 1050–1053; J. A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (1959).) As inner character is more crucial than outer fragrance, so it is the funeral, not the rowdy birthday party, that poses the ultimate questions about life the Preacher is pressing. This severe statement arises not from despondency but from sheer realism. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth- This paradox shocks the reader but fits the Ecclesiastes worldview. At birth, one enters a world of vanity, toil, sorrow. At death (especially for the righteous), one's legacy is sealed, and rest from labor begins. This is not meant to glorify death itself, but to highlight completion, culmination, and rest. Birth marks potential, but not yet proven. Death reflects the sum of a life—either well-lived or wasted. A life well-lived is more meaningful at its end than at its beginning.

*A good reputation is more valuable than physical luxury,
and a life completed with honor is better than one merely begun.*

Charles Swindoll sees chapter 7 as a major departure in Solomon's approach to life calling it "A Change in Scenery. In the first six chapters of Ecclesiastes, Solomon provided evidence for his hypothesis that life under the sun is futile. Without God, ragged-edge reality is meaningless. As we studied Solomon's expedition into excruciating emptiness, we were grateful for the few sparks of light he offered along the way, but overall the mood was dark. From chapter 7 onward, however, the focus of Ecclesiastes becomes less man-centered and descriptive and more God-centered and prescriptive. In the second half of his journal, Solomon ceased reflecting on the pointlessness of life and his own drifting from the Lord and turned his attention instead to his slow but steady voyage home. Some evidence of this change is the more frequent occurrence of verses addressing **wisdom**. If we compare the number of verses in Ecclesiastes 1–6 addressing vanity with those addressing **wisdom**, we see an emphasis on the **futility** of life. However, in Ecclesiastes 7–12 the emphasis shifts, with more verses dealing with wisdom than **vanity**. The following chart illustrates this change of focus in Solomon's book. Also, Ecclesiastes 7 opens with a string of proverbs that offers a wise perspective on dealing with life. In light of the evidence and experience of futility he described in chapters 1 through 6, Solomon began to make some general conclusions about wise living in chapter 7. These pithy observations offer nuggets of perspective to those in the crunch of busyness. ([Living on the Ragged Edge Workbook](#))

William Barrick - Death Is Good (Eccl 7:1–4)

Solomon now begins his response to the question he voiced at the start of Eccl 6:12 ("For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime . . .?"). He mentions two good things: a good reputation and the day of one's death. At creation, God exercised His authority by naming things like light and darkness, the expanse, the dry land and the collection of waters, and man (Gen 1:5, 9, 10, 26). Adam named the animals and woman (Gen 2:19, 20, 23; 3:20). Parents continue to this day to name their children at or shortly after birth. However, no matter what name a person receives at birth, his or her reputation at the time of death is far more significant. Their reputation testifies to the success or lack of success with which they met life's challenges.

Ec 7:1a exhibits Solomon's poetic skill. The Hebrew exhibits an inverted play on words: *tov shem mishshemen tov*. "**Good**" (*tov*) appears at the beginning and the end of the statement. The poetic nature of the proverb makes it memorable. At its center are the two entities that produce the auditory and visual imagery ("name" and "ointment"). At the beginning of one's life, an individual receives a name. Throughout one's lifetime that name obtains either a good reputation or a bad one—preferably, a good one. In fact, one's name accrues value and has the potential of being more valuable at death than at birth. The good, therefore, comes at death.

The "good ointment" might refer to any of a number of normal situations in ancient Israel's culture: (1) the bathing of an infant in oil at birth (cp. Ezek 16:4), (Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes*, 3rd ed., 267.) (2) refreshing the body to provide relief from body odor, muscle soreness, dry skin, and other conditions, (Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word, 150.) (3) a luxury provided by the possession of significant wealth, (R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, New Century Bible Commentary, 113.) or (4) the preparation of a corpse for burial. The fourth setting fits best, since the context speaks of "the day of one's death" (Eccl 7:1b) and "a house of mourning" (Eccl 7:2, 4). Fredericks astutely observes that "Ten verses earlier, even a burial plot was in question, much less the attending ointments for a respectable ceremony." (Daniel C. Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," in *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, 166.)

The second half of Eccl 7:1 continues to elevate one's death above one's birth. Birth commences a temporary existence "under the sun." Death, however, propels a person into an eternal existence. The former pales in the light of the latter in both time and

significance. Paul summed up the concept beautifully for the people of God: **“To die is gain. . . . I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better”** (Phil 1:21, 23).

4 Stuart Olyott highlights this concept in the title of his study of Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, *A Life Worth Living and A Lord Worth Loving*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Hertfordshire, UK: Evangelical Press, 1983).

NET NOTES:

NAME - Heb “name.” The Hebrew term שֵׁם (shem, “name”) is used metonymically for a person’s reputation (e.g., Prov 22:1; Deut 22:14, 19; Neh 6:13; also Gen 6:4; 12:2; 2 Sam 7:9; 8:13; 23:18, 22; 1 Chr 5:24; 12:31; 2 Chr 26:15; Neh 9:10; Isa 63:12, 14; Jer 32:20; Ezek 16:14; Dan 9:15); cf. HALOT 1549 s.v. שֵׁם D.2; BDB 1028 s.v. שֵׁם b.

BETTER The comparative term טוֹב (tov, “better”) is repeated throughout Ec 7:1–12. It introduces a series of “Better-than sayings,” particularly in Ec 7:1–6 in which every poetic unit is introduced by טוֹב.

GOOD - Heb “good.” The repetition of טוֹב (tov, “good”) forms an inclusion (a structural device that rounds off the unit), while the two internal terms שֵׁם ... מִשְׁחָן (shem mishemen, “name ... ointment”) create a paronomastic wordplay (see the note on the word “perfume”). The combination of these two sets of literary devices creates an AB: B’A’ chiasm: טוֹב שֵׁם // מִשְׁחָן טוֹב (tov shem // mishemen tov, e.g., “good name”// “ointment good”).

OINTMENT - tn Or “oil”; or “ointment.” The term מִשְׁחָן (shemen) refers to fragrant “perfume; cologne; ointment” (Amos 6:6; Eccl 10:1; Song 1:2 [1:3 HT]; 4:10); see HALOT 1568 s.v. מִשְׁחָן A.2.c. Bodily oils were expensive (1 Kgs 17:12; 2 Kgs 2:4). Possession of oils and perfumes was a sign of prosperity (Deut 32:8; 33:24; Job 29:6; Prov 21:17; Ezek 16:13, 20). Wearing colognes and oils was associated with joy (Ps 45:8; Eccl 9:8; Isa 61:3) because they were worn on festive occasions (Prov 27:9). The similar sounding terms “name” (שֵׁם, shem) and “perfume” (מִשְׁחָן) create a wordplay (paronomasia). See W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTSup), 242–43; J. J. Glöck, “Paronomasia in Biblical Literature,” *Semiotics* 1 (1970): 50–78; A. Guillaume, “Paronomasia in the Old Testament,” *JSS* 9 (1964): 282–90; J. M. Sasson, “Wordplay in the OT,” *IDBSup* 968–70.

LIKEWISE - The vav prefixed to the form וְיָוֶם (véyom) functions in a comparative sense, e.g., Job 5:7; 12:11; 16:21; Prov 25:25 (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 71, §437).

There are two ways to understand this proverb:

- (1) Happy times (characterized by celebration and “fragrant perfume”) teach us less than hard times (“the day of one’s death”) which can bring about moral improvement (“a good reputation”).
- (2) It is better to come to the end of one’s life (“day of one’s death”) with a good reputation (“a good name”) than to merely be starting life (“day of one’s birth”) in an auspicious manner in joy and wealth (“fine perfume”). Folly and wickedness could foil a good beginning so that a person ends life as a fool. For example, Solomon began as the wisest man who ever lived, only to end life as one of history’s greatest fools.

William Barrick - GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Life Is Complicated: Live with Care

By application, the Preacher found the explanation for apparent inequalities in divine providence (Eccl 6:1–8:15).

The smell of death, the crackling of thorns in a fire, nostalgia for yesteryear, something bent that cannot be straightened, the whispering of servants, and the hardened hearts of fallen mankind—these are some of the images summoned by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7. At the mid-point of the book,¹ he returns to the themes with which he had commenced his spiritual journal (see 1:2–3, 15). Life is transitory (6:12). What advantage do people have in life? In 6:10–12, Solomon depicts death as the reigning king in every individual’s life. He moves on in chapter 7 to examine the topic more diversely and deeply. Indeed, he pulls the reader aside to invite him or her to a funeral. There they will listen in as the mourners discuss the deaths of friends and loved ones. Readers will observe how such an experience affects the lives of those who have witnessed the state of the deceased person’s affairs.

Theological tension permeates the chapter. How can a sovereign God still be in control of creation when death interrupts the good life He has so graciously granted to a man or a woman? Solomon’s reflection on the Fall of mankind in Eccl 6:10–12 comes to the fore again at the end of Eccl 7:29. Life under the sun continues with all of the baggage of Adam’s disobedience. This is a fallen, corrupted world.

In Ecclesiastes 7:1’s proverb, “A good name is better than a good ointment,” the adjective “good” operates as a bridge between Eccl 6, 7, between the first half of the book and the second half of the book. The author utilizes the phrase **“better than”** (literally, “more good than”) to offer a series of contrasts that argue for the superiority of wisdom over foolishness, righteousness over wickedness:

- In life or death a good reputation is better than smelling good (Eccl 7:1a).
- One's dying day is better than the day of his or her birth (Eccl 7:1b).

1 The exact middle of Ecclesiastes actually comes at Eccl 6:10. Ancient Jewish tradition divided the book into four sedarim (weekly liturgical readings for completing the reading of the Hebrew Bible every three years): Eccl 1:1–3:12, 3:13–6:12; 7:1–9:6, and 9:7–12:14.

- A funeral is better than a festival (Eccl 7:2).
- Grief is better than laughter (Eccl 7:3).
- A wise man's rebuke is better than a fool's song (Eccl 7:5).
- The end of something is better than its beginning (Eccl 7:8a).
- Patience is better than pride (Eccl 7:).
- Realism about the present and occupation with the future are better than nostalgia over the past (Eccl 7:10).

The wise person will choose that which is better over that which is not; the foolish person will pursue the opposite course of action. The upshot of it all is that Solomon has learned that the truly godly individual takes life and death seriously. Remembering that he must stand before the righteous and eternal God to give an account of himself, a person lives to please God, rather than to please himself.²

Proverbial wisdom occupies a significant portion of the final half of Ecclesiastes. Solomon's parallels abound. For Eccl 7:1–14 alone, readers will find echoes of Pr 3:2, 16a (Eccl 7:12b); Pr 13:1 (Eccl 7:5); Pr 14:13 (Eccl 7:3); Pr 14:17a (Eccl 7:9); Pr 14:29 (Eccl 7:8b, 9); Pr 15:27 (Eccl 7:7); 15:31 (Eccl 7:5); Pr 16:32a (Eccl 7:8b); Pr 22:1 (Eccl 7:1a). Solomon employs these proverbs to advance his observation that an individual's life is all too brief and filled with a multitude of enigmas and contradictions. In other words, life is complicated; therefore, we must learn to live it with great care.

The two sections of Eccl 7 examine a person's **circumstances** (Eccl 7:1–14) and **character** (Eccl 7:15–29). Solomon looks at the first in the light of eternity and the second in the light of divine revelation. Both sections together proclaim, "**Life Is the Time to Serve the Lord**"—the title of one of Isaac Watts' hymns based upon Ecclesiastes.

A Person's Present Circumstances in the Light of Eternity (Eccl 7:1–14)

Mature individuals, who are facing their final cycle of years, realize that their bodies are deteriorating rapidly. Increased pain, weakness, and medical issues relative to the aging process all mark the transition. Eventually, if the deterioration affects the quality of one's life significantly, the aging person begins to long for the relief that will come with death. Just as severely oppressed people might look to being freed from their torturous circumstances by death (Eccl 4:1–3), so too, even the godliest individuals endure the ravages of time with the hope that passing from this life will bring a desirable release from the effects of the Fall.

God does not limit the release from suffering, pain, and sorrow to the aged. All too late in life, we come to the realization that an infant's death might well display God's mercy in delivering that child from a traumatic, painful, and sorrow-filled existence (Eccl 7:3–6; cp. 2 Kgs 22:18–20; Isa 57:1–2). Only the omniscient and sovereign God of the universe can know such things and make such judgments. The power of death is His.

Ecclesiastes 7:1–14 appears to follow up on "the theme of Ecclesiastes as a whole with the question: Will the life of faith survive hard and troublesome times when the 'good old days' have gone and the 'days of adversity' come?" (Borrow [Michael A. Eaton, Ecclesiastes](#)) Solomon's answer declares that life remains worth living,⁴ even in this fallen existence, until our Sovereign Lord determines that the proper time has come for us to make our final exit. With these thoughts in mind, what is good for a person in life? ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

² Michael Kelley, *The Burden of God: Studies in Wisdom and Civilization from the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Minneapolis: Contra Mundum Books, 1993), 113–14.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) LESSONS FROM THE FUNERAL HOME

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Ecclesiastes 7:1-2

Have you smelled the first shovel of dirt from your grave yet?" the friend asked the St. Louis businessman. The businessman, only forty-eight years old, knew that sooner or later he was going to die of cancer. Twice it had come to him, twice he had beaten it, but the third time he might not be so lucky.

We all wonder about life after death. It's natural to think about it, because sooner or later we're going to die. That much is certain.

Death is truly the last enemy of the people of God. That's not my word. It's what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:26. We can beat many other enemies, but death always wins in the end. We can put it off, dress it up, delay it, or deny it, but to no avail.

A gifted colleague told me that the last year has been the most difficult in his life. His aged father died, his daughter-in-law died of cancer, then his wife of forty-four years died of a brain tumor after a two-year illness. In his preaching he openly shares his personal journey through pain and suffering. I don't think I had gotten three minutes into my message on the providence of God before he put his head on the table and started to weep.

Afterwards he gripped my shoulder and said, "I believe all that, but it's so hard." He said that at the end, his wife didn't even recognize him. A hundred times a day she would say, "Who are you?" He wept as I have not seen a man weep in many years.

Jesus wept too. When He stood before the tomb of Lazarus He wept openly. People have wondered why He wept since He knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. I think He wept because He loved Lazarus and because He felt the pain of death. He saw the grief of Mary and Martha and wept for all the suffering that death causes in the world.

Death is the last enemy, and until it is destroyed, we, like Jesus, will weep too.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the lessons learned in the house of mourning. I look forward to the day tears will be forever banished. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Under what circumstances can a person's death be considered a joyful event? A tragic event?
- Suppose you were to die today; what phrase would sum up your life so far?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Lamentations 3:1-33; Mark 5:21-43; and 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:2 Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:2 γὰρ ὃ πορευθῆναι εἰς οἶκον πένθους ἢ τι πορευθῆναι εἰς οἶκον πίου καθ' ὅτι τὸ τέλος πάντων ἐστὶν ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ζῶν ὁμοῦς ἐκκαλεῖται τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the banquet house: since this is the end of every man; and the living man will apply good warning to his heart.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to a funeral than a feast. For death is the destiny of every person, and the living should take this to heart.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, since that is the end of all mankind, and the living should take it to heart.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:2 Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies-- so the living should take this to heart.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:2 Better to go unto a house of mourning, Than to go unto a house of banqueting, For that is the end of all men, And the living layeth it unto his heart.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:2 Better go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; for to this end everyone comes, let the living take this to heart.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for this is the end of everyone, and the living will lay it to heart.

- **better:** Ge 48:1-22 49:2-33 50:15-17 Job 1:4,5 Isa 5:11,12 22:12-14 Am 6:3-6 Mt 5:4 14:6-12 1Pe 4:3,4
- **that:** Nu 23:10 De 32:29 Ro 6:21,22 Php 3:19 Heb 9:27
- **living:** De 32:46 Isa 47:7 Hag 1:5 *marg: Mal 2:2

Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 3:20 All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.

Hebrews 9:27 And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment,

WISDOM IN THE WAKE OF DEATH

It is better to go to a house of mourning - NET - "It is better to go to a funeral than a feast. "The **house of mourning** refers to a funeral or place of grief, a setting where death and loss are acknowledged. "**Better**" does not mean more pleasant, but more profitable for wisdom and reflection.

*The house of mourning is
God's classroom for wisdom.*

Michael Eaton - Death brings us to think about life (cf. Ps. 90:12), especially since mourning was taken very seriously (cf. Gen. 50:10). A party has no such effect. Every funeral anticipates our own. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Than to go to a house of feasting - The represents celebration, parties, and indulgence where sorrow is often forgotten. While joy has value, it often causes people to ignore life's deeper realities. While the party may make you forget, the funeral teaches you how to live.

Because (term of explanation) **that is the end of every man - NET** = "For death is the destiny of every person." This refers to the inescapable reality of death. Death is the universal destiny of all people. Mourning reminds us of our mortality and the need to live wisely.

NET NOTE Qoheleth recommended that people soberly reflect on the brevity of life and the reality of death (It is better to go to a house of mourning) than to waste one's life in the foolish pursuit of pleasure (than to go to a house of banqueting). Sober reflection on the brevity of life and reality of death has more moral benefit than frivolous levity.

And the living takes it to heart. - Literally: "lays it upon his heart." This implies deep reflection, allowing the truth of death to influence one's thinking and decisions. The Septuagint says "the living man will apply good warning to his heart." Wise people allow death to teach them. Mourning causes sober reflection, leading to humility, repentance, and a reoriented life.

Barrick - Eccl 7:2, 4 form a proverbial pair sandwiching Eccl 7:3:

the house of mourning vs. the house of feasting (Eccl 7:2)
sorrow and laughter
sadness and goodness 9
the house of mourning vs. the house of pleasure (Eccl 7:4)

The house of mourning" refers to the home of the deceased, where the family mourns the departure of their loved one. Jacob's family observed a seven-day period of mourning, a practice still continued among the Jews.¹⁰ Solomon explains that death "is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart" (Eccl 7:2c,d). Everyone will face the day of their death (cp. Rom 6:23). At "the house of mourning" the living take this ending to heart. Sadly, people do not always give due consideration to the significance of death. During the prophetic ministry of Isaiah, he made the observation that people were not laying it to heart when they saw the righteous die (Isa 57:1). What does an individual gain from visiting a family in mourning, standing beside the open casket and gazing upon the lifeless form of the deceased, or listening to an account or eulogy regarding the life of the dead person? The benefits of a funeral include:

- Understanding more clearly the ultimate result of the Fall.
- Giving proper consideration to the brevity of life.

- Being reminded that how we live does count.
- Recommitting ourselves to live life in the light of eternity.
- Preparing to die.
- Learning the value of comfort and being comforted.
- Knowing that no one lives to herself and no one dies to himself.

In other words, “Every funeral anticipates our own,” according to Eaton’s laconic summary.¹¹ Only when an individual takes the seriousness (the finality) of death to heart, does he or she benefit from the life-lessons that a funeral imparts.

“The School of the Funeral” In God’s economy, sorrow is a sacred teacher. While joy can numb us to reality, grief awakens us. At a funeral, we are reminded: Life is short. Death is certain. Legacy matters. God is our only hope. Solomon’s wisdom here is countercultural. The world tells us to avoid death, distract ourselves, party more. But the Word says: go to the funeral, sit with the sorrow, and learn. It’s there, in the quiet ache of loss, that we remember what really matters. When was the last time I paused to reflect on my own mortality? Do I live with the urgency of a soul preparing for eternity? Have I allowed sorrow to humble and shape me?

- Attend funerals with an open heart. Let them remind you of what truly endures—faith, love, and legacy in Christ.
- Make decisions in light of eternity. Evaluate your time, priorities, and relationships as if your end could be near—because it could.
- Let grief deepen your wisdom. Don’t rush through sorrow. Let it shape your character and draw you closer to God.
- Speak of death honestly. Help others prepare for the end—not morbidly, but wisely and redemptively.
- Live a life you won’t regret. The “house of mourning” challenges you: What will they say when I’m gone? Am I living a story worth remembering?

NET NOTES:

HOUSE OF MOURNING - The phrase refers to a funeral where the deceased is mourned.

HOUSE OF FEASTING - Heb “house of drinking”; or “house of feasting.” The Hebrew noun מִשְׁתֶּה (mishteh) can denote (1) “feast; banquet,” occasion for drinking-bouts (1 Sam 25:36; Isa 5:12; Jer 51:39; Job 1:5; Esther 2:18; 5:14; 8:17; 9:19) or (2) “drink” (exilic/postexilic—Ezra 3:7; Dan 1:5, 8, 16); see HALOT 653 s.v. 4 מִשְׁתֶּה; BDB 1059 s.v. שָׁתָה.

THAT IS THE END - Heb “the end.” The noun סוֹף (sof) literally means “end; conclusion” (HALOT 747 s.v. 1 סוֹף; BDB 693 s.v. סוֹף). It is used in this context in reference to death, as the preceding phrase “house of mourning” (i.e., funeral) suggests.

TAKES (SHOULD) - The imperfect tense verb יָתַן, yitten (from נָתַן, natan, “to give”) functions in a modal sense, denoting obligation, that is, the subject’s obligatory or necessary conduct: “should” or “ought to” (see R. J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, 31–32, §172; IBHS 508–9 §31.4g).

Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:3 γὰρ ὁ θυμὸς πρὸς τὸ κακὸν προσποιεῖται χαρὸν καὶ ὁ καρδιὰ

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart will be made better.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, because sober reflection is good for the heart.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:3 Grief is better than laughter, for when a face is sad, a heart may be glad.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:3 Better is sorrow than laughter, For by the sadness of the face the heart becometh better.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:3 Better sadness than laughter: a joyful heart may be concealed behind sad looks.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, because when the face is sad the heart grows wiser.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter because, in spite of a sad face, the heart can be joyful.

- **better:** Ps 119:67,71 126:5,6 Jer 31:8,9,15-20 50:4,5 Da 9:3-19 Da 10:2,3,19 Zec 12:10-14 Lu 6:21,25 Joh 16:20-22 2Co 7:9-11 Jas 4:8-10
- **by:** Ro 5:3,4 2Co 4:17 Heb 12:10,11 Jas 1:2-4

Related Passages:

Proverbs 14:13 Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, And the end of joy may be grief.

Psalms 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.

Psalms 119:71 It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

SORROW: A BETTER TEACHER THAN LAUGHTER

This verse offers a countercultural truth: not all sorrow is harmful, and not all laughter is helpful. Solomon encourages a deeper look at the value of emotional seriousness and spiritual reflection.

Sorrow is better than laughter - In context, this parallels verse 2 (the value of mourning over feasting). **Sorrow** here doesn't refer to despair but to a sober, reflective state of mind—the kind that leads to personal growth and wisdom. **Laughter** symbolizes carefree mirth, entertainment, or distraction. Solomon asserts that a sorrowful heart is often more productive in shaping character and maturity than empty laughter.

For (term of explanation) **when a face is sad a heart may be happy**. Sadness of **face** represents external mourning or seriousness. The ancient Hebrews recognized the face as a mirror of the soul. Happy heart is literally, “a good heart” and refers to a joyful, peaceful, contented inner life and demonstrates that outward sadness can coexist with inward joy.

*Sorrow can be a divine gift—it clears away illusions, deepens our hearts,
and leads us to joy that laughter alone can never produce.*

Michael Eaton - That the heart ‘... **may be put right**’ or ‘... **is put right**’ is the appropriate translation (better than made glad), for it means that the inner life may be ‘better situated’ for making right judgments and estimations, ‘put right’ in one’s approach to life (cf. NIV). A man who has looked death in the face may have his inner life transformed for the better,—not, however, that there is any automatic effect of suffering. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

William Barrick - Interrupting the two parallel proverbs of Eccl 7:2, 4, Eccl 7:3 explicitly identifies why a visit to a funeral proves beneficial. Returning to his meditation on the futility of pleasure, Solomon converts Eccl 2:2 (“I said of laughter, ‘It is madness,’ and of pleasure, ‘What does it accomplish?’”) into a concise axiom: “Sorrow is better than laughter.” The reason for the axiom’s truth is that the sadness that shows in the face results in a better¹² heart, a spiritually healthy heart. The apparent contradiction of Proverbs 14:13 with Ec 7:3 immerses Solomon in the complexities of life by providing new questions in an ever-increasing web of arguments and counter-arguments. Estes explains this apparent contradiction between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as the presentation of additional insights in order to bring about “a more comprehensive understanding of how life functions.” (13 Daniel J. Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 342.) Ecclesiastes supplements Proverbs as Solomon casts his net more widely in his search for the true meaning of life. No single proverb can synthesize the totality of life or its meaning. Life is not simple; it is complicated. Even the wisest man in history struggles to grasp the full picture and to distill it to an understandable description. ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

9 See the later discussion of v. 3 and the translation of its final phrase.

10 See Ecclesiasticus 22:12, “Mourning for the dead lasts seven days, but for a fool or an ungodly man it lasts all his life.” When Moses and Aaron died, Israel mourned for thirty days (Num 20:29; Deut 34:8). Jewish practice often practices seven days of greater mourning followed by 23 days of lesser mourning.

11 Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 109.

12 The translations of NIV, NET, KJV, and NKJV represent the Hebrew better than those translations employing “happy” or “glad.”

“Joy Grows Through Sorrow” We live in a culture that idolizes positivity and avoids grief—but God uses sorrow to sanctify. Deep joy isn’t found in endless laughter, but often in meeting God in your sorrow. This mirrors what Jesus taught: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4) Some of the richest spiritual insights are gained in the valley of tears. A broken heart is often a prepared heart. Am I resisting sorrow, or receiving its lessons? Do I seek refuge in laughter, or do I allow God to speak through grief? Can I trust that a sad face today may mean a strengthened heart tomorrow?

- Let grief soften your heart, refine your values, and draw you nearer to God. Avoid shallow joy.
- Not all laughter is wrong—but some laughter covers deep pain or masks truth. Seek joy that’s rooted in truth, not distraction.
- Minister to others with sensitivity. Recognize that sadness can be sacred. Don’t rush others through mourning. Honor their process.
- Trust God in broken seasons. He often builds joy through trial. Seasons of sorrow can birth peace, patience, and deeper worship.
- Cultivate lasting joy, not fleeting giddiness. Feed your soul with God’s Word, not just with jokes or entertainment. Real joy comes from His presence (Gal 5:22-23, Neh 8:10), even in pain.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) WHY ANGELS FLY

Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. Ecclesiastes 7:3-4

Somewhere I read that angels fly because they take themselves lightly and God seriously. This makes perfect sense to me. I can’t fly—never have and never will—because like most people I take myself too seriously and God too lightly. In some ways I believe the greater challenge is not to take yourself too seriously.

Many years ago I heard Bible professor Vernon Grounds say that when approaching any important decision you should ask, “What difference will this make in 10,000 years?” What a liberating way to look at life. Ninety-nine percent of what you worried about this week won’t matter three weeks from now, much less ten thousand years from now. In the year 2085—if Christ has not yet returned—it won’t matter where you went to college or what kind of car you drove. But what will matter is that you have decided to take God seriously in every area of your life. All these trivial, piddling details that just soak up so much energy will in that day be seen for what they really are—trivial, piddling details.

That’s why the wise spend time in “the house of mourning.” When you view the body of a friend or loved one, it’s amazing how so many of the lesser issues of life suddenly melt away. Moses declared of God, “You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning—though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered” (Psalm 90:5).

Recently when the death of a local pastor was announced on the radio, one of my friends heard only part of the report. He thought they were talking about me. It could have been me, it might be me next time, and certainly one day it will be me. Thinking along those lines certainly causes you to ponder your own mortality. Visiting the house of mourning reminds us that life is short and we shouldn’t take ourselves too seriously. Enjoy each day as a gift from God and don’t forget that you won’t be here forever.

Lord, deliver me from the pomposity of taking myself too seriously and from the folly of taking You too lightly.
Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Think about the issues that have dominated your time lately. Which ones will really matter one thousand years from now?
- Which ones probably won’t matter in ten years or ten months or ten weeks or ten days?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD’S WORD Read Psalms 119:71; 126:5-6; and Hebrews 12:5-11.

Ecclesiastes 7:4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:4 καρδ α σοφ ν ν ο κ π νθους κα καρδ α φρ νων ν ο κ ε φροσ νης

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of merrymaking.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in a house of pleasure.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:4 A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, And the heart of fools in a house of mirth.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, the heart of fools in the house of gaiety.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:4 The minds of wise people think about funerals, but the minds of fools think about banquets.

- **mind:** Ne 2:2-5 Isa 53:3,4 Mt 8:14-16 Mk 5:38-43 Lu 7:12,13 Joh 11:31-35
- **the mind:** 1Sa 25:36 30:16 2Sa 13:28 1Ki 20:16 Isa 21:4 Jer 51:39,57 Da 5:1-4,30 Ho 7:5 Na 1:10 Mk 6:21-29

WHERE IS YOUR MIND/HEART?

Solomon contrasts the thought life and priorities of the **wise** versus the **foolish** by observing where their hearts dwell.

The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning- **Mind** is literally heart, the "control tower" of our inner person, the mind, will, emotions. The "house of mourning" refers to a place of grief or funeral (cf. v. 2). A **wise** person reflects on mortality, legacy, and the brevity of life, because they are skilled in living according to God's truth, not merely possessing intelligence. Their mind dwells on serious, eternal realities, not because they are morbid, but because they are grounded in truth. As alluded to earlier **house of mourning** is a place of grief, especially in the context of death, a place where life's finiteness of life and gravity of death are felt most deeply.

*Wise hearts dwell in serious places—
not to grieve endlessly, but to grow deeply.*

Michael Eaton - The heart (NEB thoughts) is amongst other things the centre of a man's attention (Exod. 7:23), thought (Deut. 7:17), understanding (1 Kgs 3:9) and memory (Deut. 4:9). One's heart being in the house of mourning means that death is the object of the wise man's reflections; he allows it to rouse him to thought and concern. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

*Fools hide in laughter;
the wise find truth in tears.*

While the mind of fools ([kesil](#); Lxx - [aphron](#)) is in the house of pleasure - A **fool** is a moral and spiritual dullard, who ignores God, His wisdom, and consequences of their actions! The "**house of pleasure**" (or mirth) represents parties, entertainment, self-indulgence, and superficial enjoyment. This place symbolizes a life focused on temporary enjoyment. A **fool** escapes into pleasure to avoid reflection, avoiding the hard truths of life and death. This doesn't condemn all joy, but highlights the danger of escapism and shallowness.

The wise embrace reflection and reality, even when painful.

Fools pursue escape and distraction, even if it leads to ruin.

NET NOTE The expression the house of merrymaking refers to a banquet where those who attend engage in self-indulgent feasting and riotous drinking.

Michael Eaton - The **fool** (kēsîl), on the other hand, is blind to spiritual issues (Eccl. 2:14), yet content in his blindness (Prov. 1:22), verbose yet empty-headed (Prov. 18:2), a menace to society (Prov. 14:7). Not surprisingly his preoccupation is with the house of feasting, presumably a place where men indulge in festivity, perhaps a rowdy party. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Barrick - Eccl 7:4 provides the transition Eccl 7:1–3 and Eccl 7:5–7 by using the characteristic pairing of “the wise” and “fools.” Biblical wisdom literature majors on contrasting natures, paths, and destinies of two types of people. Ecclesiastes first contrasts them in Eccl 2:14–19. A wise youth and a foolish old king depict the dissimilarity in Eccl 4:13. Solomon identifies laziness, careless sacrifice, verbosity, and failure to fulfill a vow as the follies of fools (Eccl 4:5, 17; 5:1–4). Both the wise and the fool experience the equality of death (Eccl 6:8). The message of the sandwich (Eccl 7:2–4) is that the heart of a wise person improves its spiritual health at a funeral. The fool, on the other hand, dulls the sharp interruption of death by directing his heart to revelry and hilarity. ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

“The Heart’s Home” Your heart gravitates somewhere. For the wise, it rests where truth dwells—even when truth is uncomfortable. The “house of mourning” doesn’t mean constant sadness, but intentional reflection on what really matters: God, eternity, repentance, relationships, legacy. Fools, by contrast, constantly seek comfort and stimulation. They laugh loudest to drown out the silence of the soul. This is echoed in Psalm 90:12: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Where does my heart dwell? In distraction or reflection? Do I invite God to meet me in quiet, sobering moments, or do I run toward the next entertainment?

- Cultivate reflective habits - Spend regular time thinking about life’s purpose, your mortality, and God’s calling. Journaling, prayer, and Scripture meditation help align your heart with wisdom.
- Don’t fear sorrow. Wise people understand that grief shapes the soul. Invite God into your seasons of mourning.
- Avoid escapism. Entertainment is not wrong, but living to avoid discomfort is foolish. Beware of numbing your soul with pleasure.
- Choose friends who value depth. Surround yourself with those who encourage thoughtfulness, not just thrill-seeking.
- Live with the end in mind. Let the certainty of death help you choose your priorities wisely today.

Fools ([03684](#)) **kesil** is a stupid fellow, a morally insensitive dullard, whether it be in spiritual, intellectual, or moral matters. These are stupid people who are totally confident in own wisdom, thinking they have it all figured out without God’s assistance. **Swanson** adds that **kesil** refers to (1) foolishness, stupidity, insolence, i.e., the state of being in complete lack of understanding, implying rebellion (Pr 10:1); (2) fool, insolent person, i.e., one completely lacking understanding, implying to be a rebel against standard or person (Pr 10:18).

Vine - The **kesil** is “insolent” in religion and “stupid or dull” in wise living (living out a religion he professes)....They have knowledge of God but do not properly evaluate or understand what they know...(In Proverbs the fool) rejects the claims and teachings of wisdom. However, in the Bible wisdom is the practical outworking of one’s religion. Therefore, even in these contexts there is a clear connotation of insolence in religion. ([Vine’s Expository Dictionary](#))

KESIL - 69V - **fool(35), fool’s(2), foolish(6), foolish man’s(1), fools(23), stupid(1), stupid man(1), stupid ones(1)**. Ps. 49:10; Ps. 92:6; Ps. 94:8; Prov. 1:22; Prov. 1:32; Prov. 3:35; Prov. 8:5; Prov. 10:1; Prov. 10:18; Prov. 10:23; Prov. 12:23; Prov. 13:16; Prov. 13:19; Prov. 13:20; Prov. 14:7; Prov. 14:8; Prov. 14:16; Prov. 14:24; Prov. 14:33; Prov. 15:2; Prov. 15:7; Prov. 15:14; Prov. 15:20; Prov. 17:10; Prov. 17:12; Prov. 17:16; Prov. 17:21; Prov. 17:24; Prov. 17:25; Prov. 18:2; Prov. 18:6; Prov. 18:7; Prov. 19:1; Prov. 19:10; Prov. 19:13; Prov. 19:29; Prov. 21:20; Prov. 23:9; Prov. 26:1; Prov. 26:3; Prov. 26:4; Prov. 26:5; Prov. 26:6; Prov. 26:7; Prov. 26:8; Prov. 26:9; Prov. 26:10; Prov. 26:11; Prov. 26:12; Prov. 28:26; Prov. 29:11; Prov. 29:20; Eccl. 2:14; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:16; Eccl. 4:5; Eccl. 4:13; Eccl. 5:1; Eccl. 5:3; Eccl. 5:4; Eccl. 6:8; Eccl. 7:4; Eccl. 7:5; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:9; Eccl. 9:17; Eccl. 10:2; Eccl. 10:12; Eccl. 10:15

Read through the uses of kesil in Proverbs for a more complete Biblical understanding of a **fool** - e.g., they are complacent, they will be destroyed, etc (Pr 1:32). Then read [Torrey’s description of Fools](#)

Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man Than for one to listen to the song of fools.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise Than for a man to hear the song of fools.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:5 γὰρ ὅτι κοῦσαι πικρῶν μῆσιν σοφοῦ πρὶν ὅρα καὶ ὄντα σμὰ φρὲνων

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to hear a reproof of a wise man, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better for a person to receive a rebuke from those who are wise than to listen to the song of fools.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to listen to rebuke from a wise person than to listen to the song of fools,

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:5 Better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fool.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:5 Better to hear a rebuke of a wise man, Than for a man to hear a song of fools,

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:5 Better attend to the reprimand of the wise than listen to a song sung by a fool.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to hearken to the wise man's rebuke than to hearken to the song of fools;

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better to listen to wise people who reprimand you than to fools who sing your praises.

- better: Ps 141:5 Pr 9:8 13:13 15:31,32 17:10 27:6 Rev 3:19
- the song: Ps 69:12

TRUTH OVER TUNES: THE HEALING STING OF WISDOM

It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man- Listen is not "in one ear and out the other" but means to hear attentively with the intent to obey or learn. **Rebuke** means correction or a stern word of truth spoken to expose or confront wrongdoing and to provoke repentance. From **a wise man**, one who possesses practical and moral insight, and who fears God, such **rebuke** is not meant to harm but to heal and guide right action. Listening to rebuke requires humility, but it leads to growth and maturity.

Than for one to listen to the song of fools ([kesil](#); Lxx - [aphron](#)) The "**song of fools**" represents empty entertainment, flattery, or shallow affirmations that may be fun or soothing but are ultimately meaningless. **Fools** tend to celebrate sin or distract from it, rather than address it.

In short, correction from a wise person, though uncomfortable, is far more beneficial than indulging in the meaningless mirth of the foolish. A sharp word from the wise is better than a sweet lie from a fool. The path to spiritual maturity runs through humble listening, not empty entertainment.

Michael Eaton - It has been maintained that the song of fools means 'the song of praise and flattery', 'the compliments showed by fools' (cf. GNB, NEB). But since the word song (*šir*) is always used of quite literal songs (more than seventy times in the Old Testament), it is more likely that the reference is to the songs of jubilation in the house of festivity. The rebuke of the wise is exemplified in 2 Samuel 12:1–12; the song of the fool in Amos 6:5f. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Barrick - The Superiority of Wisdom (Eccl 7:5–12) Receiving rebuke with humility, patience, and a willingness to change marks the wise (Eccl 7:5). Many people prefer foolish humor to shrug off the rebuke and excuse bad behavior and poor attitudes (Eccl 7:6). Solomon utilizes a pun to drive the point home in Eccl 7:5, 6. He contrasts "the song [*shir*] of fools" with the "crackling of thorn bushes [*sirah*] under a pot [*sir*]." Thorn bushes crackle pleasantly in the fire, but the flames quickly consume them without any enduring heat with which to heat a pot of water or food. The heat they produce is temporary. The humor and laughter of fools possesses an equally fleeting benefit. Indeed, their merriment is hebel, transitory and insubstantial. Hebel closes verse 6, reminding the reader that the previous uses of the word were at the close of the first half of the book (Eccl 6:9, 11, 12).

Ryken's exposition of Eccl 7:5, 6 exposes the message of Ecclesiastes with regard to edifying criticism and friendly reproof:

Wise people will say all of the things that Ecclesiastes says. They will tell us that living for pleasure and working for selfish gain are striving after wind. They will tell us that God has a time for everything, including a time to be born and a time to die. They will tell us that two are better than one in facing all of the toils and trials

of life. They will tell us that because God is in Heaven and we are on earth, we should be careful what we say. They will tell us that money will never satisfy our souls. In short, they will teach us not to live for today but to live for eternity. (Ryken, Ecclesiastes, 156)

We become that to which we listen. The ear can be a Golden Gate for wisdom, knowledge, holiness, righteousness, and grace, or it can become the Dung Gate for foolishness, ignorance, impurity, iniquity, and crudity. Solomon declares that the better path is the former, even if a rebuke appeals less than a song. Instead of drowning out the realities of life and death with music, humor, and feasting, believers would do well to heed a wise counselor who is not reluctant to offer heart-strengthening admonition.

“Better a Hard Word That Helps” We often avoid rebuke because it hurts our pride. Yet Solomon says true wisdom comes from being willing to hear what we need—not just what we want. The fool’s song flatters, entertains, and deceives. It keeps people from repentance and truth. But a wise rebuke, though painful, leads to life, transformation, and eternal fruit. This principle is echoed in Proverbs 27:6 “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” Do I resist correction or receive it? Am I surrounding myself with voices that challenge me toward Christ—or distract me from Him?

- Be open to correction. When a godly person lovingly rebukes you, listen well—it may be God’s voice through them.
- Avoid shallow influences. Don’t fill your ears with content that entertains but never edifies or convicts.
- Speak hard truths with love and grace. Like the wise man, be willing to lovingly rebuke those you care about—not to shame, but to restore.
- Pray for discernment in what you hear. Ask God to help you filter wisdom from foolishness, and choose voices that align with His truth.
- Cherish wise friends. The one who lovingly speaks hard truths is a rare and priceless friend.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) THE HEALING POWER OF HARD TRUTH

It is better to heed a wise man’s rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless. Ecclesiastes 7:5-6

I note that Solomon says it is “better” to heed a wise man’s rebuke. Better, but not easier. Most days I’d much rather listen to the song of fools. I can do that by turning on the radio and flipping across the dial. But a wise man’s rebuke? That’s harder to find—and harder to take.

Over the years I’ve been on both sides of that issue. Sometimes I’ve had to confront another person about his behavior. No matter how many times I’ve done it, I still dread picking up the phone and saying, “Could we get together? I’ve got something I need to talk about.” I much prefer to be the bearer of good news—to be the one who says, “Congratulations! You just won \$10 million,” rather than, “I’m here to repossess your car.” Knowing that people sometimes shoot the messenger who brings the bad news, I’d rather not bring it at all. But sometimes there is no other option.

As I look across the years, I can see clearly that when I have made that phone call anyway, the results have almost always been positive in the long run. To be sure, the initial reaction is often anger and denial; but where a bond of friendship and love exists, hard truth can be told. And when the truth is finally faced, it sets us free, just as Jesus said it would (John 8:32).

Sometimes I’ve been on the receiving end of a wise man’s rebuke. The hardest part of receiving a rebuke is discerning whether or not it comes from a wise person; it may be from a cranky critic. I’m not always a good judge of that— since I don’t have the gift of discernment—but I have close friends who can help me sort things out, keeping the fish and throwing away the bones.

None of this is easy or pleasant—whether rebuking or being rebuked—but both are absolutely necessary for healthy spiritual growth. God repeatedly puts us in places where we have to speak the truth and where we have to hear the truth. Blessed are the truth-tellers—and the truth-hearers—for they shall be set free.

Lord, thank You for friends who care enough to tell me the hard truth. I pray for grace to hear Your voice through their words. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- When was the last time you were rebuked by someone you know? How did you respond?
- Which is harder for you—to rebuke a friend or to be rebuked by a friend?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD’S WORD Read Proverbs 9:8; 27:5; Galatians 6:1-5; and James 5:19-20.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity. {crackling: Heb. sound}

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:6 For like the crackling of quick-burning thorns²³ under a cooking pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This kind of folly²⁴ also is useless.²⁵

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:6 π ς φων τ ν κανθ ν π τ ν λ βητα ο τως γ λως τ ν φρ νων κα γε το το μαται της

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:6 {07:7} As the sound of thorns under a caldron, so is the laughter of fools: this is also vanity.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:6 for like the crackling of burning thorns under the pot,¹ so is the laughter of the fool. This too is futile.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:6 aFor as the crackling of bthorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.¹

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:6 Like the crackling of thorns^a under the pot, so is the laughter^b of fools. This too is meaningless.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:6 A fool's laughter is quickly gone, like thorns crackling in a fire. This also is meaningless.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:6 For as the noise of thorns under the pot, So is the laughter of a fool, even this is vanity.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:6 For like the crackling of thorns under the cauldron is the laughter of fools: and that too is futile.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of fools; this also is vanity.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the fool's laughter.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:6 The laughter of a fool is like the crackling of thorns burning under a pot. Even this is pointless.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:6 Like the cracking of thorns under a pot, so is the laugh of a foolish man; and this again is to no purpose.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.

- **as:** Ec 2:2 Ps 58:9 118:12 Isa 65:13-15 Am 8:10 Lu 6:25 16:25 2Pe 2:13-17 Jude 1:12,13
- **the laughter:** Pr 29:9

Related Passages:

Psalms 58:9 Before your pots can feel the fire of thorns He will sweep them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike.

LAUGHTER WITHOUT HEAT SOUND OF SHALLOW JOY

Solomon uses a striking metaphor from nature and daily life to expose the hollow nature of foolish laughter.

For as the crackling (literally "voice") **of thorn bushes under a pot** - **Thorn bushes** were often used in Israel for quick-burning fuel under cooking pots. They burn fast, make a lot of noise (crackling), but provide little lasting heat. This is a metaphor for loud, flashy, short-lived energy that ultimately accomplishes nothing useful.

Michael Eaton - The pun 'Like the sound of sîrîm (thorns) under the sîr (pot, cauldron)' is caught by Moffatt's Like nettles crackling under kettles. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

So is the laughter of the fool([kesil](#); Lxx - [aphron](#)) - A fool's **laughter** is compared to the thorns' noise because it is loud but

meaningless, quickly over, and unable to sustain anything substantial.

Michael Eaton - Thus fools' laughter is a sudden flame, a fine display of sparks, accompanied by plenty of noise, but soon spent and easily put out. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

And this too is futility ([hebel](#); [Lxx](#) - [mataiotes](#) - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) - The laughter of fools promises pleasure but delivers nothing lasting. Foolish laughter is like a noisy fire made of thorns, brief, shallow, and useless. It distracts from wisdom and truth and ends in futility.

Crackling, But Cold - In our entertainment-saturated culture, Solomon's words hit home. Much of modern amusement is flashy, noisy, and empty—like the burning of thorns. Laughter isn't wrong. But foolish laughter—the kind that mocks holiness, trivializes sin, or numbs the soul—is dangerous. It makes noise, not warmth. It distracts, not transforms. It doesn't build a life. It masks emptiness. Compare with Proverbs 14:13 "Even in laughter the heart may be in pain, and the end of joy may be grief." What kind of laughter fills my life? Does it bring warmth and light, or just noise and smoke? Am I more interested in comfort or character?

NET NOTE -

THORNS - The term "thorns" (הַסִּירִים, hassirim) refers to twigs from wild thorn bushes which were used as fuel for quick heat, but burn out quickly before a cooking pot can be properly heated (e.g., Pss 58:9; 118:12).

VANITY - It is difficult to determine whether the Hebrew term הֶבֶל (hevel) means "fleeting" or "useless" in this context. The imagery of quick-burning thorns under a cooking pot is ambiguous and can be understood in more than one way: (1) It is useless to try to heat a cooking pot by burning thorns because they burn out before the pot can be properly heated; (2) the heat produced by quick-burning thorns is fleeting—it produces quick heat, but lasts only for a moment. Likewise, the "laughter of a fool" can be taken in both ways: (1) In comparison to the sober reflection of the wise, the laughter of fools is morally useless: the burning of thorns, like the laughter of fools, makes a lot of noise but accomplishes nothing; (2) the laughter of fools is fleeting due to the brevity of life and certainty of death. Perhaps this is an example of intentional ambiguity.

Futility (**vanity, idols, breath, delusion, worthless, emptiness**) ([01892](#)) [hebel](#) means breath, vapor, vanity, emptiness, meaninglessness; idols. Hebel commonly has the figurative use of that which is evanescent and unstable. The first OT use refers to idols (Dt 32:21, cf 1 Ki 16:13, 26, Jer 8:19; Jeremiah 10:8, 15; Jer 14:22 Jer 51:18; Jonah 2:9; Ps 31:6), a fitting word picture for the worthlessness of idols! **Hebel** refers to breath because of its transitory fleeting character, as in Job's figurative use "my days are but a **breath**." (Job 7:16, cf similar idea Ps 39:5, 6, 11; Ps 62:9; Ps 78:33 where hebel parallels behālā from root bāhal "to hasten": Ps 94:11; Ps 144:4) **Hebel** "generally appears in contexts where it is used as a simile emphasizing the transitory state of an object, never as descriptive of the biological function. A prime example would be "Humanity is like a breath (Ps. 144:4). Not only is breath ethereal and of short duration, but all things which breathe will die." (Gilbrant)

Michael Eaton adds **Hebel** means (i) brevity and unsubstantiality, emptiness (NEB), spelt out in Job 7 where the 'vanity' (Job 7:16, Heb.) of man's life is a 'breath' (Job 7:7), an evaporating cloud (Job 7:9), soon to be ended (Job 7:8) and return no more (Job 7:9f.); (ii) unreliability, frailty, found also in Psalm 62 where God, a 'Rock' and a 'high tower' (Ps 62:6), is compared with man who is 'vanity' (Ps 62:9), a 'leaning wall' and a 'tottering fence' (Ps 62:3); (iii) futility, as in Job 9:29 (Heb.), where 'in vanity' means 'to no effect'; (iv) deceit (cf. Jer. 16:19; Zech. 10:2). Ecclesiastes includes each of these emphases. All is untrustworthy, unsubstantial; no endeavour will in itself bring permanent satisfaction; the greatest joys are fleeting. Between Eccl 1:2 and Eccl 12:8 the Preacher will echo this key statement about thirty times, showing that his book is in fact its exposition. Vanity characterizes all human activity (Eccl 1:14; 2:11): joy (Eccl 2:1) and frustration (Eccl 4:4, 7–8; 5:10) alike, life (Eccl 2:17; 6:12; 9:9), youth (Eccl 11:10) and death (Eccl 3:19; 11:8), the destinies of wise and foolish (Eccl 2:15, 19), diligent and idle (Eccl 2:21, 23, 26). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes : an introduction and commentary page 56](#))

Vine's summary of **hebel** - **First**, the word represents human "breath" as a transitory thing: "I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity [literally, but a breath] (Job 7:16). **Second**, hebel means something meaningless and purposeless: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl. 1:2). **Third**, this word signifies an "idol," which is unsubstantial, worthless, and vain: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities ..." (Dt. 32:21, the first occurrence). See SPIRIT usage notes.

Warren Baker adds that **hebel** "refers to the vanity and ultimate emptiness and meaninglessness of all things in this life, whether they seem good or bad (Eccl.

1:2, 14; 2:11, 15, 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8; 5:7; 6:2, 4, 9; 7:6, 15; 8:10; 9:9; 11:8). Combined with itself in the plural, it means **absolute meaninglessness** (Eccl. 1:2). Idols and the vain religious customs associated with them are all delusions (Jer. 10:3, 15). It denotes an empty, vain life (Eccl. 6:12). Used with the verb *hāḇal*, it means to carry out vain talk or action or what is empty (Job 27:12). As an adverb, it means to talk in vain, emptily (Job 35:16). To walk after *hebel* means to go after or follow vanity (2 Ki. 17:15; Jer. 2:5). Anything obtained through evil is vain, such as wealth (Prov. 13:11)." (Borrow Complete Word Study Dictionary— Old Testament)

Victor Hamilton (See [TWOT](#)) on "the cluster of references (of [hebel](#)) found in Ecclesiastes (thirty-six). These may be grouped into several subdivisions. First are those passages in which the author states his inability to find fulfillment in work, both in his failure to be creative and in his lack of control over the privilege of free disposition of his possessions; this is "vanity": Eccl 2:11, 19, 21, 23; Eccles. 4:4, 8; Eccles. 6:2. Second are those verses in which the author struggles with the idea that the connection between sin and judgment, righteousness and final deliverance is not always direct or obvious. This is an anomaly about life and it is vanity": Eccles. 2:15; Eccles. 6:7-9; Eccles. 8:10-14. The meaning of *hebel* here would be "senseless." Thirdly are those verses in which the author laments the shortness of life; this is vanity": Eccles. 3:19; Eccles. 6:12; Eccles. 11:8, 10. Life, in its quality, is "empty" or "vacuous" (and thus unsubstantial), and in its quantity is "transitory." Rather than the above observations being final conclusions about life by the author of Ecclesiastes, perhaps they reveal something of his method and his concealed premise. He may be attempting to demonstrate man's inability to find meaning to life unaided by divine revelation and interruption. This solo quest will always end in futility.

HEBEL - 67X/64V - breath(5), delusion(2), emptily(1), emptiness(2), fleeting(2), fraud(1), futile(1), futility(13), idols(7), mere breath(2), nothing(1), useless(1), vain(3), vainly(1), vanity(19), vanity of vanities(3), vapor(1), worthless(2). Deut. 32:21; 1 Ki. 16:13; 1 Ki. 16:26; 2 Ki. 17:15; Job 7:16; Job 9:29; Job 21:34; Job 27:12; Job 35:16; Ps. 31:6; Ps. 39:5; Ps. 39:6; Ps. 39:11; Ps. 62:9; Ps. 78:33; Ps. 94:11; Ps. 144:4; Prov. 13:11; Prov. 21:6; Prov. 31:30;

Eccl. 1:2; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:1; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:19; Eccl. 2:21; Eccl. 2:23; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:7; Eccl. 4:8; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:7; Eccl. 5:10; Eccl. 6:2; Eccl. 6:4; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 6:11; Eccl. 6:12; Eccl. 7:6; Eccl. 7:15; Eccl. 8:10; Eccl. 8:14; Eccl. 9:9; Eccl. 11:8; Eccl. 11:10; Eccl. 12:8;

Isa. 30:7; Isa. 49:4; Isa. 57:13; Jer. 2:5; Jer. 8:19; Jer. 10:3; Jer. 10:8; Jer. 10:15; Jer. 14:22; Jer. 16:19; Jer. 51:18; Lam. 4:17; Jon. 2:8; Zech. 10:2

Deuteronomy 32:21+ 'They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their **IDOLS** (no god = ESV, so-called gods = CSB, false gods = NET)(*hebel*; Lxx - [eidolon](#)). So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,

Ecclesiastes 7:7 For oppression makes a wise man mad, And a bribe corrupts the heart.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, And a bribe debases the heart.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression can turn a wise person into a fool; likewise, a bribe corrupts the heart.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:7 τὸ σκυφαντ ἂ περιφρεῖ σοφὸν καὶ πλῆυσιν τὸν καρδὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ αἵματος

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:7 for oppression makes a wise man mad, and destroys his noble heart.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely, the practice of extortion turns a wise person into a fool, and a bribe destroys the mind.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:7 Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:7 Extortion turns wise people into fools, and bribes corrupt the heart.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression maketh the wise mad, And a gift destroyeth the heart.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:7 But being oppressed drives a sage mad, and a present corrupts the heart.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression makes the wise foolish, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:7 For oppression can make a fool of a wise man, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:7 Oppression can turn a wise person into a fool, and a bribe can corrupt the mind.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:7 The wise are troubled by the ways of the cruel, and the giving of money is the destruction of the heart.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:7 Surely oppression makes the wise man foolish, and a bribe corrupts the mind.

- **oppression:** De 28:33-34,65
- **a bribe:** Ex 23:8 De 16:19 1Sa 8:3 12:3 Pr 17:23 Isa 1:23 33:15

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 28:33-34+ "A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually. 34 "You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.

THE CORRUPTING POWER OF INJUSTICE

This verse transitions from general reflections on wisdom and folly to a warning about how external pressures and temptations can warp even those who are wise.

Michael Eaton points out that Ec 7:7-10 introduce four dangers and "introduce the less beneficial effects of trials."

For oppression makes a wise man mad - **For** in this context is probably better translated "surely." **Oppression** refers to injustice, exploitation, abuse of power or cruelty, often by the powerful over the weak. **Mad** (Hebrew: *halal*) means to rage, act irrationally, or become foolish. Even the wise can be tainted! A wise person, under sustained injustice, may lose control, emotionally, morally, or spiritually. It suggests the corrupting influence of systemic injustice, pushing even the righteous to despair or rage. It also implies how unchecked power or injustice can distort one's ability to think and act wisely. The Hebrew word for make mad (*Yəhōlēl*) means to make boastful, mad, or foolish; can imply irrationality or loss of control.

Suggests that even wise people can react destructively or irrationally under oppressive conditions.

Michael Eaton writes that "the whole inner life of man may be brought to spiritual ruin by the temptations that belong to an oppressive regime." (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

And a bribe corrupts ([abad](#); Lxx - [periphero](#) - cause to think one way and then another) **the heart** - A **bribe** (Hebrew: *šōḥad*) is money or gifts intended to pervert judgment and justice. This practice is strongly condemned in both Torah and Prophets (cf. Ex 23:8; Dt. 16:19; Isa 1:23). **Corrupts** (*Ya'āḇēd*) means destroys, ruins, causes to perish. The **heart** represents the inner moral compass in Hebrew thought—the seat of thinking, feeling, choosing, of will, reason, and conscience. A **bribe** has the power to pervert discernment, distort justice, and destroy integrity, even in those who might otherwise act righteously. A bribe does not just change behavior but can destroy a person's moral foundation.

The upshot is that even the wise are vulnerable and **oppression** can drive them to anger or despair, and **abribes** can morally distort their judgment. Wisdom is not invincible. Wisdom is precious but fragile. Even the wise can fall—to oppression's pressure or bribery's allure. Guard your heart, stay humble, and root yourself in God's righteousness.

*Bribery can do to the upright heart
what oppression can do to the wise of heart.*

William Barrick - In a fallen world, true biblical wisdom attracts persecution. "**Surely oppression makes the wise foolish**" (Eccl

7:7NRSV). Life's complexities involve the deleterious effects of **oppression** on even the wise person's stability of mind. (15 Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 110–11.) Persecution possesses the power to pressure the wise into speaking or acting as fools—in other words, contrary to the faith they espouse. Another interpretation understands the text to speak of corruption's subversion of wisdom. (Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms, 343. Craig G. Bartholomew, [Ecclesiastes \(Baker Commentary on the Old Testament\)](#), 249, writes, "Even the wise person buckles under oppression and is susceptible to a bribe, and bribery and corruption destroy the heart.") Fredericks takes the meaning in a third direction, making the wise the oppressor rather than the oppressed: "Even the wise can sin (Eccl 7:20) and stoop to intimidating another person physically, emotionally, legally or even ecclesiastically." (Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," 169.) Of the three approaches to Ec 7:7, the first two appear more solidly based upon the straightforward reading of the text. The second half of the verse continues the effects of corruption in the realm of influence. Bribery can do to the upright heart what oppression can do to the wise of heart. When innocent victims watch the public humiliation of a wise counselor (who is made to look like a fool) and the corruption of previously honest witnesses, they lose heart. Injustice appears to prevail and life becomes even more complicated. ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

The Fragility and Vulnerability of Wisdom - This verse is a sobering reminder: even the wise are not immune to corruption. Oppression— injustice without relief—can push the righteous to rage, bitterness, or even compromise. Bribery, though subtle, has the power to undermine the integrity of anyone who accepts it. Solomon, who asked God for wisdom illustrates how wisdom can be corrupted, for he later fell into compromise and moral failure, primarily because of the pernicious influence of his idol loving wives (1 Kings 11:1-14+). The sense of this verse is reflected in Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 10:12+ "Let him who thinks he stands **take heed** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) that he does not fall." Am I aware of pressures or injustices that tempt me to rage or compromise? Am I guarding my heart (Pr 4:23+) against the subtle pull of favoritism, flattery, or gain?

- Guard against internal corruption. Stay alert to how power, privilege, or gain may tempt you to compromise your values.
- Respond to injustice wisely—not reactively. When faced with oppression, seek God's strength to endure rather than allow bitterness or rage to take over.
- Flee from bribes in any form. Not just money—favoritism, flattery, or gifts can bribe our conscience. Refuse anything that clouds clear judgment.
- Pray for leaders and judges. They are uniquely vulnerable to bribes and pressure. Ask God to raise up just and courageous leadership.
- Pursue integrity in private and public. Integrity is eroded subtly. Cultivate it daily through truth, humility, and Scripture-fed wisdom.

NET NOTE -

OPPRESSION - Or "extortion." Scholars debate whether the noun עֲשֵׂק ('osheq, "oppression; extortion") in this context denotes "oppression" (HALOT 897 s.v. 1 עֲשֵׂק) or "gain of extortion" (BDB 799 s.v. 3 עֲשֵׂק). The parallelism between עֲשֵׂק and מַתָּנָה (mattanah, "bribe") seems to suggest the latter; but the prominence of the theme of oppression in 7:8–10 argues for the former. Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, the noun עֲשֵׂק denotes "oppression" (Eccl 4:1) and "extortion" (Eccl 5:8 [Heb 5:7]). The LXX rendered it as συκοφαντία (sukophantia, "oppression"). English translations are split between these two options: "extortion" (ASV, MLB, NIV), "oppression" (KJV, NAB, NASB, RSV, NRSV, YLT, Douay, Moffatt), as well as "cheating" (NJPS) and "slander" (NEB).

WISE MAN MAD - Or "Oppression drives a wise person crazy"; or "Extortion drives a wise person crazy." The verb III הָלַל ("to be foolish") denotes "to make foolish; to make a fool out of someone; to make into a madman" (Job 12:17; Isa 44:25); cf. HALOT 249 s.v. III הָלַל; BDB 239 s.v. II הָלַל. It has been handled variously: "makes a wise man mad" (KJV, NASB); "drives a wise man crazy" (NEB); "can make a fool of a wise man" (NAB); "makes the wise man foolish" (RSV, NRSV); and "turns a wise man into a fool" (NIV).

CORRUPTS THE HEART - Or "and a bribe drives a person mad." The noun לֵב (lev, "heart") may be taken as a synecdoche of part (i.e., heart) for the whole (i.e., a person). HALOT 3 s.v. I אֲבַד suggests that לֵב יִאֲבַד (vi'abbed lev, "destroys the heart") is an idiom meaning, "drives a person mad." The B-line is taken as a comparison with the preceding A-line. On the other hand, the A-line and B-line might be in synonymous parallelism in which case the two lines could be rendered: "Surely [the gain of] extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart." On the other hand, the lines could be rendered, "Surely oppression drives a wise man crazy, and a bribe drives a person mad."

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) **KEEP YOUR COOL**

Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Ecclesiastes 7:7-9

Certain things ought to make us angry. Extortion is a good example, and so is bribery. Psalm 4:4 reminds us that anger and sin live next door to each other. While it is possible to be angry without sin, it isn't easy to stay angry without crossing the line into forbidden territory. The key is learning to control your own spirit. Ecclesiastes 7:9 shows us one of the primary signs of a fool: He can't control his temper. If you cross him, he is "quickly provoked." In modern parlance, he has a short fuse.

I stopped at a local auto dealership one time, met the manager, and told him I was thinking about leasing a car. We chatted briefly, and then he began showing me one of the models in the showroom. He was obviously proud of the car because he went on and on about front disc brakes, front-wheel drive, overhead cams, tune-ups that last 30,000 miles, and the all-important galvanized steel body. He was thirty-something, personable, and a walking encyclopedia of knowledge about his product. We started with the left rear of the car and he had talked his way along the side and under the hood when I heard a noise behind me. People were talking loudly but I couldn't quite make out what they were saying. No matter. The manager just kept on rolling about the turbo-charged pistons, or whatever.

The voices got louder until I couldn't help but turn and look. Two people, a young man in his early twenties and a lady slightly older (and taller), were screaming at each other. I think maybe she had something to do with the payroll, and maybe he was angry because he wasn't getting his check. She screamed something about him being a low form of life, and he shouted back a similar compliment. She made a reference to fertilizer, and he answered in the same vein.

And all this happened while we—myself and the others in the showroom—looked on. It was ugly and scary because I thought they were going to come to blows. I hadn't seen people get angry in public like that in a long time.

The most amazing fact is that the manager never stopped talking. Even while they were cursing each other twenty feet away, he bragged about the transverse-mounted engine and the gas-filled struts. I didn't hear a word of it. He had me sit down in the driver's seat, but I didn't feel a thing. We went outside to look at another model but I didn't see a thing. All the way home all I could think of was what I had just experienced—the ugly words, the bitterness, all that verbal venom flying

through the air. That man and woman were like two fools in combat, armed with weapons of outrage. I bought my next car somewhere else. Consider the power of anger. It overcomes a thousand well-spoken words.

Father, I pray for the Spirit of Jesus to fill my heart so that I might learn how to respond with grace under pressure. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Name three situations that tend to make you "provoked in your spirit." Would an objective person say that you have a problem with anger?
- Can you think of anything foolish you've done while angry?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Proverbs 16:32; James 1:19; and 1 Peter 2:21-23.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; likewise, patience is better than pride.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:8 γὰρ τὸ τέλος τοῦ ἔργου ἂν ᾖ ἂν ἀρχῆς· ὁ μακροθυμὸς ἂν ᾖ ἂν ὑψηλότης.

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:8 The end of a matter is better than the beginning thereof: the patient is better than the high-minded.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; a patient spirit is better than a proud spirit.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:8 Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:8 Better is the latter end of a thing than its beginning, Better is the patient of spirit, than the haughty of spirit.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:8 Better the end of a matter than its beginning, better patience than ambition.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning; the patient in spirit are better than the proud in spirit.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:8 Better is the end of speech than its beginning; better is the patient spirit than the lofty spirit.

- **Better:** Ps 126:5,6 Isa 10:24,25,28-34 Lu 16:25 Jas 5:11 1Pe 1:13
- **Patience of spirit** : Pr 13:10 14:29 15:18 16:32 28:25 Lu 21:19 Ro 2:7,8 Heb 10:36 Jas 5:8 1Pe 2:20,21 5:5,6

Related Passages:

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

BETTER THE END THAN THE BEGINNING

The end of a matter is better than its beginning - Here Solomon alludes to the value of perseverance and fulfillment. Beginnings are often exciting, full of hope, but they lack the proven worth of something that has stood the test and reached maturity. In context, Solomon affirms that wisdom often sees greater value in perseverance to the end than in initial enthusiasm. The end (ʿaḥārīt) refers to the latter part, outcome, or final result and is often used to speak of one's future, destiny, or the conclusion of a matter (cf. Jer. 29:11). **Beginning** (rē'šīt) refers to the first stage or start of something (cf. Ge 1:1 – "In the beginning").

*True wisdom values the finish line
more than the starting gun.*

One might ask why is the **end better**? (1) The end reveals results, character, lessons, and fruit. (2) It reflects faithfulness, not just excitement or appearance. (3) It can bring closure, peace, and reward, while the beginning may only bring anticipation or uncertainty.

NET NOTE ה **matter** - The term דָּבָר (davar) denotes "matter; thing" here rather than "speech; word," as the parallelism with "patience" suggests. The term was misunderstood as "speech; word" by the Vulgate (so also Douay).

*The enduring spirit, not the proud heart,
walks with God to the end.*

Patience of spirit (ruah; Lxx- [pneuma](#)) **is better than haughtiness of spirit** (gāḇah [ruah/ruach](#)) - **Patience of spirit** (Hebrew: "long of spirit") describes someone who is longsuffering, showing calm restraint, slow to anger, enduring, and willing to wait, the opposite of impulsiveness. **Haughtiness of spirit** (literally "high of spirit") refers to pride, puffed up attitude, arrogance, and a tendency to push ahead without reflection or submission. Here we see a clear contrast between the superiority of a calm, humble attitude versus an impulsive, self-centered one.

*Patience and humility enable a person to wait for the outcome of a matter
and to actually witness the truth that the end is better than the beginning.*

William Barrick - Eccl 7:8 transitions from Eccl 7:5–7 to Eccl 7:9–12. "Living for the End in the Now" (Borrow William P. Brown, [Ecclesiastes, Interpretation \(Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000\), 76](#)) labels Ec 7:8–12 in Brown's commentary. The contrast of **beginning** and **ending** closely parallels the opening of the chapter with the acknowledgement of **birth** and **death**. **How can the end of a matter be better than the beginning?** Bartholomew points to Ec 7:5 for one example: "*the rebuke of a wise person may be unpleasant, but its end or result may be good.*" (Bartholomew, Ecclesiastes, 249.) A handy illustration to demonstrate the point, according to Estes, is a race, since "*the only measure that counts is the finish line, and in life it often takes considerable time until the wise course is vindicated.*" (Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms, 343.) The literal translation of Ec 7:8 second half reads, "Better is length of spirit than height of spirit." "**Length of spirit**" refers to **patient endurance**—being slow to anger (cp. Pr 14:29; Pr 15:18; Pr 16:32—all three proverbs use "length of anger" to mean "slow to anger"). "**Height of spirit**" occurs also in

Proverb 16:18 with the meaning of “a haughty spirit.” In other words, patience and humility enable a person to wait for the outcome of a matter and to actually witness the truth that the end is better than the beginning. Without these two attributes, a person will not discover what time can do to improve a situation. ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

Start Strong, But Finish Stronger - We live in a culture obsessed with starting fast and making a splash. But God often measures success not by how impressively we begin—but by how faithfully we finish. The second half of this verse is key: finishing well requires a patient spirit, not a proud or hasty one. This echoes what Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Likewise, in James 1:4 says “Let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Where in my life am I rushing ahead in pride, rather than waiting in humility? Am I more impressed by fast beginnings or by quiet endurance? Do I trust God’s timing for the “end of the matter”?

- Value perseverance over performance. Start well—but focus more on finishing with integrity and faithfulness. At age 79 I can attest that this takes focus and discipline, and I hear of so many believers who are not finishing will (not judging them, just being honest and remember 1Co 10:12+!)
- Be patient in trials. Don’t demand immediate results. The end will show what God was building in you.
- Resist prideful ambition. Let go of the desire to be seen as impressive. Instead, cultivate a spirit that endures with grace.
- Wait for God’s appointed conclusion, for God’s timing is always perfect. You may not see the purpose now, but God is crafting a better “end” than you can imagine.
- Let patience guide your relationships. Haughty responses divide; patient responses heal and build.

Spirit (07307) **ruah/ruach** ([click for in depth discussion](#)) means breath, wind, spirit (76x to the Spirit), air; breeze; ; courage; temper; **Ruah/ruach** refers to the Spirit of God or Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11; Ps 106:33; Isa. 63:10, 11), who inspired the prophets (Nu 11:17, 25; 1Sa 10:6; 19:20), moved the prophets in time and space (Elijah (1 Ki. 18:12 cf Ezekiel in Ezek. 2:2). **Ruah/ruach** can refer to an evil spirit from the Lord (1Sa. 16:15, 16; 1Ki. 22:22, 23). David was inspired to speak as a prophet by the Spirit (2Sa 23:2). The Spirit was present among the returned exiles in Jerusalem (Hag. 2:5; Zech. 4:6); and will be poured out in the latter days on all flesh, imparting prophecy, dreams, and visions (Joel 2:28). The Spirit of God was grieved by the rebellion of God’s people (Isa. 63:10).

RUAH IN ECCLESIASTES - Eccl. 1:6; Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 1:17; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:17; Eccl. 2:26; Eccl. 3:19; Eccl. 3:21; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:6; Eccl. 4:16; Eccl. 5:16; Eccl. 6:9; Eccl. 7:8; Eccl. 7:9; Eccl. 8:8; Eccl. 10:4; Eccl. 11:4; Eccl. 11:5; Eccl. 12:7

Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not let yourself be quickly provoked, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:9 μ σπε σ ς ν πνε ματ σου το θυμο σθαι τι θυμ ς ν κ λπ φρ νων ναπα σεται

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger will rest in the bosom of fools.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:9 Don't let your spirit rush to be angry, for anger abides in the heart of fools.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:9 Control your temper, for anger labels you a fool.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry, For anger in the bosom of fools resteth.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not be too easily exasperated, for exasperation dwells in the heart of fools.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not be quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:9 Do not in spirit become quickly discontented, for discontent lodges in the bosom of a fool.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:9 Don't be quick to get angry, because anger is typical of fools.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not quick to let your spirit be angry; because wrath is in the heart of the foolish.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.

- **Do not be eager:** 1Sa 25:21,22 2Sa 19:43 Es 3:5,6 Pr 14:17 16:32 Jon 4:9 Eph 4:26,27 Jas 1:19
- **anger:** Ge 4:5,6,8 34:7,8,25,26,30,31 2Sa 13:22,28,32 Pr 26:23-26 Mk 6:19,24

Related Passages:

James 1:19+ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

ANGER IN YOUR HEART PUTS WISDOM AT RISK

Do not be eager (hasty, hurried, impetuous) **in your heart** ([ruah](#); Lxx- [pneuma](#)) **to be angry** - NET = "Do not let yourself be quickly provoked" **NJB** = "Do not be too easily exasperated." **Eager** implies impatience, hastiness, or readiness to become angry. The idea is one who is easily provoked or lacking restraint. **In your heart** (center of thought, emotion, and will) emphasizes that this is not just about external outbursts, but the inner posture of a person. This calls for Spirit enabled self-control, slowness to anger, and inner calmness.

For (term of explanation) **anger resides in the bosom of fools** ([kesil](#); Lxx - [aphron](#)) - For explains why you should not be eager to be angry. The phrase **anger resides** gives the picture of fools making their home with anger (it is welcome and undisturbed), keeping it close, nurturing it, and acting out of it. Note that **anger** here is not righteous indignation but irrational, self-centered, destructive emotion. **Fools** are driven by their emotions, while the wise exercise restraint. **Bosom** ([hēq](#)) refers to the lap or inner chest, symbolic of closeness or intimacy and thus is a place where something is held dearly or constantly. **Fools** ([kesil](#); Lxx - [aphron](#)) are those who are morally insensitive, stubborn, and spiritually dull.

The upshot is that those who are quick to anger reveal a foolish heart. True wisdom involves controlling your temper and refusing to let anger live in you.

A wise heart makes room for grace.

A foolish heart gives anger a bed to sleep in.

Michael Eaton - Anger (Heb. [ka'as](#)) is anger tinged with exasperation and elsewhere indicates 'indignation' over idolatry (1 Kgs 15:30) or unmerited treatment (1 Sam. 1:6, 16), 'exasperation' over an erring child (Prov. 17:25) and 'resentment' of a nagging wife (Prov. 27:3). In Ecclesiastes it expresses the exasperation at the perplexities of life (1:18; 2:23), the bitter grief of bereavement (7:3), and here the resentment roused by unjust persecution. It is stronger than Dahood's 'care'40 or NAB discontent. If tolerated, resentment makes its permanent home in the personality of the fool (cf. Heb. 12:15), for bosom (AV, RSV) indicates the innermost part of something (1 Kgs 22:35). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

William Barrick - Anger finds fuel for its fire in impatience and pride. Thus, Eccl 7:9 follows logically. The catchword is "spirit" (twice in Eccl 7:8 and once in Eccl 7:9—translated sometimes as "heart" in the latter verse) ties the two verses together conceptually. "**Fools**" comprises another word linking this verse to its preceding context. The heart of a fool seeks pleasure (Eccl 7:4), his song lacks wisdom (Eccl 7:5), his laughter lasts momentarily (Eccl 7:6), and he harbors anger (Eccl 7:9). This fool can be described as obstinate, with no patience to seek wisdom, and possessing no reverence for truth. (Borrow [Derek Kidner discusses foll. kesil in The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary, page 40.](#)) ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

Here's are **illustrations**. A fool clutching a flame to his chest, unaware it is burning him from within. Two homes: one welcoming anger at the door, the other guarded by patience, refusing it entry. A heart shaped like a furnace, glowing hot, while the wise heart is a calm reservoir. Imagine two coworkers under pressure. One reacts with immediate frustration, blurting insults. The other breathes deeply, listens, and responds calmly. One builds tension, the other defuses it. Which one reflects God's wisdom?

Where Does Anger Live? This verse forces us to ask: Is anger merely a guest in your heart—or a resident? Solomon doesn't deny that we all experience anger. But he warns against eager anger—the kind that is ready to flare, rooted in pride or control. The New Testament echoes this wisdom: "Be slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." (James 1:19–20+) "**Be angry** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) and **do not sin** ([present imperative with a negative](#)); **do not let the sun go down** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) on your anger." (Ephesians 4:26+) Anger is not always sinful, but harboring it, nurturing it, or living from it is the path of the fool. Am I prone to quick irritation, defensiveness, or rage? Do I entertain anger or do I release it to God? Am I living like a wise person—or a fool with a seething heart?

- Be slow to anger. Enabled by the Holy Spirit and Holy Word, practice pausing, praying, and breathing when irritation rises. Wisdom begins with restraint.
- Refuse to host anger in your heart. Confess it and cast it out QUICKLY! Don't let bitterness take root. Anger is meant to be dealt with, not stored.
- Be alert to "eager anger." (WOE! BEEN THERE, DONE THAT!) Do certain situations or people trigger quick temper? Ask God to supernaturally transform your reactions through the Spirit.
- Use your words carefully. Fools explode. The wise speak with measured grace. (See Pr 15:1+)
- Pursue reconciliation. If anger has lingered in your heart toward someone, take a step toward peace and forgiveness today. (See study of [forgiveness](#))

Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:10 Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these days?" for it is not wise to ask that.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:10 μ ε π ς τ γ ν ε τ ο τ ι α μ ρ α ι α π ρ τ ε ρ α ι σ α ν γ α θ α π ρ τ α τ α ς τ ι ο κ ν σ ο φ η η ρ η σ α ς π ε ρ τ ο τ ο υ

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:10 Say not, What has happened, that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire in wisdom concerning this.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:10 Don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?" since it is not wise of you to ask this.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:10 Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:10 Don't long for "the good old days." This is not wise.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:10 Say not thou, 'What was it, That the former days were better than these?' For thou hast not asked wisely of this.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not ask why the past was better than the present, for this is not a question prompted by wisdom.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:10 Do not say: How is it that former times were better than these? For it is not in wisdom that you ask about this.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:10 Don't ask, "Why were things better in the old days than they are now?" It isn't wisdom that leads you to ask this!

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:10 Say not, Why were the days which have gone by better than these? Such a question comes not from wisdom.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:10 Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

- **Why:** Judges 6:13 Jer 44:17-19
- **For it is not from wisdom,** Ge 6:11,12 Ps 14:2,3 Isa 50:1 Ro 1:22-32 3:9-19

THE FOLLY OF LONGING FOR YESTERDAY

This verse confronts a common human tendency: to romanticize the past and grumble about the present. Solomon warns against this mindset, labeling it unwise.

Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?" - This is the voice of nostalgia mixed with dissatisfaction, reflecting a heart that looks back longingly, but not always accurately. It ignores the goodness of God in the present, the fact that the past had its own flaws and pains and the reality that God's purposes are ongoing, not stuck in yesterday. Wisdom accepts that God rules over all times—the past, present, and future (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:1–11). **Better** is the same word used throughout Ecclesiastes 7 (Eccl 7:1 Eccl 7:2 Eccl 7:3 Eccl 7:5 Eccl 7:8 Eccl 7:10) to compare what is "good" or "better." It implies value or quality, often from a subjective or emotional lens.

*Wisdom lives forward—
not backward.*

Michael Eaton - To evaluate the times may be needful; to ask specifically for days gone by is wrong and foolish. One cannot face the difficulties of one age by pining for another. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

For (term of explanation) **it is not from wisdom that you ask about this** - NET = "it is not wise to ask that." Solomon exposes this question as foolish, or at least unwise. Here he directly states that true wisdom doesn't ask such questions. This longing arises from foolish comparison, discontent, or fear, not from trust in God's plan.

The upshot is that longing for ["the good old days"](#) without appreciating the present is not wise. Wisdom embraces God's sovereignty over every season.

*God isn't just the God of the past—He is present and active today.
Don't miss it by longing for yesterday.*

William Barrick - The lack of wisdom on the part of fools promotes an unhealthy and irrational nostalgia for the past. The fool wishes for a return to the past where things surely were better than they are in the present (Eccl 7:10). In reality, he exercises a selective memory. **Dreamers of bygone days reveal their ignorance of history, their false theology regarding the sinfulness of man and fallen condition of the world, their blindness to the opportunities existing in the present, and their impatience regarding the future.** In short, this way of thinking "is not from wisdom." Eccl 7:10, 11, 12 all employ the catchword "wisdom." Solomon picks up his earlier references (Eccl 7:4, 5, 7). The wise person values a funeral above a feast (Eccl 7:4) and a rebuke above a song (Eccl 7:5), but wisdom has its price (Eccl 7:7; cp. Eccl 1:18). Life is not only brief; it is filled with trouble (cp. Job 5:7). So, how can someone experience good (Eccl 6:12)? ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

"Nostalgia Isn't Always Wisdom" - It's easy to believe that "things were better back then." But this mindset is often rooted in selective memory and discontent. The past might seem golden because we're avoiding the challenges of the present. God calls us to live faithfully in the time we are given, not to long for a time He has passed over. Even the hard days are His gift for our growth. As Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:13–14+ "Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Am I grateful for today—or grumbling for yesterday? Am I trusting that God is still working, even now? Or do I believe the best is behind me?

- Be present in today. Honor what God is doing right now, even if it's hard. He is still faithful.
- Practice gratitude. (1Th 5:18+) Instead of romanticizing the past, give thanks for current mercies.
- Resist unhealthy nostalgia. It's okay to remember fondly, but don't let it steal your joy or hope.
- Trust God's unfolding story. The best may be (IS) ahead—not behind (Titus 2:13+). God's purposes are progressive, not regressive.
- Encourage the next generation. Don't be the voice that says, "It's not like it used to be." Be a voice of hope and faith for what God is doing now and next.

Illustrations - A man sitting on a bench, staring at a golden-hued memory bubble, while behind him God is pouring blessings into his present day, unnoticed. A forked path with signs: one says "Past" and glows with nostalgia; the other says "Present", lit by God's hand holding a lantern. A calendar with "yesterday" circled in gold, but today glowing with fresh light from above. An older man tells stories of ["the good old days"](#) insisting nothing is as good now. But his grandson, listening nearby, is discouraged, thinking he was born into something lesser. The wisdom of Ecclesiastes 7:10 would urge the man to honor the past but speak hope into the present, to be a voice of encouragement, not nostalgia.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - LONGING FOR THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions. Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor. Ecclesiastes 7:10-12

Memory is a good thing, if you remember the right things at the right times. For a husband to recall his wedding vows while on a business trip may keep him from making a life-destroying mistake. By the same to-

ken, a wife who remembers that her marriage has had many good moments may resist giving up in despair. In one sense the fountain of gratitude flows from a good memory. We will be thankful if we recall how much we have been given and how little we have deserved our many blessings. Thus did David exhort the children of Israel to recount God's good deeds and to let that memory be a bulwark in the present hour of crisis.

But there is a kind of memory that hinders our spiritual progress. Sometimes a painful event from the past keeps you from moving ahead. Easing that painful memory may require choosing to forgive, even though the other person won't admit he or she did anything wrong. It often will require deliberately choosing to let go of some dream you held onto for many years. No matter what it is, whether good or bad, if it's holding you back, you've got to let go of it.

The same thing happens to us whenever we play the comparison game. We compare our children and our wives and husbands. We compare what we used to have with what we have now. We remember the past as better than it really was so that the present seems worse than it really is.

The comparison game is foolish and dangerous because only God can make a proper comparison. I am reminded of that strange and touching conversation between Jesus and Peter in John 21. Three times Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" Three times Peter answered yes. Three times Jesus told him to feed the flock of God. Then Peter saw John following them and asked, "What about him?"—meaning, "Where does John fit in your plans?" To which Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (John 21:22).

God isn't obligated to treat us in exactly the same way He treats anyone else, nor is He required to treat us today exactly as He did yesterday. Because God is God and we are not, He has the absolute right to do as He pleases. If you think about that fact, it renders all comparisons useless and counterproductive.

Spirit of Grace, I thank You for the promise of better things to come for the people of God. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- What are the "good old days" for you? If you could go back and relive them again, would you?
- What's the difference between remembering the past and living in it?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Psalm 77:1-10; 2 Corinthians 6:2; and 2 Peter 3:10-13.

Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good And an advantage to those

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing; it benefits those who see the light of day.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:11 γαθ σοφ α μετ κληροδοσ ας κα περισσε α το ς θεωρο σιν τ ν λιον

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and there is an advantage by it to them that see the sun.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance and an advantage to those who see the sun,

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is even better when you have money. Both are a benefit as you go through life.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And an advantage it is to those beholding the sun.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is as good as a legacy, profitable to those who enjoy the light of the sun.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom and an inheritance are good, and an advantage to those that see the sun.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is as good as an inheritance. It is an advantage to everyone who sees the sun.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom together with a heritage is good, and a profit to those who see the sun.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun.

- **good with an inheritance:** Ec 9:15-18 1Ki 3:6-9 Lu 16:8,9 1Ti 6:17-19
- **them:** Ec 11:7

Related Passages:

Proverbs 13:22 A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, And the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.

WHEN WISDOM MANAGES WEALTH

Wisdom ([chokmah](#); Lxx - [sophia](#)) **along with an inheritance** ([nachalah](#)) **is good** (excellent, desirable, beneficial - [tob](#); Lxx - [agathos](#)) - Wisdom of course is practical skill in living according to God's order and is connected with the fear of the LORD (Pr 9:10). Solomon, known for both wisdom and wealth, reflects here on the combined benefit of both when rightly held. This verse doesn't place wisdom and inheritance in opposition but recognizes that both can be valuable especially together. An **inheritance** represents material resources—money, land, or possessions passed down. In context wisdom is the skillful, God-fearing use of knowledge and judgment with one's inheritance. Solomon is saying that when wisdom governs wealth, it becomes good and beneficial. Wealth without wisdom leads to ruin; wisdom without resources may be limited in reach.

And an advantage (profit, benefit. [yother](#); Lxx - [perisseia](#)) **to those who see the sun** - "Those who see the sun" refers to the living, those who are still alive on earth and in context are able to make wise choices regarding their inheritance. While **wisdom** and **inheritance** don't help the dead, they are profitable tools in this life. The verse implies practical benefit that wisdom and inheritance can make life more effective, impactful, and stable when rightly used.

The upshot is that wisdom, when paired with material provision, is a great blessing to the living, enabling better stewardship, legacy, and purpose for furtherance of the kingdom of God.

William Barrick - Individuals who possess **wisdom** and who also receive an **inheritance**, do experience good (Eccl 7:11). After all, there is an advantage to having an **inheritance**—an advantage that can be enjoyed only in this life by "those who see the sun." Seeing the sun implies pleasantness and enjoyment (Eccl 11:7; 12:1–2) as well as referring to life on earth (Ps 58:8). The vicissitudes of life sometimes bring pain and loss, but sometimes even the loss results in a gain. Inheritances come to someone as the result of the death of someone near and dear (Pr 19:14; cp. Heb 9:16–17). Good and godly people seek to leave an inheritance for their children and grandchildren (Pr 13:22). The fool, like the prodigal son, squanders his or her inheritance (Eccl 2:18–19, 21; cp. Luke 15:12–13). The texts dealing with this issue imply that the wise will not waste an inheritance, but will appreciate it and, if possible, even multiply it for their descendants. ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

Wisdom Makes Wealth Worthwhile - Wisdom alone is precious. But when it's joined with an inheritance, material provision and opportunity, it becomes powerfully effective for blessing, ministry, and legacy. Wealth without wisdom leads to entitlement, pride, or waste. The wise steward uses inheritance to glorify God, provide for others, advance good (God's) works, building lasting influence. Paul's instruction to the rich echoes this (1 Timothy 6:17–18+) "**Instruct** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) 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. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." Do I pursue wisdom as my foundation? If I have resources, do I use them with discernment? Am I leaving behind not just wealth, but a legacy of truth and godliness?

- Pursue wisdom before wealth. An inheritance without wisdom is dangerous. Seek God's ways first.
- Teach the next generation both. Pass down not just money, but biblical values, discernment, and humility.
- Be a faithful steward. Whether you inherit little or much, use it in ways that honor God and bless others.
- Invest in what outlives you. Wisdom enables wealth to be eternalized—through generosity, missions, discipleship, and family impact.
- Don't envy the wealthy—envy the wise. Seek the advantage of wisdom, whether or not you receive an inheritance.
- Wisdom is the true wealth—but when paired with material inheritance, it becomes a powerful tool for good in the hands of the living.

Illustrations - A scroll of wisdom wrapped around a bag of gold—showing wisdom governing wealth. Two sons: one squanders an inheritance foolishly, the other uses it wisely to build and bless. A wise elder handing both a lamp (symbol of wisdom) and a coin pouch (inheritance) to a younger person walking into the sunlight—symbolizing life. Life Example - Two siblings inherit from their father. One is impulsive, buying luxury and partying. The other is prudent—investing in missions, caring for the poor, and funding gospel work. Ten years later, only one legacy remains: the one guided by wisdom.

Advantage (03148) **yother** (from **yathar** = to be left over) means superiority, advantage, excess, profit, gain. Frequently used in Ecclesiastes to ask, "What's the gain?" a recurring question about the meaning of life apart from God.

John Hartley - ([TWOT Online](#)) The wisdom school, especially Ecclesiastes, often employs this root in search of the real advantage or the true excellence in life. Proverbs emphasizes that abundance can be gained by toil and diligent effort (Proverbs 14:23; Proverbs 21:5). But abundance must not become the goal of life, for after necessities have been met that which is left then becomes the inheritance of one's family (Psalm 17:14).

Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) uses this word family to get across many of his ideas. One is not to be too wise or too righteous; i.e. one cannot authenticate himself by putting his wisdom and righteousness on display so that they appear greater than they really are (Eccles. 7:16). Truly the best advantage belongs to one with wisdom (Eccles. 7:11). He uses *yitrôn* in the manner of "advantage," "gain" or "profit." There is advantage for an agricultural community to have a king, no doubt so that its production can be fully realized (Eccles. 5:9 [H 8]). He also finds advantage or benefit in wisdom over folly (Eccles. 2:13). Wisdom shows man how to overcome a difficult problem and knowledge allows wisdom to preserve the life of its owner (Eccles. 7:12; Eccles. 10:10). Proverbs points out there is advantage in toil over laziness (Proverbs 14:23). But Ecclesiastes probes deeper by continually asking what profit does one gain from his toil (Eccles. 1:3; Eccles. 3:9). The answer is nothing, especially if it is to accumulate goods which cannot be taken at death (Eccles. 2:11; Eccles. 5:15). Ecclesiastes here feels the full force of the curse on man's work which makes it toil and he clearly sees that ultimate value can not reside in man's labor or its results.

Gilbrant - The sense of the root is particularly clear in 1 Sam. 15:15, which says that the Israelites spared the best of the sheep and oxen and destroyed "the rest." This term has economic overtones in the sense of "surplus," "profit" or "advantage." This sense of "advantage" is seen in the question, "What advantage does the wise man have over the fool?" (Ecc. 6:8 NASB; cf. v. 11). The statement that wisdom with an inheritance is "surplus" (Ecc. 7:11) is semantically equivalent to the English idiom of "icing on the cake." *Yôthfir* is also used adverbially and means "too much" or "excessively." This use is seen in the question, "Why then have I been extremely wise?" (Ecc. 2:15, NASB). The word is used similarly in the statement, "Do not be overly wise" (Ecc. 7:16, NASB). When followed by *min* (HED #4623), *yôthfir* means "more than" (Est. 6:6; Ecc. 12:12). One time it occurs with the relative particle *shā* (HED #8054). In this case, it can mean either "besides" or "it can be added that." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

YOTHER - 8V - **addition(1), advantage(3), beyond(1), extremely(1), more(1), overly(1)** Est. 6:6; Eccl. 2:15; Eccl. 6:8; Eccl. 6:11; Eccl. 7:11; Eccl. 7:16; Eccl. 12:9; Eccl. 12:12

Wisdom (02451) **chokmah** from the verb **chakam** - to be wise) is the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. Wisdom is the ability to see something from God's viewpoint. Wisdom is "God's character in the many practical affairs of life." We can get INFORMATION "on LINE" (from Google) but WISDOM is from "on HIGH" (from God)! **Chokmah** is the knowledge and the ability to make the right choices at the opportune time. The consistency of making the right choice is an indication of one's spiritual maturity. The prerequisite for this "**wisdom**" is the fear of the Lord (Pr 1:7⁺). "**Wisdom**" is personified as crying out for disciples who will do everything to pursue her (Pr 1:20). The person who seeks **chokmah** diligently will receive understanding: (Pr 2:6) and will benefit in life by walking with God (Pr 2:20, cf Gal 5:16).

1. **Knowledge** is what is gathered over time through study of the Scriptures. It can be said that **wisdom**, in turn, acts properly

upon that knowledge. **Wisdom** is the fitting application of knowledge.

2. **Knowledge** understands the light has turned red; **wisdom** applies the brakes.
3. **Knowledge** sees the quicksand; **wisdom** walks around it.
4. **Knowledge** memorizes the Ten Commandments; **wisdom** obeys them.
5. **Knowledge** learns of God; **wisdom** loves Him.

([What is wisdom?](#))

Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom provides protection, just as money provides protection. But the advantage of knowledge is this: Wisdom preserves the life of its owner.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:12 τι ν σκι α τ ς σοφ α ς σκι το ρ γυρ ου κα περισσε α γν σεω ς τ ς σοφ α ς ζωοποι σει τ ν παρ α τ ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom in its shadow is as the shadow of silver: and the excellence of the knowledge of wisdom will give life to him that has it.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:12 because wisdom is protection as money is protection, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of its owner.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:12 Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:12 Wisdom and money can get you almost anything, but only wisdom can save your life.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:12 For wisdom is a defense, money is a defence, And the advantage of the knowledge of wisdom is, She reviveth her possessors.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:12 For as money protects, so does wisdom, and the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom bestows life on those who possess her.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:12 For the protection of wisdom is as the protection of money; and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of its owner.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:12 Wisdom protects us just as money protects us, but the advantage of wisdom is that it gives life to those who have it.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:12 Wisdom keeps a man from danger even as money does; but the value of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to its owner.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money; and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

- **wisdom:** Job 1:10 22:21-25 Pr 2:7,11 14:20 18:10,11 Isa 33:6
- a defence: Heb. a shadow, Jdg 9:15 Ps 57:1 Isa 30:2 32:2
- the excellency: De 30:19,20 32:47 Pr 3:18 8:35 9:11 11:4 Joh 12:50 17:3 Php 3:8

Related Passages

Proverbs 3:2 For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you.

THE SHADOW OF WISDOM BETTER THAN MONEY

For (term of explanation) - This explains why an **inheritance** with **wisdom** is good - they provide protection.

Wisdom ([chokmah](#); Lxx - [sophia](#)) **is protection** ([tsel](#); Lxx - [skia](#)) **just as money is protection** ([tsel](#); Lxx - [skia](#)) - The Hebrew literally reads: "For in the shadow of wisdom, in the shadow of silver..." Both **wisdom** and money offer a kind of "shade" or refuge from danger (e.g., poverty, folly, ruin). Solomon is not dismissing money—it does have value in providing for needs, creating security, and preventing certain troubles.

But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.- Wisdom not only protects—it preserves, sustains, and can even save your life. "**Knowledge**" (used here synonymously with wisdom) brings long-term benefits: It guides decisions. It keeps one from moral ruin. It may even extend life by keeping one from danger or destructive behavior. In sum, like riches, knowledge and wisdom protect, but at a deeper level.

The upshot is that money and wisdom both offer protection, but only wisdom offers lasting preservation, shaping character and giving eternal value.

NET NOTE on **preserves** - The verb חָיָה (khayah, "to live") in the Piel denotes (1) "to let live; to keep alive; to preserve alive; to allow to live happily" (Gen 12:12; Exod 1:17; Num 31:15; Deut 6:24; Josh 9:15; Isa 7:21; Jer 49:11) and (2) "to bring back to life" persons who are ill (Ps 30:4) or deceased (Hos 6:2); HALOT 309 s.v. חָיָה. Its parallelism with תִּשֶׁל (tsel, "protection") indicates that it means "to preserve someone's life" from premature death or calamity. Therefore, "preserves the life" (RSV, NAB, ASV, NASB, NIV, NJPS) is preferable to "gives life to" (KJV, Douay, NRSV, YLT).

William Barrick - An **inheritance** with **wisdom** is good because they both provide protection (Eccl 7:12; literally, "because in the shadow of that wisdom is in the shadow of that silver"). A **shadow** might appear a bit unusual as a figure for protection in this context, since Eccl 6:12 utilized the figure to emphasize the brevity of life. However, a shadow also symbolizes **protection** (as from the heat of the sun; Jdg 9:15; Ps 17:8; Isa 4:6). However, both money and wisdom provide only temporary shelter, when it comes to preserving life. No matter how much wisdom a person possesses and exercises, he will yet die. No matter how much money a person expends for comfort and medical care, he will eventually die. The fact that neither wisdom nor wealth can prevent death does not make these things worthless, bad, or a disadvantage. Wisdom and money give the wise the means to handle life's complications well, so that a person might enjoy his or her God-given life for the short time it lasts. This approach to life countermands the axiom "Eat and drink for tomorrow we die," because it demands biblical wisdom involving right teaching (from Scripture) that produces right thinking, resulting in right choices that make for right living. ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

Wisdom: More Than Money Can Buy - Money can buy you a home—but not peace. It can shield you from hunger—but not from self-destruction. Wisdom, however, protects the soul, mind, and body. It guides you through temptation, pressure, and uncertainty. Think of Joseph in Egypt—his wisdom preserved nations, while his wealth came as a result of that wisdom. Proverbs 3:13–18 echoes this "She [wisdom] is more precious than jewels... Her ways are pleasant ways... She is a tree of life..." Do I lean more on money or wisdom for my security? Am I pursuing the kind of wisdom that preserves life, not just protects comfort?

- Pursue wisdom more than wealth.
- Invest in God's Word, prayer, counsel, and humility—these will preserve you when wealth cannot.
- Don't idolize money's protection. Money can fail. But wisdom rooted in God's truth endures storms money can't prevent.
- Use both for God's glory. If God has given you both wealth and wisdom, use them together to build the kingdom and bless others.
- Let wisdom (AND PRAYER) guide financial decisions. Steward money with discernment, humility, and generosity.
- Teach wisdom to the next generation.
- More valuable than an inheritance is the wisdom to use it well.
- Money may shield you from trouble—but wisdom shields your soul. It's not just protection—it's preservation.

Protection (shadow, shade, shelter) ([06738](#)) [tsel](#) means shade or shadow and figuratively speaks of a defense, protection or refuge. Tsel frequently used in Psalms in the phrase "in the shadow of Your (Jehovah's) wings." (Ps. 17:8; Ps. 36:7; Ps. 57:1; cf Ps 121:5 "The LORD is your shade", Ps 91:1 = "shadow of the Almighty"). Hartley adds that "Shade, even that of a boulder, gives some relief from the heat of the day, especially for the slave (cf. Job 7:2). "Under the shadow of one's roof" connotes that the head of the

house provides protection for his guests (Genesis 19:8, ASV). Similarly a strong nation may offer someone or another nation shelter (Isaiah 30:2f.; cf. Ezekiel 17:23). But God may remove a nation's shelter or defenses in order to enable his people to conquer them (Numbers 14:9). On the other hand shadow serves as a negative metaphor when it is viewed as ephemeral and fleeting. Man's life is compared to a shadow, for it has no permanence and flees quickly away (1 Chron. 29:15). Shadow also describes the failing condition of one who is enduring a sickness (Job 17:7). Yahweh is the shade or the source of protection for his people (Psalm 121:5f.; Isaiah 25:4). Therefore the Psalmist prays that God may hide him under "the shadow of his wings" (Psalm 17:8; cf. Psalm 36:7 [H 8]; Psalm 91:1). God promises to hide the suffering servant in the shadow of his hand in order that he can proclaim his penetrating message for a period of time (Isaiah 49:2): And in the latter days Yahweh's glory will return to Jerusalem. It will be a shade from the heat and a shelter from the other elements (Isaiah 4:6; cf. Hosea 14:8). ([TWOT Online](#))

The term צל (tsel, "shade, shadow") refers to that which provides protection or a shelter from the sun (Gen 19:8; Judg 9:36; Isa 25:5; 32:2; Jer 48:45; Jonah 4:5). It is used often in a figurative sense (hypocatastasis) to connote "protection" from calamity (Num 14:9; Isa 49:2; Hos 14:8; Pss 17:8; 36:8; 57:2; 63:8; 91:1; 121:5; Lam 4:20).

Advantage (03504) **yithron** (from **yathar** = to remain over, remain, be left over) is a masculine noun refers literally to what is left over (a gain or a profit) or metaphorically to what is advantageous or of benefit, or that which remains after one's work (Eccl. 1:3; 5:16, 10:11); or knowledge (Eccl 7:12). The word yithrôn appears 10 times, all in Ecclesiastes and each time it appears, it questions what is the lasting benefit or eternal value does all this effort really yield? Yithrôn is not just about material gain, but about meaning, enduring value, or spiritual profit.

The noun יִתְרוֹן (yithron, "profit") has a two-fold range of meanings: (1) "what comes of [something]; result" (Eccl 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10) and (2) "profit; advantage" (Eccl 2:13; 10:11); see HALOT 452–53 s.v. יִתְרוֹן. It is derived from the noun יָתַר (yeter, "what is left behind; remainder"; HALOT 452 s.v. יָתַר). The related verb יָתַר (yatar) denotes "to be left over; to survive" (Niphal) and "to have left over" (Hiphil); see HALOT 451–52 s.v. יָתַר. When used literally, יִתְרוֹן refers to what is left over after expenses (gain or profit); when used figuratively, it refers to what is advantageous or of benefit.

***Though some things have relative advantage over others
(e.g., light over darkness, and wisdom over folly in Eccl 2:13),
there is no ultimate profit in man's labor due to death.***

Complete Biblical Library - Likely a loanword from Aramaic, yithron is derived from the cognate of Hebrew verb yathar, "to remain". Appearing exclusively in Ecclesiastes, the noun is attested in Jewish Aramaic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Syriac and Mandaean. The nuance of "profit" is a direct extension of the verbal nuance of "to be left over," as it denotes that which is superfluous or more than the necessary amount. It appears in two broad contexts, that of the lack of profit of labor and in the context of the advantage of wisdom.

It appears twice in the comparative simile "wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness" (Eccl 2:13). Near the conclusion of a proclamation concerning the greatness of wisdom, the statement is: "the advantage of knowledge is wisdom" (Eccl 7:12). It also appears with this nuance in a series of metaphors which express the defilement of folly. Wisdom achieves profit (Eccl 10:10). "A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; The babbler is no different (Eccl 10:11, NKJV).

The second broad context for this noun is that of the rhetorical question, "What profit is labor?" The pointlessness of work is manifested in the realization that the earth is eternal, and generations continually do the same work, minimizing the significance of any individual (Eccl 1:3); as the only profit gained was the reward of the work itself (Eccl 2:11). Indeed, labor itself gains one nothing, not only in this life (Eccl 3:9), nor beyond as well, as one leaves life in the same financial state they entered (Eccl 5:16). Financially, a king is better than anarchy, in regard to land claims (Eccl 5:9).

YITHRON - 10x/9v - advantage(5), excels(2), profit(3). Eccl. 1:3; Eccl. 2:11; Eccl. 2:13; Eccl. 3:9; Eccl. 5:9; Eccl. 5:16; Eccl. 7:12; Eccl. 10:10; Eccl. 10:11

Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God, For who is able to straighten what He has bent?

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God; For who can make straight what He has made crooked?

NET Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God: For who can make straight what he has bent?

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:13 ὁ τ ποιματα το θεο τι τς δυν σεται το κοσμσαι ν ν θες διαστρ ψ α τ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:13 Behold the works of God: for who shall be able to straighten him whom God has made crooked?

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God, for who can straighten out what He has made crooked?

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:13 Accept the way God does things, for who can straighten what he has made crooked?

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:13 See the work of God, For who is able to make straight that which He made crooked?

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider God's creation: who, for instance, can straighten what God has bent?

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked?

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider what God has done! Who can straighten what God has bent?

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:13 Give thought to the work of God. Who will make straight what he has made bent?

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:13 Consider the work of God; who can make straight what he has made crooked?

- **Consider:** Job 37:14 Ps 8:3 107:43 Isa 5:12
- **who:** Ec 1:15 Job 9:12 11:10 12:14 34:29 Isa 14:27 43:13 46:10,11 Da 4:35 Ro 9:15,19 Eph 1:11

Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 1:15+ What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.

Ecclesiastes 3:14+ I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

ACCEPTING THE CROOKED PATH THE UNCHANGEABLE WORK OF GOD

Consider (raah - see; horao in [aorist imperative](#) = ide) **the work of God** - **Consider** (רָאָה, re'eh) means more than glance but calls for contemplation, acknowledgment, and in this context even awe. The "work of God" refers to God's providence and activity—His creation, governance, and even the mysteries of His will in life's events. Solomon is telling us to look at the big picture and trace the hand of God in all circumstances.

For (term of explanation) - Solomon is explaining why we need to heed the commandment to consider the work of God.

Who is able to straighten what He has bent?- A rhetorical question emphasizing human limitation and God's unchangeable sovereignty. **Straighten** (יָקַן or יָשַׁר yakkān or yāshēr) to make straight, correct, or bring into order and is symbolic of trying to alter or fix something not within human control. **Bent** (עִוְתָהּ - 'iwwēt) means twisted, distorted, made crooked, and is often used metaphorically for trouble, difficulty, or divine mystery.

What He has **bent** refers to what God has made crooked, allowed, or purposed—including difficult or painful circumstances. The word "**straighten**" implies man's attempts to control, fix, or undo what God has designed for a purpose. (EVER TRIED THAT IN YOUR LIFE? I HAVE! IT DOES NOT WORK!) This verse echoes Ecclesiastes 1:15: "What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted." The upshot is that man should acknowledge God's sovereignty in both the straight paths and the crooked ones. Human striving cannot undo what God has permitted for His purposes.

Michael Eaton - This echoes Ec 1:15; the crookedness of the world, which is being expounded throughout, is not mere 'fate'. It is subject to God's will (cf. Ro 8:20+). We may wish to quarrel with it, but we can effect no change in the basic structure of things. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

*God has appointed both the good (the straight)
and the bad (the bent or crooked) circumstances.*

William Barrick - The Sovereign God Is in Control (Eccl 7:13–14) Bringing this section (Eccl 7:1–14) to a close, Solomon calls upon his readers to think about their present conditions in the light of eternity. How does God figure in their situation? How do they relate to His will? Literally, the author's imperative is **"See the work of God"** (Eccl 7:13). After listing some of the good, beneficial, and advantageous aspects of life (Eccl 7:1–12), **Solomon turns the reader's attention Godward**. God's work cannot be altered (Eccl 7:13; cp. Eccl 1:15; 3:14). God has appointed both the good (the straight) and the bad (the bent or crooked) circumstances. This is not mere "fate." **God controls all events in our lives and designs them for our good** (Rom 8:28+). We should accept everything with thanksgiving (1Th 5:18+), being content in every circumstance (Phil 4:11–12+). In fact, both James 1:2+ and 1 Peter 1:6+ exhort believers to count it a joy to pass through times of trouble. The Spirit of God, Who superintends Solomon as he writes, intends this instruction (Eccl 7:13–14) "to build confidence and define boundaries within which one can act wisely." (Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," 173.) ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

"God's Ways Are Not Our Ways" - Sometimes God allows crooked paths—detours, pain, unanswered prayers. We try to "straighten" them: to fix, resist, or undo what doesn't make sense. But wisdom teaches us to trust, not tamper—to submit, not strive. Isaiah 55:8–9 reminds us: "My thoughts are not your thoughts... My ways are higher than your ways." God's "bending" may be a gift: To humble us. To redirect us. To protect us from a more dangerous "straight" path. Do I fight against the crooked path God has assigned? Or do I trust His hand even when I cannot trace His plan? Do I believe He is still good even when the way is bent?

- Surrender your plans to God. Even the best goals may be "bent" by divine wisdom. Trust His redirection.
- Accept divine detours. When life goes sideways, don't panic. God bends paths to mold hearts.
- Meditate on God's providence. Observe and reflect on how God has worked through difficulties in your past.
- Avoid trying to control what is beyond your reach. Wisdom knows when to act and when to accept.
- Find peace in mystery. You don't need all the answers—only faith in the One who knows the end from the beginning.
- You cannot straighten what God has bent—but you can trust Him in the curves. Wisdom sees the hand of God even in life's crooked paths.

ILLUSTRATION - A woman loses her job unexpectedly. At first, she fights the "crooked path." But months later, that turn leads her to a ministry opportunity she never would have chosen—and never would have found on her "straight" path. She looks back and sees: *"God bent the road for my good."*

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - THE STEPS AND THE STOPS OF LIFE

Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future. Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

We had just finished a grand eleven-day tour of the Holy Land and then boarded a jet for a final two-day visit to Greece. We made it as far as the Athens airport with no major problems. Then the unexpected happened: Two of the members of our group were detained by the Greek customs officials because their passports contained invalid visas.

To those who never travel overseas that may not sound serious, but it is. A visa is a legal document that allows a person to enter a foreign country for a designated period of time (a few days or weeks or months).

No visa, no entry—it's really as simple as that. To make matters worse, when you are standing in the airport of another country waiting for the customs officer to clear you, there really isn't anything you can do to help the situation along. If you lose your temper, your papers have a mysterious way of being misplaced for hours at a time.

So there we were, waiting and wondering what would happen next. After several conversations, it all came down to this: The customs officials would send a telex to the head office in downtown Athens and wait for a decision—which would take four or five hours at least. The rest of our group could go ahead to the hotel, but the two women would have to stay in the airport.

I wondered how they would react to this frustrating delay. One of the women smiled at me and quoted Psalm 37:23 (KJV), "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Then she added this phrase—"And so are the stops."

What a fantastic insight that is. Both our steps and our stops are ordered by the Lord. He is in charge of everything that happens to us, and that definitely includes those maddening delays that seem to come out of nowhere. Sometimes we end up sitting for hours on a bench when we could be doing something productive—or so we think.

But it's exactly at that point that our faith must rise to the challenge. Do you believe that God has a plan for your life that includes every little detail? Do you believe that God is working out that plan every moment of every day? And do you believe that God is able to use everything that happens to you for your good and His glory?

If all of that is true, then even in the stops of life we can still give thanks to God. That doesn't make "stopping" easy or pleasant, but it does release us from the urge to barge ahead in our own strength. Are you temporarily "stopped" right now? Fear not, child of God. This is part of His divine appointment for you. Wait on the Lord and soon enough your stopping will become stepping.

Lord of time and eternity, if I should have less than I want today, may I be content in the knowledge that I already have everything I need. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- If you could change one situation in your own life right now, what would it be? If you could ask one question about your future, what would it be?
- Do you truly believe that God has ordained your hard times as well as your good times?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Exodus 16:31-35; Philippians 4:11-13; and 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing that will come after him.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:14 ν μ ρ γαθωσ νης ζθι ν γαθ κα ν μ ρ κακ ας δ κα γε σ ν το το σ μφωνον το τ πο ησεν θε ς περ λαλι ς να μ ε ρ νθρωπος π σω α το μηδ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity live joyfully, and consider in the day of adversity: consider, I say, God also has caused the one to agree with the other for this reason, that man should find nothing after him.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:14 In times of prosperity be joyful, but in times of adversity consider this: God has made one as well as the other, so that no one can discover what the future holds.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man cannot discover anything that will come after him.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:14 Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. Remember that nothing is certain in this life.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:14 In a day of prosperity be in gladness, And in a day of evil consider. Also this over-against that hath God made, To the intent that man doth not find anything after him.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:14 When things are going well, enjoy yourself, and when they are going badly, consider this: God has designed the one no less than the other so that we should take nothing for granted.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:14 When times are good, be happy. But when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one time as well as the other so that mortals cannot predict their future.

- **the day:** Ec 3:4 De 28:47 Ps 30:11,12 40:3 Mt 9:13 Joh 16:22,23 Jas 5:13
- **but:** De 8:3 1Ki 8:47 17:17,18 2Ch 33:12,13 Job 10:1,2 Ps 94:12,13 Ps 119:71 Isa 22:12-14 26:11 42:25 Jer 23:20 Mic 6:9 Hag 1:5-7 Lu 15:17,18 Ac 14:22
- **made,** Ec 12:8,13 Ho 2:6,7

GOD OF BOTH DAYS SO REJOICE & REFLECT

This verse gives us wisdom for both good times and bad, rooted in the unshakable truth that God is sovereign over both.

In the day of prosperity be happy—(Literally, “In a good day be in good”) **Prosperity** ([tobah](#); Lxx - [agathosune](#)) refers to days of blessing, success, joy, when things go well. **Be happy** (bəṭôḇ - [tob](#)) means enjoy the good. In this verse, Solomon is not cynical, but urges us to rejoice and embrace joy as a gift from God (cf. Eccl. 3:13+).

But in the day of adversity consider - Adversity (rā’āh) refers to hardship, difficulty, or trouble. **Consider** (re’eh, same verb as “consider” in Ec 7:13) means reflect deeply—look for meaning, not just escape. Solomon’s point is do not waste suffering, but ponder what God might be teaching you or revealing to you.

God has made the one as well as the other - God is not only sovereign over the good; He is equally Lord over trials. This echoes Job 2:10: “Shall we accept good from God and not adversity?” It teaches balanced theology—we trust God in both sunshine and storms. Both joy and trial come from the same benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient, loving Hand! (See [Good Hand of the Lord](#))

Michael Eaton - Both **prosperity** and **adversity** have their uses. One leads to joy, the other draws attention to the realities of life and leads (if so allowed) to a life of faith in a sovereign God. Both are subject to God’s will and part of his providence. The constant fluctuation between them keeps us dependent not on our own guesswork, but on God who ‘holds the key to all unknown. (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

So that (term of purpose or result) **man will not discover anything that will be after him** - God allows this balance (prosperity...adversity) to keep us humble and dependent. We cannot predict the future. We must walk by faith, not by sight (2Co 5:7+), and not by control or presumption. This juxtaposition of prosperity and adversity echoes Ecclesiastes’ theme of divine mystery and our limited perspective. In prosperity, rejoice. In adversity, reflect. Both come from God, and both are designed to humble us and teach us to trust Him and to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2Pe 3:18+).

William Barrick - Eccl 7:14NIV contains two uses of “good” (literally, “In a good day be in good”) in order to encourage readers to take advantage of the enjoyment of the days of good, prosperity, health, and happiness. The English idiom “be in the moment” approximates the meaning Solomon intends. In other words, do not miss the enjoyment of the good times. Savor them and treasure them—build memories to sustain hope during the more difficult times of life. Next, Solomon turns to the “day of adversity.” For the second time in two verses, he exhorts the reader to “consider” the work of God in bringing about both kinds of days in a person’s life. Human beings cannot predict which kind of day tomorrow (or even today) might be. In fact, the fluctuations of life’s extremes exhibit no regularity and the changes come with astonishing speed. God’s people must learn to trust Him, because He alone knows the purpose of those fluctuations. (24 Eaton, Ecclesiastes, 113.) “What appears on the surface as adversity, may in truth be a severe mercy of the sovereign God that leads to a more profound and substantial blessing” (25 Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms, 346.) (read again 2 Kgs 22:18–20 and Isa 57:1–2). Whether these changes are economic (prosperity vs. recession or depression), physical (health and life vs. illness and death, peace vs. war, environmental stability vs. earthquake or flood), or social (support and acceptance vs. rejection and persecution), we must find our peace and confidence in knowing God is at the helm. ([Ecclesiastes 7:1-14 Commentary](#))

Questions for study:

- What have I done with my life thus far?
- Am I prepared to leave this life?
- In what ways do people seek to escape life’s complications?
- How can we properly enjoy and treasure them?
- What is there about God that causes us to trust Him in life’s trials?

“God Holds Every Kind of Day” We often embrace prosperity and question adversity. But Solomon says: God is the Author of both. That doesn’t make Him the author of sin—but He permits and governs every circumstance with purpose. Why? So we learn trust, not control. In joy: praise. In pain: ponder. In both: remember who is King. This aligns with Romans 8:28: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him...” Am I only thankful in prosperity? Do I trust that God’s hand is still good in adversity? Can I worship Him even when I don’t understand the future?

- Rejoice when life is good. Enjoy God’s blessings. Don’t feel guilty—receive joy as worship.
- Reflect when life is hard. Adversity is a teacher. Ask: What might God be shaping in me?

- Trust God's sovereignty. Your future is unknown—but not to God. Rest in His character, not your predictions.
- Hold plans loosely. You don't know what comes next. Walk in faithful flexibility.
- Live dependently. Let both good and bad days draw you nearer to the God who ordains them.
- Rejoice in good days, reflect in hard days—but trust God through all days. He is the unseen Author of every chapter, even those you would not have written.

Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:15 All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, And there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:15 During the days of my fleeting life I have seen both of these things: Sometimes a righteous person dies prematurely in spite of his righteousness, and sometimes a wicked person lives long in spite of his evil deeds.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:15 σ ν τ π ν τ α ε δ ο ν ν μ ρ α ι ς μ α τ α ι τ η τ ς μ ο υ σ τ ι ν δ κ α ι ο ς π ο λ λ μ ε ν ο ς ν δ ι κ α α τ ο κ α σ τ ι ν σ ε β ς μ ω ν ν κ α κ α τ ο

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen all things in the days of my vanity: there is a just man perishing in his justice, and there is an ungodly man remaining in his wickedness.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my futile life I have seen everything: there is a righteous man who perishes in spite of his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in spite of his evil.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen everything in this meaningless life, including the death of good young people and the long life of wicked people.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:15 The whole I have considered in the days of my vanity. There is a righteous one perishing in his righteousness, and there is a wrong-doer prolonging himself in his wrong.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my futile life, I have seen everything: the upright person perishing in uprightness and the wicked person surviving in wickedness.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evildoing.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen all manner of things in my vain days: a just man perishing in his justice, and a wicked one surviving in his wickedness.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen it all in my pointless life: Righteous people die in spite of being righteous. Wicked people go on living in spite of being wicked.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:15 These two have I seen in my life which is to no purpose: a good man coming to his end in his righteousness, and an evil man whose days are long in his evil-doing.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:15 In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil-doing.

- **have:** Ec 2:23 5:16,17 6:12 Ge 47:9 Ps 39:6
- **is a righteous man:** Ec 3:16 8:14 9:1,2 1Sa 22:18,19 1Ki 21:13 2Ch 24:21,22 Job 9:22,23 Mt 23:34,35 Joh 16:2 Ac 7:52
- **there is a wicked:** Ec 8:12,13 Job 21:7-15 Ps 73:3-13 Isa 65:20 Jer 12:1,2

THE PERPLEXING PARADOX

OF THE GOOD AND THE WICKED

Solomon voices a philosophical and theological dilemma: life under the sun doesn't always operate by expected moral logic. Sometimes, righteous people suffer, and wicked people prosper. This reality deeply disturbed the Preacher and remains a stumbling block for many.

I have seen everything during my lifetime of futility ([hebel](#); [Lxx](#) - [mataiotes](#) - emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness) - **Seen everything** (a bit of hyperbole as he had not literally seen everything) reflects Solomon's broad observation of human life, and it implies personal experience and extensive reflection.

*The length of a person's life
does not depend upon his spirituality.*

William Barrick - Wisdom and righteousness characterize the lives of those who "fear God." However, exhibiting those characteristics involves balance in how a person spends his or her life. Solomon comes to this conclusion through careful observation. Eccl 7:15 marks the eleventh time Solomon has used the phrase "**I have seen.**" (Eccl. 1:14; Eccl. 2:24; Eccl. 3:10; Eccl. 3:16; Eccl. 3:22; Eccl. 4:4; Eccl. 4:15; Eccl. 5:13; Eccl. 5:18; Eccl. 6:1; Eccl. 7:15; Eccl. 8:9; Eccl. 8:10; Eccl. 10:5; Eccl. 10:7). The recurrences of this phraseology remind the reader that Ecclesiastes records a thorough examination of life "under the sun." Indeed, the writer speaks of observations about his own life, a life he characterizes as "**my lifetime of futility**" (literally, "in the days of my futility" or "in my fleeting days"). The same combination of [hebel](#) and "days" occurs also in Job 7:16 ("my days are but a breath"), Psalm 78:33 ("So He brought their days to and end in futility"), Ecclesiastes 6:12 ("the few years [lit., days] of his futile life"), and Eccl 9:9 ("all the days of your fleeting life"). Although life has passed Solomon faster than he could imagine, he manages to make some observations related to its brevity. First, he notices that a **righteous** person's life might end while he is still living righteously (**a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness**). Second, he observes that a **wicked** person might experience an extended life in spite of his continual wickedness (**a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness**). In other words, the length of a person's life does not depend upon his spirituality. ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#)) (The interpretation of this section is difficult. See [Barrick's additional comments](#) related to the righteous and the wicked below)

There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness - Perishes (תָּבַח 'ōbēḏ) means to be lost, destroyed, or die, often untimely or unjustly. This is a tragedy when a morally upright person dies early or unjustly, despite doing good. He dies even while living uprightly. This confronts the assumption that righteousness guarantees prosperity or protection in this life. Job, Abel, or martyrs are biblical examples.

*the length of a person's life
does not depend upon his spirituality.*

and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. - Just as shocking, the wicked sometimes enjoy long life and stability, even though they persist in evil. This challenges Deuteronomic theology, where obedience was typically linked with blessing. **Prolongs his life** (מֵאֲרִיֶּכֶת בְּרָא'ָתוֹ) is literally, "lengthens [his days] in his evil" meaning he thrives in rebellion!

Solomon is saying that life doesn't always "**add up.**" God sometimes allows injustice and mystery to remain, and righteousness is no guarantee of temporal success. He is in effect calling us to live with this divine tension, which calls for us to trust God's sovereign hand.

Michael Eaton - My vain life is that dominated by the problems expounded in Ec 1:2–11 (**ED: THE HORIZONTAL VIEW**). The introduction of a VERTICAL perspective does not nullify the overall problem: life remains subject to vanity. The Preacher aims neither to abolish nor even to explain life's anomalies, but to enable one to live with them. It is a simple fact that the righteous may, like Naboth (1Ki 21:13+), perish in his righteousness, whereas the wickedness of a Jezebel (1Ki 18–19; 21+) may persist. The anomaly frequently perplexed the devout Israelite (cf. Job. Ps 37; Ps 73; Hab. 1:13–17+). The blunt statement with no explanation (except perhaps Ec 7:29) demands simply that the believer face life in this world as it really is. Forewarned is forearmed (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12+). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

"When Life Feels Backward" - We often expect life to be fair—that righteous people should thrive and evil people should fail. But Ecclesiastes dares to stare into the injustice of this fallen world. Solomon isn't denying God's justice—he's lamenting the delay of it. What he sees disturbs him—and should disturb us, too. Yet the rest of Scripture reminds us: God's justice is real, even if not always immediate. **"Do not be deceived** ([present imperative with a negative](#)): God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." (Galatians 6:7+, cf Ro 12:17-21+) Do I trust God's justice even when it is delayed? Do I live for eternal reward, or am I discouraged when righteousness seems to "fail" in this life?

- Expect injustice—but trust God anyway. This world is broken. Bad things happen to good people. But God still rules.
- Live for what lasts. Eternal reward outweighs temporary injustice. Don't abandon righteousness even if it costs you now.

- Resist envy of the wicked. Don't mistake their prosperity for God's approval (cf. Psalm 73:1-28 and do not miss Ps 73:27). Their judgment may be delayed, not denied.
- Lament with hope. It's okay to mourn injustice. Just don't lose faith in God's ultimate justice.
- Cling to eternity. Only a heavenly perspective can reconcile the mystery of the righteous dying early and the wicked living long.
- Sometimes the righteous perish and the wicked prosper—but this is not the final word. God sees, God knows, and eternity will balance the scales.

Balanced Living (Eccl 7:15–18) Solomon's observations of real life appear to contradict the teaching of both biblical law (e.g., Deut 4:40; 5:16; 30:17–18; cp. 1 Kgs 3:14) and wisdom (e.g., Prov 10:27; 12:21) (**ED: BARRICK IS REFERRING TO STATEMENTS LIKE "There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness."**). Law and wisdom announce principles and proclaim the ideal (**ED: THAT IS WHAT WE WOULD EXPECT IN A PERFECT WORLD**). While the law promises blessing for righteous, obedient living, the wisdom of Proverbs builds on those principles, establishing general truths. In fact, individual proverbs "present life in the form of paradigms, patterns, and stereotypical generalizations." (Ted A. Hildebrandt, "Proverb," in [Cracking Old Testament Codes: Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament](#), 235) They were not intended to cover all circumstances. Instead, the "proverb is limited to the specific slice of reality that it portrays." (Ted A. Hildebrandt, 249)

Righteous living, obedience to the Word of God, prolongs a person's life, while the opposite, **disobedience and wicked living** shorten an individual's life. This does not mean that the **righteous** will live longer than the average person's lifespan, or that the **wicked** will live a shorter time than the average. Only God knows what the lifespan is for each individual (Job 14:5; Eccl 3:1–2). On the one hand, God extends the lives of some **righteous** individuals for their godliness, but they might still die younger than some of the **wicked** people among whom they live. On the other hand, God shortens the lives of some **wicked** people by "the debilitating effects of their lifestyle and the judicial actions" (5 Peter A. Steveson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2001),) which He will take against them. However, those same **wicked** persons might live longer than the **righteous** who live among them.

Does Solomon refer merely to physical life and death in his observation of these contrasting circumstances? Rather than referring to the concepts of physical life and death (i.e., clinical death), the text might speak of "abundant life in fellowship with God, a living relationship that is never envisioned as ending in clinical death in contrast to the wicked's eternal death."⁶ Thus, Proverbs depicts the wicked spending their time in darkness (Pr 2:13; 4:19; 20:20) rather than in light. In Ecclesiastes Solomon repeats the description of the unrighteous and foolish living in darkness (Eccl 2:14). Statements like Proverbs 12:28 cannot possibly mean that the righteous person will not die, so the text might refer to an abundant life rather than a life governed by death and darkness.

Few verses have stimulated more discussion and investigation than Eccl 7:16–18 with their seeming contradiction to biblical norms of behavior

Few verses have stimulated more discussion and investigation than Eccl 7:16–18 with their seeming contradiction to biblical norms of behavior. Interpreters who have already placed Ecclesiastes in the Hellenistic era and associated the book with Greek philosophy, identify the "Golden Mean" with these verses. (7 E.g., Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 275–76. See response in Wayne A. Brindle, "Righteousness and Wickedness in Ecclesiastes 7:15–18," in *Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ed. by Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 302.) Moderation alone, however, fails to do justice to the text. Eccl 7:16, 17 seem to recommend a response to the observation recorded in Eccl 7:15. Since being righteous or being wicked does not guarantee a longer or shorter life in comparison with other individuals, it is wise not to go to extremes in either righteousness or wickedness. The former will not guarantee living longer than anyone else and the latter will not guarantee dying sooner than anyone else.

Kaiser rightly observes that people sometimes delude themselves, as well as family and friends, through a multiplicity of pseudo-religious acts of sanctimoniousness; ostentatious showmanship in the act of worship; a spirit of hypercriticism against minor deviations from one's own cultural norms, which are equated with God's righteousness; and a disgusting conceit and supercilious, holier-than-thou attitude veneered over the whole mess. (8 Borrow Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., [Ecclesiastes: Total Life, Everyman's Bible Commentary](#) (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 85–86.)

In Eccl 2:15 Solomon asked why he had been "extremely wise," since both the wise and the fool meet the same fate (death). Both that text and the present verses encounter the same issue. The real delusion occurs when someone thinks they can either forestall or hasten their own death by engaging in more extreme forms of religious or irreligious living. They are not in control of their death, God is.

Back to an examination of what is good in life "under the sun," Solomon observes that (1) it is a good thing to both enjoy life while one has it and (2) to pursue godliness (Eccl 7:18). The one who fears God (see Eccl 3:14 and Eccl 5:7) maintains both pursuits.⁹ Fearing God includes, in this context, a sense of dependence upon Him for one's security.¹⁰ God gives the good things in life and

He controls the time of one's death. ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#))

1 Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge: Coming to Terms with Reality* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 220 (emphasis his).

3 Ted A. Hildebrandt, "Proverb," in [Cracking Old Testament Codes: Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament](#), 235

4 Hildebrandt [Cracking Old Testament Codes: Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament](#), 249.

5 Peter A. Steveson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2001),

6 Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1 – 15*, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 105.

7 E.g., Robert Gordis, *Koheleth—The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes*, 3rd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 275–76. See response in Wayne A. Brindle, "Righteousness and Wickedness in Ecclesiastes 7:15–18," in *Reflecting with Solomon: Selected Studies on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ed. by Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 302.

8 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life*, *Everyman's Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 85–86.

9 Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, *New American Commentary* 14 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 324.

10 Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 347.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - LIVING IN THE GOLDEN MEAN

In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy yourself? Do not be over-wicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes. Ecclesiastes 7:15-18

This much-debated passage evidently means something like this: Don't try to impress God by acting like you're more righteous than you really are. God sees through the sham because His vision penetrates to the heart. You can't control the length of your days by acting super-religious. Sometimes the righteous die young while the wicked live to a ripe old age. This is a true mystery.

So what does it mean to be "overrighteous"? Louis Goldberg suggests that it means becoming overconscientious or super scrupulous about our daily lives. You can worry so much about the secondary details that you lose the joy of each new day. And what good is that—especially since you could die in the next six hours? Understood in this light, these verses are an Old Testament echo of Jesus' warning to the Pharisees in Matthew 23. They strained at the gnats of Jewish law only to swallow the camel of sinful pride and selfish indulgence. Don't overdo it, says Solomon, because if you major on the secondary details—which may in themselves be valuable—you risk cutting yourself off from family and friends. You can even end up destroying yourself.

On the other hand, don't be "overwicked" either. This means just what it says. Don't use your sinfulness as an excuse to sin even more. The fact that you aren't perfect should spur you on toward holiness, not toward moral compromise. It's easy to see how this line of reasoning might work. "I've already told one lie. What difference will another make?" Or "I know I shouldn't have used foul language, but why stop now?" All such reasoning is evil. Why compound your troubles by continuing to sin? When you're in a hole, stop digging.

I recall the sage advice of an old friend who said, "If you can't make things better, at least make sure you don't make them worse." This applies to all of us because everyone struggles with sin to one degree or another. You don't have to take another drink, you don't have to cheat a second time, you don't have to keep on swearing, and you don't have to lose your temper over and over again. By the power of God, and with the help of a few good friends, you can stop the patterns of sin and replace them with habits of holiness.

Seen in that light, this passage offers excellent advice for the spiritual life. Don't be something you're not and don't make matters worse than they already are. This is the "Golden Mean" of the righteous life.

I confess, that I am often confused by the things I see around me. Turn my heart, gracious God, from the uncertainties of this life to an eternal interest in Jesus Christ. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Can you think of any examples (ancient or modern) of good men who died too young and evil men who lived much too long? Why would God allow such an apparent inversion of moral justice?
- Are you more likely to be "overrighteous," "overwise," or "overwicked"?

Ecclesiastes 7:16 Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:16 Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:16 Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?

NET Ecclesiastes 7:16 So do not be excessively righteous or excessively wise; otherwise you might be disappointed.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:16 μ γ νου ὁ καιος πολ κα μ σοφ ζου περισσ μ ποτε κπλαγ ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:16 Be not very just; neither be very wise: lest thou be confounded.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:16 Don't be excessively righteous, and don't be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself?

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:16 Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:16 Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise-- why destroy yourself?

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:16 So don't be too good or too wise! Why destroy yourself?

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:16 Be not over-righteous, nor show thyself too wise, why art thou desolate?

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:16 Do not be upright to excess and do not make yourself unduly wise: why should you destroy yourself?

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:16 Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself?

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:16 "Be not just to excess, and be not overwise, lest you be ruined.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:16 Don't be too virtuous, and don't be too wise. Why make yourself miserable?

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:16 Be not given overmuch to righteousness and be not over-wise. Why let destruction come on you?

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:16 Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself?

- **Do not:** Pr 25:16 Mt 6:1-7 9:14 15:2-9 23:5,23,24,29 Lu 18:12 Ro 10:2 Php 3:6 1Ti 4:3
- **overly wise:** Ec 12:12 Ge 3:6 Job 11:12 28:28 Pr 23:4 Ro 11:25 12:3 1Co 3:18,20 Col 2:18,23 Jas 3:13-17
- **ruin yourself** Mt 23:38 Rev 18:19

Do not be (Qal jussive = functions like a command) **excessively righteous and do not be overly** ([yother](#); Lxx - [perissos](#) - exceedingly) **wise**. - NIV - "Do not be overrighteous" The meaning of this section (Ec 7:16-18) is much debated. OT expert **William Barrick** in fact writes "Few verses have stimulated more discussion and investigation than Eccl 7:16–18 with their seeming contradiction to biblical norms of behavior."

Some interpret Solomon as warning against extremes, particularly forms of self-righteousness, legalism, or pretentious intellectualism.

Barrick for example writes "Eccl 7:16, 17 seem to recommend a response to the observation recorded in Eccl 7:15. Since being righteous or being wicked does not guarantee a longer or shorter life in comparison with other individuals, it is wise not to go to extremes in either righteousness or wickedness. The former will not guarantee living longer than anyone else and the latter will not guarantee dying sooner than anyone else."

Guzik - In light of the apparent vanity of life, Solomon here recommended a balanced approach to living. Be righteous, but not too much; be wise, but not too much; be wicked, but not too much; be foolish, but not too much.

Michael Eaton writes "R. N. Whybray on the other hand argues persuasively that what is discouraged is not excessive

righteousness but self-righteousness.⁴⁷ The Preacher holds that there is no righteous man (Ec 7:20). ‘**Do not be greatly righteous**’ must be taken ironically and must refer to the way a person thinks about himself and presents himself.” The translation too or overmuch goes somewhat beyond the Hebrew, which means ‘greatly’ and does not express the judgment implicit in ‘too great’ or ‘overmuch’. This view is confirmed in the next line where the Hebrew for **Do not make yourself overwise** (RSV) contains a Hebrew hithpaal which may mean ‘to play the wise man’ (cf. Num. 16:13 ‘play the part of a prince’; and 2 Sam. 13:5 ‘pretend to be ill’). Play-acting righteousness delights in the reputation of wisdom (cf. Matt. 23:7).

Duane Garrett - The warning not to be “overrighteous” or “overwise” is not an exhortation to do a little sinning. The Teacher is not dealing here with the issue of personal sins as such. Rather, he is concerned with a philosophy of life that seeks the benefits of long life, prosperity, and personal happiness through the strict observation of religious and wisdom principles. A modern way to put it would be, “Do not be a fanatic.” Also, as Crenshaw observes, v. 17 does not counsel that sin in moderation is acceptable. Rather, it implies that while some sin in everyone’s life is inevitable, those who embrace evil as a way of life are destroyed by it. (Borrow [New American Commentary – Volume 14: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs](#))

Walter Kaiser - Few verses in Ecclesiastes are more susceptible to incorrect interpretations than 7:16–18. For many, Solomon’s advice is the so-called golden mean; it is as if he had said: “*Don’t be too holy and don’t be too wicked. Sin to a moderate degree!*” What such commentators miss is that verses 16–17 are not cautioning against possessing too much real righteousness. The danger is that men might delude themselves and others through a multiplicity of pseudoreligious acts of sanctimoniousness; ostentatious showmanship in the art of worship; a spirit of hypercriticism against minor deviations from one’s own cultural norms, which are equated with God’s righteousness; and a disgusting conceit and supercilious, holier-than-thou attitude veneered over the whole mess. The real clue to this passage, as George R. Castellino demonstrated, is that the second verb in verse 16 “to be wise,” must be rendered reflexively (Hebrew Hithpaal form), as “to think oneself to be furnished with wisdom.” Furthermore, Castellino observed, even if this valid point about the reflexive nature of the verb is rejected for some reason, “Do not be wise” in verse 16 is to be understood as it is in Proverbs 3:7: “Be not wise in your own eyes” (emphasis added).¹ Accordingly, verse 17 would follow the same pattern as established for verse 16, because the two verses are part of the same thought. The resulting translation for verses 16–17 is:

7:16: Do not multiply [your] righteousness and do not play the part of the wise [in your own eyes; see Prov. 3:7]—why destroy yourself?

7:17: Do not multiply [your] wickedness and do not be a [downright] fool—why die before your time?

The correctness of this interpretation can be demonstrated by its compatibility with verse 18. It is good, says Solomon, that men should take hold of “this,” namely, true wisdom that comes from the fear of God, rather than grasping “that,” namely, the folly of fools. It is the fear of God that is the best protection against either absurdity. Neither man’s folly nor a conceited and strained righteousness will serve as a guide or as a guise to mask the real need of men. They must come to fear Him. That is true wisdom. Wisdom is then not a self-imposed estimate of one’s own abilities. Indeed, true wisdom will be a better protection against all these errors and excesses than ten rulers or sultans in a city (v. 19). (Borrow Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., [Ecclesiastes: Total Life, Everyman’s Bible Commentary \(Chicago: Moody Press, 1979\), 85–86.](#))

Ray Pritchard - This much-debated passage evidently means something like this: Don’t try to impress God by acting like you’re more righteous than you really are. God sees through the sham because His vision penetrates to the heart. You can’t control the length of your days by acting super-religious. Sometimes the righteous die young while the wicked live to a ripe old age. This is a true mystery. So what does it mean to be “overrighteous”? Louis Goldberg suggests that it means becoming overconscientious or super scrupulous about our daily lives. You can worry so much about the secondary details that you lose the joy of each new day. And what good is that—especially since you could die in the next six hours? Understood in this light, these verses are an Old Testament echo of Jesus’ warning to the Pharisees in Matthew 23. They strained at the gnats of Jewish law only to swallow the camel of sinful pride and selfish indulgence. Don’t overdo it, says Solomon, because if you major on the secondary details—which may in themselves be valuable—you risk cutting yourself off from family and friends. You can even end up destroying yourself.

Donald Glenn interprets this verse as follows - He urged his readers **not to be overrighteous** or **overwise** “lest they be confounded or astonished.” He meant they should not depend on their righteousness or wisdom to guarantee God’s blessing because *they* might be confounded, dismayed, or disappointed like the righteous people whom Solomon had seen perishing in spite of their righteousness (Ecc. 7:15). (SEE [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 276](#))

NET NOTE - The adjective יוֹתֵר (yoter) means “**too much; excessive**,” e.g., Ec 2:15 “excessively wise” (HALOT 404 s.v. 2 יוֹתֵר; BDB 452 s.v. יוֹתֵר). It is derived from the root יָתַר (yeter, “what is left over”; cf. HALOT 452 s.v. 1 יָתַר) and related to the verb יָתַר (yatar, Niphal “to be left over” and Hiphil “to have left over”; cf. HALOT 451–452). In Ec 2:15 the adjective יוֹתֵר is used with the noun יֵתְרוֹן (yitron, “advantage; profit”) in a wordplay or pun: The wise man has a relative “advantage” (יֵתְרוֹן) over the fool (Ec 2:13–14a); however, there is no ultimate advantage because both share the same fate—death (Ec 2:14b–15a). Thus, Qoheleth’s acquisition of

tremendous wisdom (Ec 1:16; 2:9) was “excessive” because it exceeded its relative advantage over folly: it could not deliver him from the same fate as the fool. He strove to obtain wisdom, yet it held no ultimate advantage. Likewise, in Ec 7:16, Qoheleth warns that wisdom and righteous behavior do not guarantee an advantage over wickedness and folly, because the law of retribution is sometimes violated. Heb “**So do not be overly righteous and do not be overly wise**” The Hitpa’el verb תִּתְחַכֵּם (titkhakkam, from חָכַם, khakkham, “to be wise”) means “to make or show yourself wise” (HALOT 314 s.v. חָכַם; BDB 314 s.v. חָכַם). The Hitpa’el may be understood as: (1) benefactive reflexive use which refers to an action done for one’s own behalf (e.g., Gen 20:7; Josh 9:12; 1 Kgs 8:33; Job 13:27): because the law of retribution is sometimes violated, it is not wise for a person to be overly dependent upon wisdom or righteousness for his own benefit; (2) estimative-declarative reflexive which denotes esteeming or presenting oneself in a certain state, without regard to the question of truthfulness (e.g., 2 Sam 13:5; Prov 13:6; Esth 8:17): it is useless to overly esteem oneself as wise or to falsely present oneself as wiser than he really is because the law of retribution sometimes fails to reward the wise. The enigma of this line—“overly righteous and overly wise”—may be resolved by proper classification of the Hitpa’el stem of this verb.

Why should you ruin yourself - NET = “otherwise you might be disappointed.”

NET NOTE - Or “**Why should you ruin yourself?**”; or “**Why should you destroy yourself?**” The verb שָׁמַם (shamem) is traditionally taken as “to destroy; to ruin oneself.” For its use here HALOT 1566 s.v. 2 שָׁמַם has “to cause oneself ruin”; BDB 1031 s.v. 2 שָׁמַם has “cause oneself desolation, ruin.” Most English versions take a similar approach: “Why destroy yourself?” (KJV, ASV, NEB, NRSV, MLB, NIV); “Why ruin yourself?” (NAB, NASB). However, in the Hitpo’el stem the root שָׁמַם never means this elsewhere, but is always nuanced elsewhere as “to be appalled; to be astonished; to be dumbfounded; to be confounded; to be horrified” (e.g., Ps 143:4; Isa 59:16; 63:5; Dan 8:27); cf. BDB 1031 s.v. 1 שָׁמַם; HALOT 1566 s.v. 1 שָׁמַם. It is taken this way in the English version of the Tanakh: “or you may be dumbfounded” (NJPS). Likewise, Cohen renders, “Why should you be overcome with amazement?” (A. Cohen, *The Five Megilloth [SoBB]*, 154). If a person was trusting in his own righteousness or wisdom to guarantee prosperity, he might be scandalized by the exceptions to the doctrine of retribution that Qoheleth had observed in 7:15. D. R. Glenn (“Ecclesiastes,” BKCOT, 994) notes: “This fits in nicely with Solomon’s argument here. He urged his readers not to be over-righteous or over-wise ‘lest they be confounded or astonished.’ He meant that they should not depend on their righteousness or wisdom to guarantee God’s blessing because they might be confounded, dismayed, or disappointed like the righteous people whom Solomon had seen perishing in spite of their righteousness [in 7:15].” (SEE [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 276](#)).

Ecclesiastes 7:17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:17 Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:17 Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?

NET Ecclesiastes 7:17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool; otherwise you might die before your time.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:17 μὴ σεβῇς πολὺ καὶ μὴ γίνῃς σκληρὸς νὰ μὴ ποθῇς τὸ τέλος σου

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:17 Be not very wicked; and be not stubborn: lest thou shouldest die before thy time.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:17 Don't be excessively wicked, and don't be foolish. Why should you die before your time?

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:17 Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool-- why die before your time?

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:17 On the other hand, don't be too wicked either. Don't be a fool! Why die before your time?

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:17 Do not much wrong, neither be thou a fool, why dost thou die within thy time?

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:17 Do not be wicked to excess, and do not be a fool: why die before your time?

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:17 Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time?

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:17 Be not wicked to excess, and be not foolish. Why should you die before your time?"

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:17 Don't be too wicked, and don't be a fool. Why should you die before your time is up?

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:17 Be not evil overmuch, and be not foolish. Why come to your end before your time?

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:17 Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time?

- **not:** Jer 2:33,34 Eze 8:17 16:20 Jas 1:21
- **why:** Ge 38:7-10 1Sa 25:38 Job 15:32,33 Ps 55:23 Pr 10:27 Ac 5:5,10 Ac 12:23

Related Passages:

Proverbs 10:27 The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

Job 36:14 "They die in youth, And their life perishes among the cult prostitutes.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE FOLLY OF LIVING RECKLESSLY

Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?- See comments on Ec 7:17. Wickedness and foolishness are often linked. A fool lives without the fear of God (Prov. 1:7), rushing into behavior that invites destruction. Solomon isn't permitting moderate wickedness. He warns against plunging into sin without restraint—a lifestyle of arrogant rebellion. **Walter Kaiser** translates it "Do not multiply [your] wickedness and do not be a [downright] fool—why die before your time?" Sinful living and foolish decisions can accelerate ruin—not just spiritually, but physically and socially. God allows consequences. In other words, foolishness has a deadline!

To reiterate, this verse does not imply that moderate sin is acceptable. Rather, it's a warning against extremes—especially arrogant, blatant sin and spiritual carelessness.

Donald Glenn - the fact that God did not punish in some cases (cf. v. 15b) should not be taken as a license to sin (do not be overwicked, v. 17); God might judge them and they might die before they had to (die before your time; cf. Ps. 55:23). (SEE [The Bible Knowledge Commentary Wisdom - Page 276](#)).

Michael Eaton - The contrary danger is capitulation to evil. Greatly (RSV overmuch) does not imply that wickedness in moderation is acceptable! To have omitted overmuch, apart from breaking the parallel with v. 16, would have contradicted vv. 20, 29. The Preacher recognizes wickedness as a fact of human experience. The right life walks the path between two extremes, shunning self-righteousness, but not allowing one's native wickedness to run its own course. The end-product of wickedness run riot may be an untimely death (Ps. 55:23). (Borrow [Ecclesiastes](#))

Bob Utley - There are national events related to the different seasons/times of human life. The mind/actions of those who fear God can extend the days of one's life (cf. Eccl. 7:12, 18). Faith effects longevity.

Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that you grasp this, And also not remove your hand from the other; For he who fears God will escape them all.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is best to take hold of one warning without letting go of the other warning; for the one who fears God will follow both warnings.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:18 γὰρ ὅτι τὴν κατὰ θεὸν ἐπιτοίμην σου τὴν φοβούμενόν σου θεὸς ἐξέλκεται τὴν ἄλλην

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is well for thee to hold fast by this; also by this defile not thine hand: for to them that fear God all things shall come forth well.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that you grasp the one and do not let the other slip from your hand. For the one who fears God will end up with both of them.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for

the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:18 Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that thou dost lay hold on this, and also, from that withdrawest not thy hand, for whoso is fearing God goeth out with them all.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is wise to hold on to one and not let go of the other, since the godfearing will find both.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that you should take hold of the one, without letting go of the other; for the one who fears God shall succeed with both.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good to hold to this rule, and not to let that one go; but he who fears God will win through at all events.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:18 It's good to hold on to the one and not let go of the other, because the one who fears God will be able to avoid both extremes.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good to take this in your hand and not to keep your hand from that; he who has the fear of God will be free of the two.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:18 It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand; for he who fears God shall come forth from them all.

- **good:** Ec 11:6 Pr 4:25-27 8:20 Lu 11:42
- **for:** Ec 8:12 12:13 Ps 25:12-14 145:19,20 Jer 32:40 Mal 4:2 Lu 1:50

Related Passages:

Proverbs 3:7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

TWO TRUTHS, ONE GUIDE: FEAR OF THE LORD

It is good that you grasp one thing and also not let go of the other- NET - " It is best to take hold of one warning without letting go of the other warning" The word "**warning**" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation two times in this line for clarity.

William Barrick - Back to an examination of what is **good** in life "under the sun," Solomon observes that (1) it is a **good** thing to both enjoy life while one has it and (2) to pursue godliness (Eccl 7:18). The one who fears God (see Eccl 3:14 and Eccl 5:7) maintains both pursuits. (Duane A. Garrett, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, New American Commentary , 324.) Fearing God includes, in this context, a sense of dependence upon Him for one's security.¹⁰ God gives the good things in life and He controls the time of one's death. ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#))

For the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.- NET = "the one who fears God will follow both warnings." (See NET NOTES below)

Fear in Ecclesiastes - Eccl 3:14 Eccl 5:7 Eccl 7:18 Eccl 8:12 Eccl 8:13 Eccl 12:13

Walter Kaiser - It is good, says Solomon, that men should take hold of "this," namely, true wisdom that comes from the fear of God, rather than grasping "that," namely, the folly of fools. It is the fear of God that is the best protection against either absurdity. Neither man's folly nor a conceited and strained righteousness will serve as a guide or as a guise to mask the real need of men. They must come to fear Him. That is true wisdom. Wisdom is then not a self-imposed estimate of one's own abilities. Indeed, true wisdom will be a better protection against all these errors and excesses than ten rulers or sultans in a city (v. 19). (Borrow Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., [Ecclesiastes: Total Life, Everyman's Bible Commentary \(Chicago: Moody Press, 1979\), 85-86.](#))

Bob Utley sees that as "a summary statement going back to Eccl. 7:15. From the context Qoheleth seems to encourage a righteous life and a prolonged life, both of which are related to an appropriate fear and respect for God (cf. Eccl. 3:14; 5:7; 8:12,13; 12:13; Prov. 1:7). There is evil in our world and in our hearts! God and His hidden will, goodness, and presence are fallen mankind's (cf. Eccl. 7:23; 3:11; 8:17) only hope. We cannot fully understand Him or our circumstances, but we can trust Him, obey Him, and abide

in faith amidst an unpredictable earthly life (cf. Eccl. 12:13)!...Life is unpredictable! God's work and will are hidden! Wisdom cannot find ultimate answers! In light of this, live in fear and faith, and leave the outcome to God. Avoid thinking human efforts can ever fully answer or overcome the uncertainties of this life!

Duane Garrett - Verse 18b, a famous crux, should be rendered, **'He who fears God comes forth with both of them.'** But what are the two things the God-fearer should hold to, and in what sense does he come forth with both? (**ED**: BUT SEE NET NOTES BELOW) In this context the two things to be maintained are, on the one hand, devotion to God and the teachings of wisdom and, on the other hand, enjoyment of the good things of life. [The God-fearer](#) "comes forth" with them in that he maintains both through his life. While the ascetic looks upon every form of indulgence or mirth as sin (against religion) or folly (against wisdom) and the libertine looks upon any restraint as a threat to his pleasure-seeking, the Teacher counsels combining true religion—the fear of God—with true enjoyment of the good things of life. (Borrow [New American Commentary – Volume 14: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs](#))

*the proper fear of God will prevent a person from trusting in righteousness
and wisdom alone for his security, and it will also prevent indulgence in wickedness and folly*

NET NOTE **n also not let go of the other** - The other warning. Qoheleth is referring to the two words of advice in Ec 7:16–17. He is not, as some suggest, urging his readers to grasp righteousness without letting go of wickedness. His point is not that people should live their lives with a balance of modest righteousness and modest wickedness. Because he urges the fear of God in Ec 7:18b, he cannot be inconsistent in suggesting that his readers offend the fear of God by indulging in some degree of sin in order to counterbalance an overly righteous life. Rather, the proper fear of God will prevent a person from trusting in righteousness and wisdom alone for his security, and it will also prevent indulgence in wickedness and folly.

NET NOTE **on comes forth with both of them** -Or "will escape both"; or "will go forth in both." The Hebrew phrase יֵצֵא אֶת־כֻּלָּם (yetse' 'et-kullam, "he will follow both of them") has been interpreted in several ways: (1) To adopt a balanced lifestyle that is moderately righteous while allowing for self-indulgence in moderate wickedness ("to follow both of them," that is, to follow both righteousness and wickedness). However, this seems to unnecessarily encourage an antinomian rationalization of sin and moral compromise. (2) To avoid the two extremes of being over-righteous and over-wicked. This takes יֵצֵא in the sense of "to escape," e.g., Gen 39:12, 15; 1 Sam 14:14; Jer 11:11; 48:9; cf. HALOT 426 s.v. 6 יֵצֵא.c; BDB 423 s.v. 1 יֵצֵא.d. (3) To follow both of the warnings given in 7:16–17. This approach finds parallels in postbiblical rabbinic literature denoting the action of discharging one's duty of obedience and complying with instruction. In postbiblical rabbinic literature the phrase יֵצֵא יָדַי (yetse' yade, "to go out of the hands") is an idiom meaning "to comply with the requirements of the law" (Jastrow 587 s.v. יֵצֵא Hif.5.a). This fits nicely with the context of 7:16–17 in which Qoheleth issued two warnings. In 7:18a Qoheleth exhorted his readers to follow both of his warnings: "It is best to grasp the first warning without letting go of the second warning." The person who fears God will heed both warnings. He will not depend upon his own righteousness and wisdom, but upon God's sovereign bestowal of blessings. Likewise, he will not exploit the exceptions to the doctrine of retribution to indulge in sin, rationalizing sin away just because the wicked sometimes do not get what they deserve.

NET NOTE **on both of them** - Heb "both." The term "warnings" does not appear in the Hebrew text, but is supplied in the translation for clarity. Alternately, "both [extremes]" or "both [fates]." The point of this expression is either (1) "he achieves both things," (2) "he escapes all these misfortunes," (3) "he does his duty by both," or (4) "he avoids both extremes." See D. Barthélemy, e.d., Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project, 3:580–81.

Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom strengthens the wise More than ten rulers of the city.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom gives a wise person more protection than ten rulers in a city.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:19 σοφ α βοηθ σει τ σοφ π ρ δ κα ξουσι ζοντας το ς ντας ν τ π λει

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom will help the wise man more than ten mighty men which are in the city.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom makes the wise man stronger than ten rulers of a city.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:19 One wise person is stronger than ten leading citizens of a town!

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:19 The wisdom giveth strength to a wise man, more than wealth the rulers who have been in a city.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom makes the wise stronger than a dozen governors in a city.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom gives strength to the wise more than ten rulers that are in a city.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom is a better defense for the wise man than would be ten princes in the city,

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom will help a wise person more than ten rulers can help a city.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom makes a wise man stronger than ten rulers in a town.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers that are in a city.

- Ec 9:15-18 2Sa 20:16-22 Pr 21:22 24:5 Col 1:9-11

Related Passages:

Proverbs 24:5-6 A wise man is strong, And a man of knowledge increases power. 6 For by wise guidance you will wage war, And in abundance of counselors there is victory.

One Wise Man vs 10 Rulers

GODLY WISDOM GREATER THAN HUMAN POWER

This verse is a clear affirmation of the practical strength and value of wisdom, even in comparison to political or military power.

Wisdom ([chokmah](#); Lxx - [sophia](#)) **strengthens a wise** ([chakam](#); Lxx - [sophos](#)) **man more than ten rulers who are in a city** - Strengthens (חָזַק *ḥāzēq* - 'azaz) means to make strong, to empower. Wisdom does not just inform—it fortifies. **Ten rulers** (עֲשָׂרָה שְׂלִיטִים - 'āšārāh šallīṭīm) refers to authoritative leaders, governors, judges, people of rank and decision-making power. The number “**ten**” suggests fullness, completeness, like a full council or board. One might title this verse “One wise man versus ten politicians!” Even a group of well-positioned leaders can’t match the life-preserving power of genuine wisdom in one man.

The wise man here isn't strong physically or politically, but his discernment, insight, and moral courage give him superior stability. In ancient times, cities were governed by councils or elders (cf. Ruth 4:1–2). Ten rulers imply a complete, strong governing body. Yet Solomon says one wise person, with spiritual and moral clarity, is stronger and more beneficial than a whole panel of leaders lacking wisdom.

This verse parallels the principle found in Proverbs: wisdom is better than strength (Prov. 24:5, Ecclesiastes 9:16). God's view of power is internal before external, spiritual before political. The fear of the Lord—true wisdom—provides more protection, influence, and endurance than human power structures. Even in cities (centers of power), wisdom is superior.

[Bob Utley](#) Godly wisdom is far stronger than the opinion/wisdom of many political leaders (cf. Eccl. 10:5). Wisdom is a strong ally in this fallen world (cf. Eccl. 7:12; 9:13-18), but it cannot shield the believers from evil, pain, injustice, and bad circumstances.

William Barrick - Wisdom Rather Than Perfection (Eccl 7:19–22) Next, Solomon turns to an illustration in order to emphasize the great value of wisdom (Eccl 7:19). He compares an individual's benefits from wisdom to the benefits a city experiences by having ten rulers to take care of the needs of her citizens. **Eaton** concludes that the illustration teaches that “wisdom in the fear of God may be greater than the collective wisdom of a group of experienced leaders.” (Borrow Eaton - [Ecclesiastes](#)) The thought fits the instruction found in Proverbs 24:5–6 and anticipates a more expanded illustration in Ecclesiastes 9:13–16. (Compare these illustrations with the historical example of a wise woman in 2 Sam 20:15–22.) ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#))

The Quiet Power of the Wise - This verse reminds us that true strength isn't always visible. While rulers may hold political power, wisdom offers stability, courage, and discernment that lasts longer and reaches deeper. Think of biblical examples: Joseph's wisdom saved Egypt (Genesis 41). Daniel's insight outlasted kings and empires (Daniel 6). Jesus' wisdom baffled the religious elite (Matthew 22:46). The world looks to armies and politicians. But God looks for those wise enough to fear Him and walk in truth. “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord.” (Zechariah 4:6) Do I seek worldly strength or godly wisdom? Am I investing in discernment that can guide others and endure chaos?

- Seek wisdom more than influence. Better to be unknown and wise than known and foolish.
- Use wisdom to serve and guide. Wisdom is meant to strengthen you AND bless others, especially when leadership fails.

- Don't envy power—pursue understanding. Titles come and go. Wisdom leaves a lasting mark.
- Let wisdom rule your city. Your “city” might be your home, work, or church. Lead it with wisdom, not control.
- Value God's Word as the source of wisdom. True strength comes from Scripture-shaped thinking, not opinion or popularity.
- A wise person with God's insight is stronger than a room full of rulers. If you want enduring strength, seek wisdom—because it builds what power alone cannot.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - BLESSED FORGETFULNESS

Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city. There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you— for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.
Ecclesiastes 7:19-22

There is a vast difference between knowledge and wisdom. College can give you knowledge, but it won't necessarily give you wisdom. You have to pick that up on your own. Which is not to say that you can't get wisdom in college, only that it doesn't come as a fringe benefit of paying your tuition. Biology is the science of life; wisdom is the understanding of life. That roughly is the difference between knowledge and wisdom. You need both to be successful.

Ec 7:19 tells us that wisdom elevates a person above his contemporaries. Those who have it will rise to the top. Solomon suggests that we take ten men—any ten men—and study them carefully. Then consider one truly wise man. That one wise man will in his wisdom be more powerful than the ten men with their accumulated knowledge.

Solomon also reminds us that we're all sinners and then applies that truth in an unexpected way: Don't pay attention to everything others say about you. That much we've heard before, and it stands as a piece of good advice. People are going to criticize you no matter what you do. My mother taught me to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." That's not always true. Words do hurt, sometimes much worse than broken bones.

Sometimes it pays to be a little hard of hearing. The reason may surprise you: "You may hear your servant cursing you." Just substitute "your roommate" or "your fellow-worker" or "your best friend," and you get the basic message.

Don't pay too much attention to what people say, because if you do, you will sooner or later hear people say things about you that hurt you deeply. What will you do then? Hearing a critical comment may not be helpful because it can lead to all sorts of wrong conclusions. The key is the word cursing. You will hear your servant cursing, lose your cool and wonder, Why is my servant cursing me? You end up losing your peace of mind and may in fact be tempted to lash out in blind anger.

When other people fail him, the wise man remembers that he himself has failed others many times. That one fact will produce a wonderful quality in your life— patience. You can't have wisdom without it. It matters not where you are or who you are or what you do. People will fail you. Your best friends will fail you. Your coworkers will fail you. Your brothers and sisters will fail you. Your parents will fail you. If you live long enough, everyone you count dear in life will fail you sooner or later.

The wise person remembers that he too has failed many times.

Remembering that will temper your anger.

Remembering that will keep you from rash decisions.

Remembering that will help you hold your tongue.

God of righteous judgment, when I am tempted to strike back at those who have hurt me, remind me that I too am a sinner and prone to many mistakes. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- Are you angry at anyone because they failed you? In what ways have you failed others?
- Take a moment and pray for the grace to control your tongue.

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read 2 Samuel 20:14-22; Matthew 18:21-35; and 1 Corinthians 13:3-7.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not one truly righteous person on the earth who continually does good and never sins.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:20 τι νθρωπος ο κ σπιν δ καιος ν τ γ ς ποι σει γαθ ν κα ο χ μαρτ σετ αι

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:20 For there is not a righteous man in the earth, who will do good, and not sin

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:20 There is certainly no righteous man on the earth who does good and never sins.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:20 There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:20 Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:20 Because there is not a righteous man on earth that doth good and sinneth not.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:20 No one on earth is sufficiently upright to do good without ever sinning.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:20 Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:20 yet there is no man on earth so just as to do good and never sin.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:20 Certainly, there is no one so righteous on earth that he always does what is good and never sins.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:20 There is no man on earth of such righteousness that he does good and is free from sin all his days.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

- there: 1Ki 8:46 2Ch 6:36 Job 15:14-16 Ps 130:3 143:2 Pr 20:9 Isa 53:6 Ro 3:23 Jas 3:2 1Jn 1:8-10
- doeth: Isa 64:6

Related Passages:

Romans 3:10 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Job 4:17 'Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?

1 Kings 8:46 "When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near;

Psalms 143:2 And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—

None Spared Except One Covered by Cross

NONE RIGHTEOUS EVEN BEST FALL SHORT

Indeed (kî) often used as "for" or "because" (cf **NET** = "**For** there is not one truly righteous person..."), here it emphasizes a universal truth—a reason to avoid trusting in personal righteousness (Ec 7:16).

There is not a righteous man (אָדָם 'āḏām: Human being, mankind) **on earth who continually does good and who never sins** - This verse bluntly affirms a universal truth: no one is perfectly righteous. Even those considered "righteous" fall short of God's perfection. Even the best people—those considered righteous—are not perfectly sinless. There is no person who always does what is good and never sins. Human nature is universally flawed. This echoes themes found throughout Scripture (cf. Romans 3:10, 23). It tempers expectations and confronts self-righteousness. Solomon refutes the idea that anyone can attain perfection by works. Even the best, most faithful individuals fall short of God's perfect standard. This leads to the theological need for grace and ultimately, Christ, the only sinless one (Hebrews 4:15).

Bob Utley "who never sins" This is an affirmation of the fallenness of all humanity (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:46; 2 Chr. 6:36; Job 15:14-16; 25:4; Ps. 130:3-4; 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Rom. 3:9-18,23; 1 John 1:8-2:1). This shows the foolishness of perfectionism and/or human effort (cf. Eccl. 7:16-18).

Righteous (šaddîq) refers to someone upright in character and conduct. Used throughout the Old Testament to describe people like Noah, Job, etc. However, this verse makes clear that even the "righteous" are not continually righteous. Never sins (w^elō'-yeḥṭā') means never miss the mark. The structure is emphatic: not ever sinning – which is impossible for any human.

Solomon is unpacking deep and difficult realities: The righteous sometimes suffer (v.15). Extremes in morality or foolishness can destroy a person (vv.16–17). The fear of God leads to wise balance (v.18). Wisdom offers strength (v.19). Then in v.20, he reminds us why none of us should be self-righteous: no one is perfect. Even the righteous fall short. This verse supports the argument that no person should rely on their own righteousness as if it were flawless.

NET NOTE - Righteousness alone cannot always protect a person from calamity (7:15–16); therefore, something additional, such as wisdom, is needed. The need for wisdom as protection from calamity is particularly evident in the light of the fact that no one is truly righteous (7:19–20).

William Barrick - ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#)) Eccl 7:20–22 return to a thought brought up earlier in Ec 7:7 (**For oppression makes a wise man mad, And a bribe corrupts the heart.**). Even the wise and the righteous manifest the effects of a fallen nature. No one can claim to be free of sin during his or her lifetime "under the sun." That flaw in the human character prevents anyone from being able to depend on their own wisdom or righteousness to provide them the enjoyment of God's good gifts. Ec 20 sounds Pauline (cp. Ro 3:9–20, esp. Ro 3:10, the only potential New Testament quotation of Ecclesiastes). Interestingly, Paul chooses to cite passages from the Old Testament to prove the sinfulness of mankind. The doctrine of total depravity originates in the Old Testament. This very verse appears to be an expansion of a briefer statement made by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kgs 8:46, "When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) . . .").

The apostle Paul declares that "the wages of sin is death" in Romans 6:23. Although Solomon does not refer to wages in this way, he speaks of the labor of mankind and the fact that labor does not succeed in gaining an escape from death.¹³ Paul continues his proclamation with a contrast, "but the gift of God is eternal life." Interestingly, Solomon expresses a similar thought by focusing on the gifts that one receives from God in this life and the fact that He has set "eternity in their heart" (Eccl 3:11–13). When the reader connects Ecclesiastes 7:20 with Eccl 7:15–18, he learns that no amount of righteous living can prevent the sin that so easily assails every person. Both sin and death are certain— neither can be avoided completely. Thus, the question that remains involves how a person can be delivered from sin and death. How can an individual experience life beyond the sun? The answer has already been revealed with the imperative in Eccl 5:7 ("fear God") and the advice in Eccl 7:18 ("the one who fears God comes forth with both of them").

Someone might question Solomon's assertion that everyone is an unrighteous sinner. Anticipating just such an objection, Solomon directs the reader to consider the tongue (see James 3:2–12). Each individual fails in act or speech (Eccl 7:20–22).

Everyone has spoken ill of another outside that person's presence (see 10:20). Overly righteous (self-righteous) individuals might hold a grudge over what someone else has said about them behind their backs. Overly wicked persons respond in kind with cutting speech against those whom they believe have defamed them. The individual acutely aware of his or her own sinfulness will more readily shrug off the foolish and unkind remarks of others. Solomon knows that his major point involves demonstrating that everyone sins—something they must know before they can rightly prepare for life beyond the sun. However, he also takes the opportunity to offer instruction as to how a wise and righteous person ought to behave while yet "under the sun."

"Why the Best Still Need Grace" Ecclesiastes 7:20 is a mirror to the soul. We try, strive, and clean ourselves up, but the stain of sin remains. Even those who love God falter in word, thought, or motive. This verse humbles us and levels the playing field. No one can say, "I am good enough." It pushes us away from pride and into the arms of mercy. And in Jesus Christ, we meet the only one who never sinned—who became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that we could become righteous in Him. God doesn't expect perfection—He offers it in Christ.

Ecclesiastes 7:21 Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:21 Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:21 Also do not take to heart everything people say, Lest you hear your servant cursing

you.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:21 Also, do not pay attention to everything that people say; otherwise, you might even hear your servant cursing you.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:21 κα γε ε ς π ντας το ς λ γους ο ς λαλ σουσιν μ θ ς καρδ αν σου πω ς μ κο ς το δο λου σου καταρωμ νου σε

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:21 Also take no heed to all the words which ungodly men shall speak; lest thou hear thy servant cursing thee.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:21 Don't pay attention to everything people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you,

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:21 Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:21 Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you--

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:21 Don't eavesdrop on others-- you may hear your servant curse you.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:21 Also to all the words that they speak give not thy heart, that thou hear not thy servant reviling thee.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:21 Again, do not listen to all that people say, then you will not hear your servant abusing you.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:21 Do not give heed to everything that people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you;

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:21 Do not give heed to every word that is spoken lest you hear your servant speaking ill of you,

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:21 Don't take everything that people say to heart, or you may hear your own servant cursing you.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:21 Do not give ear to all the words which men say, for fear of hearing the curses of your servant.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:21 Do not give heed to all the things that men say, lest you hear your servant cursing you;

- take no heed: Heb. give not thine heart, 2Sa 19:19
- unto: 2Sa 16:10 Isa 29:21 1Co 13:5-7

Related Passages:

Proverbs 10:19 When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 19:11 A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.

James 3:8–10 – The tongue is a fire...with it we bless God and curse men.

Matthew 12:36 "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

Psalms 141:3 Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.

THE WISDOM OF OVERLOOKING WORDS

Also (gam) connects this verse with the previous one, expanding on wisdom in relational matters. This verse recognizes the reality of sin (see Ec 7:20) that even trusted people sometimes say unkind things.

Do not take seriously all words which are spoken Don't internalize or overreact to everything you hear people saying. Don't let words disturb your peace or cloud your judgment. Don't brood over, or be emotionally controlled by what people say, especially negative or careless words. Don't give weight to everything you hear because people can say a lot, and not all of it is meaningful,

kind, or true.

Bob Utley "take seriously" is literally "give your heart to." It is idiomatic for a strenuous mental search for truth/wisdom (cf. Eccl. 1:17; 7:21; 8:9,16). The writer encourages us not to take ourselves or the words of others too seriously. We often say what we do not really mean!

lest you hear your servant cursing you - Even someone under your authority (like a servant, child, employee) may express frustration or criticism. If you listen to everything, you may end up hearing harsh or disrespectful things from those you lead.

Solomon is dealing with wisdom in a complex, unjust world. He has already said: Righteous people can perish early (v.15). Avoid extremes in morality (vv.16–17). Fear of God brings balance (v.18). Wisdom is stronger than rulers (v.19). But no one is perfectly righteous (v.20). Now in verse 21, Solomon offers practical wisdom: Don't take every spoken word—especially criticism—to heart. This is a warning against hypersensitivity and overreaction. The verse encourages emotional restraint, humility, and discretion.

"Selective Hearing of the Wise" How much emotional pain could we avoid if we didn't internalize every comment spoken about us? Solomon, wise and weary, reminds us that some things are better unheard. The words of others, especially from those close or beneath us, can wound—often unintentionally. The remedy is not retaliation, but restraint. God calls us to humility and grace, recognizing our own flaws (see v.22) and offering to others the patience we want shown to us. Don't replay hurtful words like a broken record. Let them fall to the ground unheeded—and rest in the Word that truly matters: God's opinion of you.

Ecclesiastes 7:22 For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:22 For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:22 For many times, also, your own heart has known That even you have cursed others.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:22 For you know in your own heart that you also have cursed others many times.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:22 τι πλειστ κης πονηρε σετα σε κα καθ δους πολλ ς κακ σει καρδ αν σου πως κα γε σ κατηρ σω τ ρους

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:22 For many times he shall trespass against thee, and repeatedly shall he afflict thine heart; for thus also hast thou cursed others.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:22 for you know that many times you yourself have cursed others.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:22 Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:22 for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:22 For you know how often you yourself have cursed others.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:22 For many times also hath thy heart known that thou thyself also hast reviled others.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:22 For often, as you very well know, you have abused others.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:22 your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:22 for you know in your heart that you have many times spoken ill of others.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:22 Your conscience knows that you have cursed others many times.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:22 Your heart has knowledge how frequently others have been cursed by you.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:22 your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.

- also: 1Ki 2:44 Mt 15:19 18:32-35 Joh 8:7-9 Jas 3:9

Related Passages:

James 3:2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

Romans 2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

Matthew 7:1-2 “Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2“For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Matthew 15:19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

Man in the Mirror
Speaking Back to the Man!

REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAID WHEN YOU'VE BEEN THE CRITIC!

For (ki) (term of explanation) - This verse continues directly from Ecclesiastes 7:21 giving the reason not to take to heart all words you hear.

You also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others - You also have realized is more literally “Your heart knows” or “you have known inwardly.” In short, Solomon says you’ve done it too. Deep down, you know this is true. Your heart convicts you—you too have said unkind things about others. You have spoken rashly, complained about others behind their back, or reacted in anger. So, when you overhear others doing the same about you, don’t act surprised or self-righteous. You have also **cursed others**, criticized them, or spoken badly behind their backs—even those you might admire or serve.

This verse gives one of the most realistic and humbling reminders in Scripture: We’re often offended when others speak against us...But we’ve done the exact same thing. Solomon isn’t excusing gossip or dishonor—he’s calling for mercy rooted in humility. We forgive others’ words when we remember our own. It’s a call to recognize our shared sinfulness, and to treat others as we would want to be treated (cf. Matthew 7:1–2).

You Too Have Spoken Rashly - When someone gossips or complains about us, our first reaction is hurt, anger, even outrage. But God, through Solomon, whispers something else: “Yes—it stings. But remember... you’ve done it too.” That memory softens our pride. It makes mercy possible. It reminds us: we are all people in need of grace. Don’t let someone’s words become a prison in your soul. Release them—because you know you’ve needed release too.

- Everyone has spoken foolish or harsh words. No one is innocent in this area—not even you.
- Self-awareness leads to mercy. When you remember your own sin, you’re slower to condemn others.
- Humility disarms offense. You don’t have to react to every insult when you understand your own flaws.
- Mercy is stronger than memory. Don’t nurse past offenses—heal them with grace.
- Extend grace when others speak poorly of you. They are flawed like you are.
- Guard your own speech. Reflect: when have you cursed, belittled, or gossiped about others?
- Repent for past careless words. Let this verse lead you to confession.
- Use self-awareness as a tool for peace. The next time you’re offended, pause and remember your own missteps.
- Teach this principle to your children or disciples. Mercy flows from humility. Lead others by example.

Ecclesiastes 7:23 I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise"; But it was far from me.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:23 I have examined all this by wisdom; I said, "I am determined to comprehend this"— but it was beyond my grasp.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:23 π ντα τα τα πε ρασα ν τ σοφ ε πα σοφισθ σομαι

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:23 All these things have I proved in wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:23 I have tested all this by wisdom. I resolved, "I will be wise," but it was beyond me.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise"-- but this was

beyond me.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:23 I have always tried my best to let wisdom guide my thoughts and actions. I said to myself, "I am determined to be wise." But it didn't work.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have tried by wisdom; I have said, 'I am wise,' and it is far from me.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:23 Thanks to wisdom, I have found all this to be true; I resolved to be wise, but this was beyond my reach!

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:23 All these things I probed in wisdom. I said, "I will acquire wisdom"; but it was beyond me.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:23 I used wisdom to test all of this. I said, "I want to be wise, but it is out of my reach."

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have put to the test by wisdom; I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, "I will be wise"; but it was far from me.

- I said: Ge 3:5 1Ki 3:11,12 11:1-8 Ro 1:22 1Co 1:20

Related Passages:

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Job 28:28 "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'"

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

THE LIMITS OF EVEN THE WISE

I tested (tried, examined) **all this with wisdom**, - **All this** may to the insights of the previous section (Ec 7:15–22), but could go further back. Solomon used wisdom as his method or lens for evaluation. Solomon didn't just philosophize but he applied wisdom to test life's realities. But his testing had limits.

Bob Utley "**I tested**" This VERB (BDB 650, KB 702, *Piel* PERFECT) denotes the author's approach to finding true wisdom (cf. Eccl. 2:1)....Wisdom is hard to find (Eccl. 3:11; 8:17), but must be sought (i.e., Proverbs 1-8).

and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.- **NET** - "I am determined to comprehend this"—but it was beyond my grasp." Solomon set his heart to attain true wisdom—not just knowledge, but moral and metaphysical understanding. Wisdom was always beyond his grasp no matter how diligently he pursued.

Bob Utley **I will be wise**" This VERB (BDB 314, KB 314, *Qal* COHORTATIVE) denotes a self determination. However, human effort cannot discover the mysteries of God or the mysteries of a fallen world (cf. Eccl. 1:13-18)!

This verse begins a new reflective section where Solomon moves from observation of wisdom (vv.15–22) to personal experience. He now confesses that despite applying himself to wisdom, he could not grasp its full depth. He sought wisdom, but found that it remained elusive—"far from me." Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, reaches the humbling realization: ultimate wisdom belongs to God alone.

This verse deals with the limits of human understanding, the gap between effort and divine revelation so that even the wisest can't master life. This verse echoes Job 28, where it's asked: "But where can wisdom be found? ... God understands its way." (Job 28:12, 23) Solomon admits that even wisdom must be received as a gift, not seized by intellect. This aligns with Proverbs 9:10 where Solomon wrote that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

*Solomon confesses that he lacks the wisdom
that has the capability of answering life's tough questions*

William Barrick - ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#)) **The Search for an Explanation** (Eccl 7:23–29) The final section of chapter 7 (Eccl 7:23–29) continues the focus on wisdom. Solomon confesses that he lacks the wisdom that has the capability of answering

life's tough questions—especially questions about the inequities of life and the inevitability of death. The failure lies partly in the fact that he relies upon his own desire and will to be wise (Eccl 7:23). True wisdom comes only from God. How can Solomon make such a statement about the failure of his wisdom, when God had granted him an abundance of wisdom (1 Kgs 3:9–12)? According to the historical account, God gave Solomon wisdom primarily to discern and administer justice. As he writes Ecclesiastes, however, Solomon realizes that his wisdom has limits. Only God is all-wise. No human being possesses the capacity to fully understand God's plan and program. Solomon's search for that kind of wisdom brought him to the same questions and the same conclusion as those reached by Job (see Job 28:12–13, 23). The ultimate wisdom does not reside "in the land of the living" (Job 28:13), but God knows its place (Job 28:23). Yes, such wisdom "is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?" (Eccl 7:24). As for the answer to entering life beyond the sun, Job speaks of a Redeemer (Job 19:25–27; cp. Job 33:23–28). Does Solomon know about a Redeemer? To what conclusion will his observations lead him?

13 Note the use of the word (Hebrew *yithron*) translated variously as "gain," "advantage," and "profit" in Eccl 7:1:3; 2:11, 13; 3:9; 5:8, 15; 7:12; 10:10, 11.

"Wise, Yet Wanting" How humbling it is to admit, "I thought I could figure it all out—but I couldn't." That's the voice of Ecclesiastes 7:23. The wisest man on earth tried to master life with wisdom. And still, wisdom was distant. In that confession, Solomon invites us to reverent dependence. You cannot control or comprehend everything. But you can fear God, and trust Him. It's not the one who knows most who is wise, but the one who knows God is wise—and lives accordingly. Wisdom has limits—even for the wise. Full understanding is not attainable by human effort alone. The fear of the Lord is the only true foundation. It's not found in books or success, but in reverent relationship with God through His Word and prayer. The upshot is that we need let go of needing to have all the answers. It's okay not to understand why things happen. Trust God's higher wisdom. Do you ask God for wisdom daily. He gives generously to those who ask (James 1:5).

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - LIVING IN THE VALLEY OF ACHOR

All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise"—but this was beyond me. Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound—who can discover it? So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. Ecclesiastes 7:23-25

That is really stupid!" Perhaps you've said those words about some policy in your local supermarket, bank, or even some act of congress. But do you ever consider how our own selfish acts are at times stupid? Take a moment to ponder the last two phrases of verse 25: "the stupidity of wickedness" and "the madness of folly." In what sense is wickedness truly stupid?

The foolishness of the wicked is not always obvious to them; their actions may even seem to them to make sense. Consider Hosea's unfaithful wife, a woman named Gomer. She had broken her marriage vows and chosen a life of repeated adultery. Time and again the prophet had appealed to his wife to come home. But she would not do it.

"I will go after my lovers," she said, "who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink" (Hosea 2:5). Like the Prodigal Son who left his father for the "far country," she enjoyed the passing pleasures of sin. She loved the nightlife, the excitement, the parties, the food, the wine, and the late-night trysts. In her rebellious heart, she was done with the boring routine of daily life—no more picking up after the children, no more meals to prepare for an unappreciative family, no more listening to her husband quote Scripture day and night.

There are times in life when you have to let people make their own choices. Sometimes you have to love them enough to let them go—even if you know their choices will only bring them (and you) pain, sorrow, and deep regret. No one who has ever wept over a wayward child (or a wayward mate) can doubt the anguish of Hosea's heart as he watched his sweetheart destroy herself step by step.

Your loved ones can walk out on you, but they can never walk out on God. The Hound of Heaven will pursue them relentlessly, wooing

them, convicting them, giving them just enough pleasure to make them miserable but not enough to make them happy.

Wickedness is truly stupid and sinful folly—nothing but madness—as Gomer discovered and as countless others have experienced over the years. Here is God's promise regarding His wayward children, made to Gomer and the children of Israel. "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope" (Hosea 2:14-15). The name "Achor" means "trouble" or "suffering."

God promises to lead His children into the valley of suffering, where they face the consequences of their own sins. Yet on the other side of the valley He will erect a "door of hope," where they can begin a brand-new life.

Holy Father, deliver me from thinking that the wickedness of others somehow makes me more righteous.
Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- What is your definition of wickedness? List three contemporary examples.
- What areas of wickedness can you find in your own life?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Deuteronomy 30:11-14; 1 Kings 3:5-14; and Romans 7:15-25.

Ecclesiastes 7:24 What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious. Who can discover it?

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:24 That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:24 As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, Who can find it out?

NET Ecclesiastes 7:24 Whatever has happened is beyond human understanding; it is far deeper than anyone can fathom.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:24 κα ατ μακρ νθη π μο μακρ ν π ρ ν κα βαθ βθος τ ζ ε ρ σει α τ

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:24 That which is far beyond what was, and a great depth, who shall find it out?

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:24 What exists is beyond reach and very deep. Who can discover it?

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:24 That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:24 Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound-- who can discover it?

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:24 Wisdom is always distant and difficult to find.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:24 Far off is that which hath been, and deep, deep, who doth find it?

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:24 The past is out of reach, buried deep -- who can discover it?

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:24 That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:24 What exists is far-reaching; it is deep, very deep: who can find it out?

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:24 Whatever wisdom may be, it is out of reach. It is deep, very deep. Who can find out what it is?

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:24 Far off is true existence, and very deep; who may have knowledge of it?

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:24 That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

- De 30:11-14 Job 11:7,8 28:12-23,28 Ps 36:6 139:6 Isa 55:8,9 Ro 11:33 1Ti 6:16

Related Passages:

Deuteronomy 29:29+ "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Job 5:9 Who does great and unsearchable things, Wonders without number.

Job 11:7 "Can you discover the depths of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty?

Job 15:8 "Do you hear the secret counsel of God, And limit wisdom to yourself?

Job 28:12; 23 "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? 23 "God understands its way, And He knows its place.

Psalms 139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it.

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

WISDOM BEYOND REACH THE MYSTERY BELONGS TO GOD

What has been is remote (rāḥōq - far off, distant or inaccessible) **and exceedingly mysterious** (literally "and deep, deep"). **Who** (mī) **can discover** ([matsa](#); Lxx - [heurisko](#)) **it?** (rhetorical question - cf Job's two questions Job 11:7) - **What has been** refers to the totality of existence—past events, outcomes, and divine purposes. **Remote** (rāḥōq) is often to describe something physically, emotionally, or intellectually out of reach. Life's ultimate meaning is not close to human comprehension. The nature of existence and divine wisdom is infinitely deep—beyond human probing. Solomon answers his own search saying in effect no one can find it. This isn't despair, but realism. The mystery belongs to God (cf. Deut. 29:29+). This verse declares the limits of human wisdom and the transcendence of divine understanding. God has revealed some things, but much remains hidden. Mystery is part of our faith. Hebrews 11:1 says "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Discover ([matsa](#)) is a keyword in Ecclesiastes 7 where it is used 7x - Eccl. 7:14; Eccl. 7:24; Eccl. 7:26; Eccl. 7:27; Eccl. 7:28; Eccl. 7:29;

Bob Utley - Qoheleth discovered he could not discover! His search was sincere, thorough, intensive. God has put in our hearts the desire "to know," "to understand," but it is beyond our current fallen ability. The "desire" probably comes from our being made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27), but sin has damaged our ability (cf. Genesis 3). Yet we still seek, search, yearn, and strive (cf. 1 Cor. 13:9-13)!

NET NOTE on **Exceedingly mysterious** Heb "It is deep, deep—who can find it?" The repetition of the word "deep" emphasizes the degree of incomprehensibility. **ED**: From 'āmaq, meaning "profound, unsearchable, hidden beneath the surface." Used in Job 11:8: "They are higher than the heavens... deeper than Sheol—what can you know?" See also Job 5:9; 11:7; 15:8; Rom. 11:33 (twice)

This verse follows Solomon's personal confession in v.23: "I said, 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me." In v.24, Solomon continues to express the depth and distance of true wisdom. He acknowledges that the ultimate meaning of things—the deep purposes of God, the full explanation of life's mysteries—remain beyond human grasp. This is part of the book's ongoing theme: while wisdom is valuable, it is not all-powerful, and it cannot fully explain life's perplexities.

"The Peace of Not Knowing" We often crave certainty—answers to suffering, timing, justice, and purpose. But Solomon reminds us: some things are hidden. This isn't meant to frustrate you—but to lead you to trust. If God revealed everything, there'd be no need for faith. But by hiding some things, He invites us to lean—not on understanding, but on His unchanging character. You don't need all the answers to have peace. You need to know the One who holds the answers.

- Life is filled with mystery. Don't expect to fully understand all things under the sun.
- Wisdom has limits. Even the best thinkers can't explain everything.
- God's ways are deeper than ours. Accept the difference between Creator and creation.
- Faith means trusting amid mystery. Some things are meant to be wondered at, not explained.
- Humility is the proper response to the unknown. Let unanswered questions make you worship, not worry.
- Let go of the need to control outcomes. Surrender what is "too deep" to God.
- Read Scripture with humility. Don't force answers where God has left tension or mystery.
- Be patient with unanswered prayers. Trust that God sees what you cannot.
- Avoid arrogance in teaching or theology. Acknowledge that some truths are beyond full human grasp.
- Find rest in mystery. The God who hides some things is still wise, good, and sovereign.

. Illustration Ideas

A man peering into a deep, dark well labeled "Wisdom" with no visible bottom.

A scroll floating in the sky, rolled up, just out of reach, glowing.

A labyrinth below a mountain—representing the complexity of discovering God's ways.

An ancient locked door with a sign: "The Depths Belong to the Lord."

A man looking at a star-filled sky labeled "God's Wisdom"—standing in awe, not confusion.

Discover (find) ([04672](#)) matsa means to find, attain. The verb is employed in both the active and passive senses (to be found). In addition, it is also used in a causative sense, to cause to find. Finally, the word is employed in several idioms that carry special meanings.

Victor Hamilton - TWOT online - There are approximately 450 usages of this root in the OT. Most of these are in the Qal stem (Gerleman, 306 times; but according to Koehler Baumgartner, KB, p. 553b, 310 times.) As we shall see, although its basic meaning is "to find" (in the LXX, mostly *euriskein*), *māsā'*, also assumes other shades of meaning. The Niphal stem of this verb appears 141 times (Gerleman) or 135 times (KB). Once again, the expected translation would be the passive of the Qal, "to be found." But such translations as "overpowered," "captured," and "apprehended" are also discoverable. Note that in the LXX the translation of *māsā'* is often not *euriskō* but something like *haliskomai* "be caught, held."

The evidence of related languages is helpful. Hebrew *māsā'* is to be related to Aramaic *meṭā'*, "to reach, attain" (the word in BA for "find" is *sekaḥ*); to Ethiopic *maṣ'a* "to come, arrive"; and to Ugaritic *mṣa/mṣa* "to reach" (UT 19: no. 1524).

There seems to be, then, sufficient grounds to establish for *māsā'*, in the Qal stem not only the meaning "to find" but also "to come upon, meet, reach." As a generalization, we may say that whenever *māsā'*, is used to describe a result following a time of "seeking" the translation is "to find." Thus, Deut. 4:29, "if you seek (*bāqash*) the Lord, you shall find (*māsā'*) him." Cf. Jeremiah 29:13; Song 5:6. "Seek (*dārash*) the Lord, while he may be found (*māsā'*) (Isaiah 55:6), cf. 1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 15:2; "they shall seek (*šāḥar*) me early, but shall not find (*māsā'*) me" (Proverbs 1:28).

We may add to this list the copious references to finding favor (*ḥēn*) in the eyes of another (God or one's fellow man): Genesis 6:8; Genesis 18:3; Genesis 19:19; Genesis 32:5 (H 6); Genesis 33:8, 10, 15; Genesis 34:11; Genesis 39:4; Genesis 47:25, 29; Genesis 50:4. The idea obviously is to gain acceptance or to win approbation. The phrase occurs approximately forty times in the OT.

There are twelve instances in which the subject of *māsā'* is God: Genesis 18:26, 28, 30; Genesis 44:16; Deut. 32:10; Jeremiah 23:11; Ezekiel 22:30; Hosea 9:10; Psalm 17:3; Psalm 89:20 [H 21]; Job 33:10; Neh. 9:8.

For additional meanings of *māsā'* in the Qal stem we might note the following: (1) "reach," "can you reach the perfections of the Almighty?" (Job 7:11); "they were unable to reach the door" (Genesis 19:11); (2) "overtake," "your hand overtook your foes" (Psalm 21:8 [H 9]); "the pangs of death overtook me" (Psalm 116:3); "trouble and anguish have taken hold on me" (Psalm 119:143); (3) "to happen to/to befall," "why has all this happened to us?" (Judges 6:13).

The Niphal stem also produces in certain cases the translations, "overpowered," "caught," "captured." Thus, Jeremiah 50:24: O Babylon . . . you are caught and seized (*tāpaś*); "a thief . . . if he be caught" (Proverbs 6:30-31), "if a thief be caught breaking in" (Exodus 22:1). This is also seen in cases where the Niphal participle (*han-nimṣā'*) is used. So, Judges 20:48 the phrases "all that they found" and "which they found" mean preferably "until the last 'captive'" and "all the 'captured' cities." In addition to these technical uses, *māsā'* in the Niphal is often simply a synonym for *hâyā* "to be": 1 Samuel 9:8, "I have here at hand," literally, "there is found in my hand" (BDB 594b: 2a-f).

Gilbrant - The verb, *mātsā'*, has a variety of meanings: "to find," "to meet," "to come upon," "to reach," "to attain," "to come to." It is widely attested in all branches of Semitic, with a variety of nuances. It frequently occurs in the Niphal (passive) stem and is translated "to encounter," "to be discovered," "to detect" and "to recognize." The Qal forms are found twice as often.

Most frequent are texts which relate finding things that were lost, missing, or sought for. Typical of things found are grass, water, straw and cities (1 Kings 18:5; Gen. 26:32; Exo. 5:11; 2 Sam. 20:6). More intangible items include answers (Job 32:3), words to speak (Neh. 5:8), words of wisdom (Prov. 24:14) and knowledge of God (Prov. 2:5).

Another connotation of *mātsā'* is to view "finding" as gaining or securing something, especially favor. The phrases "to find favor in the eyes of God" (Gen. 6:8; Exo. 33:12f; Judg. 6:17) and "to find favor with men" (Deut. 24:1; 1 Kings 11:19; Ruth 2:2, 10) are clear examples.

Occasionally that which was found was discovered unintentionally or unexpectedly. This is best translated "to come upon," "to happen upon." Items found in such a way include money, books, honey, ships, a jawbone and the Ark of the Lord (Gen. 44:8; 2 Ki. 22:8; Prov. 25:16; Jon. 1:3; Judg. 15:15; and Ps. 132:6, respectively).

One way in which a person intentionally finds something is through exploration. In such cases, *mātsā'* is translated "to find out," "to detect," "to learn about," "to come upon." For example, God detects sin, crime and evil (2 Ki. 17:4; Hos. 12:8), but no human can detect evil in God (Jer. 2:5). The punishment for sin will "find" the guilty (Num. 32:23). In mercy, God found Israel in the desert (Hos. 9:10), and his angel found Hagar in a desert, also (Gen. 16:7).

In a passive sense, wisdom is found (Job 28:12f), the Book of the Law was found (2 Ki. 22:13), as were lost donkeys (1 Sam. 9:20) and stolen possessions (Exo. 21:16). The Word of the Lord is something that may be found (Jer. 15:16) as may iniquity (Jer. 2:34) and wrongdoers (Jer. 2:26). The Lord himself may be found by those who would seek Him (Isa. 65:1; Jer. 29:14). Individuals may be found in the place of wealth or treasure (Gen. 47:14; 2 Ki. 14:14).

There are several idioms containing *mātsā'*. A euphemism for death is seen in the passive phrase "he could not be found" (cf. Ps. 37:36). The phrase "Thou... shall not find them" in Isa. 41:12 translates into the idea of being non-existent. A person doing what is needed at a particular moment is said to "do as occasion serve you" (1 Sam. 10:7). Another idiom using "hands" is found in Ps. 76:5, "The stouthearted are spoiled, they have slept their sleep: and none of the men of might have found their hands," i.e., they were inactive. One final idiom may be seen in Isa. 57:10, which reads, "Thou hast found the life of thine hand," meaning "you have experienced the renewal of your strength." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

MATSA - 424V - Gen. 2:20; 4:14-15; 6:8; 8:9; 11:2; 16:7; 18:3,26,28f; 19:11,15,19; 26:12,19,32; 27:20; 30:14,27; 31:32-35,37; 32:5,19; 33:8,10,15; 34:11; 36:24; 37:15,17,32; 38:20,22-23; 39:4; 41:38; 44:8-10,12,16-17,34; 47:14,25,29; 50:4; Exod. 5:11; 9:19; 12:19; 15:22; 16:25,27; 18:8; 21:16; 22:2,4,6-8; 33:12-13,16-17; 34:9; 35:23-24; Lev. 6:3-4; 9:12-13,18; 12:8; 25:26,28; Num. 11:11,15,22; 15:32-33; 20:14; 31:50; 32:5,23; 35:27; Deut. 4:29-30; 17:2; 18:10; 19:5; 20:11; 21:1,17; 22:3,14,17,20,22-23,25,27-28; 24:1,7; 31:17,21; 32:10; Jos. 2:22-23; 10:17; 17:16; Jdg. 1:5; 5:30; 6:13,17; 14:12,18; 15:15; 17:8-9; 20:48; 21:12; Ruth 1:9; 2:2,10,13; 1 Sam. 1:18; 9:4,8,11,13,20; 10:2-3,7,16,21; 12:5; 13:15-16,19,22; 14:30; 16:22; 20:3,21,29,36; 21:3; 23:17; 24:19; 25:8,28; 27:5; 29:3,6,8; 30:11; 31:3,8; 2 Sam. 3:8; 7:27; 12:7; 14:22; 15:25; 16:4; 17:12-13,20; 18:22; 20:6; 1 Ki. 1:3,52; 11:19,29; 13:14,24,28; 14:13; 18:5,10,12; 19:19; 20:36-37; 21:20; 2 Ki. 2:17; 4:29,39; 7:9; 9:21,35; 10:13,15; 12:5,10,18; 14:14; 16:8; 17:4; 18:15; 19:4,8; 20:13; 22:8-9,13; 23:2,24; 25:19; 1 Chr. 4:40-41; 10:3,8; 17:25; 20:2; 24:4; 26:31; 28:9; 29:8,17; 2 Chr. 2:17; 5:11; 15:2,4,15; 19:3; 20:16,25; 21:17; 22:8; 25:5,24; 29:16,29; 30:21; 31:1; 32:4; 34:14-15,17,21,30,32-33; 35:7,17-18; 36:8; Ezr. 2:62; 8:15,25; 10:18; Neh. 5:8; 7:5,64; 8:14; 9:8,32; 13:1; Est. 1:5; 2:23; 4:16; 5:8; 6:2; 7:3; 8:5-6; Job 3:22; 11:7; 17:10; 19:28; 20:8; 23:3; 28:12-13; 31:25,29; 32:3,13; 33:10,24; 34:11; 37:13,23; 42:15; Ps. 10:15; 17:3; 21:8; 32:6; 36:2; 37:36; 46:1; 69:20; 76:5; 84:3; 89:20; 107:4; 116:3; 119:143,162; 132:5-6; Prov. 1:13,28; 2:5; 3:4,13; 4:22; 6:31,33; 7:15; 8:9,12,17,35; 10:13; 16:20,31; 17:20; 18:22; 19:8; 20:6; 21:21; 24:14; 25:16; 28:23; 31:10; Eccl. 3:11; 7:14,24,26-29; 8:17; 9:10,15; 11:1; 12:10; Cant. 3:1-4; 5:6-8; 8:1,10; Isa. 10:10,14; 13:15; 22:3; 30:14; 34:14; 35:9; 37:4,8; 39:2; 41:12; 51:3; 55:6; 57:10; 58:3,13; 65:1,8; Jer. 2:5,24,26,34; 5:1,26; 6:16; 10:18; 11:9; 14:3; 15:16; 23:11; 29:13-14; 31:2; 41:3,8,12; 45:3; 48:27; 50:7,20,24; 52:25; Lam. 1:3,6; 2:9,16; Ezek. 3:1; 22:30; 26:21; 28:15; Dan. 1:19-20; 11:19; 12:1; Hos. 2:6-7; 5:6; 9:10; 12:4,8; 14:8; Amos 8:12; Jon. 1:3; Mic. 1:13; Zeph. 3:13; Zech. 10:10; 11:6; Mal. 2:6

Ecclesiastes 7:25 I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:25 I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:25 I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, To know the wickedness of folly, Even of foolishness and madness.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:25 I tried to understand, examine, and comprehend the role of wisdom in the scheme of things, and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the insanity of folly.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:25 κ κλωσα γ κα καρδ α μου το γν ναι κα το κατασκ ψασθαι κα ζητ σαι σοφ αν κα ψ φον κα το γν ναι σεβο ς φροσ νην κα σκληρ αν κα περιφορ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:25 I and my heart went round about to know, and to examine, and to seek wisdom, and the account of things, and to know the folly and trouble and madness of the ungodly man.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:25 I turned my thoughts to know, explore, and seek wisdom and an explanation for things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity and folly is madness.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:25 I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:25 So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:25 I searched everywhere, determined to find wisdom and to understand the reason for things. I was determined to prove to myself that wickedness is stupid and that foolishness is madness.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:25 I have turned round, also my heart, to know and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and reason, and to know the wrong of folly, and of foolishness the madness.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:25 But I have reached the point where, having learnt, explored and investigated wisdom and reflection, I recognise evil as being a form of madness, and folly as something stupid.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:25 I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:25 I turned my thoughts toward knowledge; I sought and pursued wisdom and reason, and I recognized that wickedness is foolish and folly is madness.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:25 I turned my attention to study, to explore, and to seek out wisdom and the reason for things. I learned that wickedness is stupid and foolishness is madness.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:25 I gave my mind to knowledge and to searching for wisdom and the reason of things, and to the discovery that sin is foolish, and that to be foolish is to be without one's senses.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:25 I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness which is madness.

- **I directed my mind to know**, Ec 1:13-17 2:1-3,12,20
- **to seek wisdom and an explanation**: Ec 7:27 *marg: Ec 2:15 3:16,17 9:1,2 Jer 12:1,2 2Pe 2:3-9 3:3-9
- **know**: Ec 9:3 10:13 Ge 34:7 Jos 7:13 2Sa 13:12 Pr 17:12 26:11

Related Passages:

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Job 28:12 "But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?

Job 28:28 "And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; And to depart from evil is understanding.'"

James 3:13-17 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Romans 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

EXPLORING WISDOM CONFRONTING MADNESS

This verse continues Solomon's personal reflection (Eccl 7:23–26) on his intense search for wisdom. In Ec 7:23–24, he admits wisdom was far off, mysterious and unreachable. Now, in Ec 7:25, he recounts the effort he exerted to pursue it. He sought to understand wisdom, the meaning of life, and the moral consequences of folly and madness.

I directed my mind ([leb](#)) - **Directed** means I turned, I directed, or literally "I went around." or "I myself turned my heart." (Lxx = [kukloo](#) - circle around) Literally **my mind** is **my heart** ([leb](#)) the center of thought, reason, and will in Hebrew. Solomon is saying he turned inward with deliberate focus. He concentrated his whole being on this quest.

To know ([yada](#); Lxx = [ginosko](#)), **to investigate** ([tur](#); Lxx = [kataskopeo](#)) **and to seek** ([baqas](#); Lxx = [zeteo](#)) **wisdom** ([chokmah](#); Lxx = [sophia](#)) **and an explanation** - **To know** implies intellectual understanding. **To investigate** or explore is same root used of the spies exploring Canaan. **To seek** means to search diligently and often implies persistent pursuit. Notice how the piling up of similar Hebrew verbs show the intensity Solomon's effort, an effort that was mentally exhaustive, spiritually probing, and emotionally invested in uncovering life's deepest truths. **Wisdom** ([chokmah](#); Lxx = [sophia](#)) is practical and moral insight rooted in the fear of God. An explanation ([hešbōn](#)) means reasoning and is from a root meaning "to calculate" or "analyze." Solomon was not just looking for facts, but for **wisdom** and a rational **explanation** of how the world works, why things are the way they are.

And to know ([yada](#); Lxx = [ginosko](#)) **the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.** Solomon's pursuit of wisdom included an effort to understand the nature and consequences of evil. He wanted to understand not just what was wise, but what made folly so dangerous.

This verse portrays Solomon as a spiritual scientist: He turns inward, applies rigorous inquiry, and investigates the moral landscape of wisdom and foolishness. Yet this search ends in tension. He will go on to describe (vv.26–29) that even with all his effort, true wisdom remains elusive, and foolishness—especially seductive folly—is deeply embedded in human hearts. Wisdom is a noble pursuit, but Solomon warns that it won't save you unless it's grounded in the fear of God (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13).

NET NOTE -

The phrase חֲכָמָה וְתַשְׁבּוּן (khokhmah vékheshbon, “wisdom and the scheme of things”) is a hendiadys (a figure of speech in which two nouns connote one idea): “wisdom in the scheme of things.” This is similar to the hendiadys עֲצָבוֹן וְיֶהֱרֵן ('itsévonekh véheronekh, “pain and childbearing”) which connotes “pain in childbearing” (Gen 3:16).

Or “the evil of folly” The genitive construct phrase רֶשָׁע קֶסֶל (resha' kesel) may be taken as a genitive of attribution (“the wickedness of folly”) or as a genitive of attribute (“the folly of wickedness”). The English versions treat it in various ways: “wickedness of folly” (KJV); “wrong of folly” (YLT); “evil of folly” (NASB); “stupidity of wickedness” (NIV); “wickedness, stupidity” (NJPS); “wickedness is folly [or foolish]” (ASV, NAB, NRSV, MLB, Moffatt), and “it is folly to be wicked” (NEB).

Or “the folly of madness” The genitive construct phrase וְהִסְכְּלוֹת הוֹלָלוֹת (véhassikhlot holelot) may be taken as a genitive of attribution (“the stupidity of wickedness”) or a genitive of attribute (“the evil of folly”). The phrase is rendered variously: “foolishness and madness” (KJV); “foolishness of madness” (NASB); “madness of folly” (NIV); “madness and folly” (NJPS); “the foolishness which is madness” (NEB); and “foolishness [or folly] is madness” (ASV, NAB, NRSV, MLB, Moffatt).

William Barrick - ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#)) Solomon himself set out to discover the ultimate wisdom. “I directed my mind” (literally, “I and my heart looked around,” Eccl 7:25) stresses Solomon's determined purpose. The threefold description of the goal of his determination (“to know, to investigate, and to seek”) summarizes his previous testimony concerning his search for wisdom (Eccl 1:13, 17; 2:3). “Explanation” translates a Hebrew word first occurring in Eccl 7:25 in Ecclesiastes. It will occur three times in Eccl 7:25–29 and a final time in 9:10. According to Estes, the writer “indicates that he endeavored to make an intellectual accounting of the events in the universe.”¹⁴ When Solomon added up all he had learned, what was the outcome? Before revealing the outcome, he reminds the reader that the scope of his search includes seeking knowledge of the wickedness and delusion of foolishness (Eccl 7:25; see Eccl 1:17; 2:3, 12).

His finding amounts to what he concludes as early as Eccl 3:11—“man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.” As recently as Eccl 7:14, Solomon makes a similar observation (“man will not discover anything that will be after him”). In Eccl 7:24 he poses a rhetorical question, “Who can discover it?” Obviously, no one can—not even someone with the wisdom of Solomon.

However, the reader is in for a shock. Solomon not only repeats the impossibility of success in his search, he associates his discovery with his relationship to a seductress (Eccl 7:26). Commentators disagree on the identification of this woman and the significance of concluding the search in such a fashion. Garrett argues that the text teaches that “because of sin, married life will be a war instead of a joy.”¹⁵ He bases his interpretation on his understanding of Genesis 3:16. He claims that God grants a loving wife, rather than “a human trap” to a righteous man.¹⁶

A better interpretation, however, takes the woman to be a figurative representation of folly (compare Pr 9:1–6, 13–18).¹⁷ Wisdom and folly permeate the immediate context of Eccl 7:26, so this interpretation makes a good deal of sense. Even the figurative references to folly, both in Proverbs and here, provoke readers to remember Solomon's many wives and concubines. Consider the type of women with whom Solomon had the closest acquaintance. One thousand harem-wives and concubines only turned the king's heart away from God (1 Kgs 11:1–8). If any man knew what effect a seductress might have on a man, Solomon knew. He instructed his sons accordingly, warning them of the evil woman. Since he depicted wisdom as a woman (Prov 1:20–33) and spoke highly of a number of good women (Eccl 9:9; Prov 18:22; 31:10–31), there is no justification for a reader to take the statement as a universal truth regarding all women.

“Seeking Is Not the Same as Seeing” Solomon's pursuit of wisdom is admirable—and familiar. We too want to understand: Why do the wicked prosper? Why do the righteous suffer? Why is life so unpredictable? But Solomon's confession reminds us: seeking truth is not the same as possessing it. We must seek wisdom, yes—but with humility and dependence, not pride and self-reliance. The greatest truth isn't found in analyzing life, but in trusting the God who rules over it.

Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I find more bitter than death The woman whose heart is snares and nets, Whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, But the sinner shall be trapped by her.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:26 I discovered this: More bitter than death is the kind of woman who is like a hunter's snare; her heart is like a hunter's net and her hands are like prison chains. The man who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is captured by her.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:26 κα ερ σκω γ πικρ τερον π ρ θ νατον σ ν τ ν γυνα κα πς σ τ ν θηρε ματα κα σαγ ναι καρδ α α τς δεσμο χε ρες α τς γαθ ς πρ προσ που το θεο ξαιρεθ σεται π α τς κα μαρτ νων συλλημφθ σεται ν α τ

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I find her to be, and I will pronounce to be more bitter than death the woman which is a snare, and her heart nets, who has a band in her hands: he that is good in the sight of God shall be delivered from her; but the sinner shall be caught by her.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I find more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, her heart a net, and her hands chains. The one who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:26 I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:26 I discovered that a seductive woman is a trap more bitter than death. Her passion is a snare, and her soft hands are chains. Those who are pleasing to God will escape her, but sinners will be caught in her snare.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I am finding more bitter than death, the woman whose heart is nets and snares, her hands are bands; the good before God escapeth from her, but the sinner is captured by her.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I find woman more bitter than Death, she is a snare, her heart is a net, and her arms are chains. The man who is pleasing to God eludes her, but the sinner is captured by her.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:26 I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:26 More bitter than death I find the woman who is a hunter's trap, whose heart is a snare and whose hands are prison bonds. He who is pleasing to God will escape her, but the sinner will be entrapped by her.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:26 I find that a woman whose thoughts are like traps and snares is more bitter than death itself. Even her hands are like chains. Whoever pleases God will escape her, but she will catch whoever continues to sin.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I saw a thing more bitter than death, even the woman whose heart is full of tricks and nets, and whose hands are as bands. He with whom God is pleased will get free from her, but the sinner will be taken by her.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:26 And I found more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters; he who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

- **I discovered:** Judges 16:18-21 Pr 2:18,19 5:3-5 7:21-27 9:18 22:14 23:27,28
- **One who is pleasing to God will escape:** Ec 2:26

Related Passages:

Proverbs 5:3-5 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey And smoother than oil is her speech; 4But in the end she is bitter as wormwood, Sharp as a two-edged sword. 5Her feet go down to death, Her steps take hold of Sheol.

Proverbs 5:22 (IS FRIGHTENING) His own iniquities will capture the wicked, And he will be held with the cords of his sin.

Proverbs 7:21-23 With her many persuasions she entices him; With her flattering lips she seduces him. 22 Suddenly he follows her As an ox goes to the slaughter, Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool, 23 Until an arrow pierces through his liver; As a bird hastens to the snare, So he does not know that it will cost him his life.

1 Kings 11:1-4 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, 2 from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. 3He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. 4 For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

James 1:14-15 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

TRAPPED BY TEMPTATION MORE BITTER THAN DEATH

Now Solomon reflects on a particular form of folly that ensnared even the wise! This verse is part of Solomon's personal reflection (Eccl 7:23–29) on his search for wisdom. He admits wisdom was elusive (v.23–25), and now identifies a particular danger he encountered in that search: the seductive and destructive woman. This is likely not a condemnation of all women, but a symbolic warning—possibly referencing: The "forbidden woman" of Proverbs (Prov. 5–7). The literal experience of Solomon's downfall through foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1–4). A metaphor for folly or sin itself—especially seductive, enslaving sin.

And I discovered ([matsa](#); Lxx - [heurisko](#)) more bitter ([04751](#)) [mar](#) than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets ([herem](#)), whose hands are chains. - Solomon declares that what he found is worse than physical death—something that affects the soul, not just the body. The words **snares and nets** reflect his use of hunting imagery. This hunting image reflects the motives and desires of her heart. I think of a lioness continually on the prowl for vulnerable prey (aka "men")! This woman's motives are deceptive, trapping, like baited snares. Her love is a predator's trap, not a companion's gift. And once she has you ensnared and in her net, as Solomon knew from experience, her **hands are chains**, for her embrace is not out of genuine love, but to bring the man into bondage

NET NOTE - the woman - The article on נְשִׁאָה (ha'ishah) functions in a particularizing sense ("the kind of woman") rather than in a generic sense (i.e., "women").

NET NOTE - snares - Heb "is snares." The plural form מִצְּדִים (métsodim, from the noun מִצְדָּה, matsod, "snare") is used to connote either intensity, repeated or habitual action, or moral characteristic....The term מִצְדָּה "snare" is used in a concrete sense in reference to the hunter's snare or net, but in a figurative sense of being ensnared by someone (Job 19:6; Prov 12:12; Eccl 7:26).

One who is pleasing ([tob](#)) to (before the face of) God will escape (flee to safety - 1Co 6:18+) from her - Praise God for this hopeful passage! The way of escape from her seductive snare and ironclad grip granted to the man who walks in obedience and fear of God for God will deliver him from her trap.

but (term of contrast) **the sinner will be captured** (ensnared) **by her** - The unrepentant, morally careless person is trapped by her, much like prey by a hunter.

"The Seduction of Sin" Solomon's warning is vivid because he lived it. He who had divine wisdom fell to the seduction of women and idolatry (1 Kings 11). His fall came not from ignorance, but from entanglement. This verse isn't about misogyny—it's about spiritual war. Sin flatters before it chains. Temptation smiles before it strikes. Only those who fear God escape. Not by strength, but by surrender. The question is not: Are you strong enough to resist? (YOU ARE NOT!) But are you walking closely enough with God so His Spirit gives you the desire and the power (Php 2:13NLT+) to flee when danger comes? Be on guard against seductive sin—especially where you're weak (YOU KNOW YOUR "ACHILLES' HEEL!"). What flatters may entangle. Practice moral vigilance, enabled by the Spirit, Word and prayer. Practice the Job 31:1+ approach. Do not let beauty or flattery, or perfume blind your spiritual

discernment. Practice the presence of God continually, walking closely with Him, remembering that those “pleasing to God” are protected by His presence and wisdom (pray Col 1:9-12+ frequently for yourself and family). Learn from Solomon’s regrets, always aware that even the wise can fall when they stray from God (Memorize and practice 1Co 10:12+). A general rule to follow is to avoid relationships or influences that weaken your integrity (Memorize Ro 13:14+). Whether literal or symbolic, cut ties with what pulls you away from God.

- Some temptations are more bitter than death. They wound deeper than the body—they enslave the soul.
- Sin often comes disguised as desire. What looks good may be a snare.
- God-fearers are protected—not because they’re strong, but because they obey. The upright are preserved through divine grace and moral alertness.
- The sinner will be caught. Without repentance and watchfulness, sin inevitably ensnares.
- Wisdom sees through the disguise. Solomon’s insight warns us against judging by appearance.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - TRAPPED IN THE NAME OF LOVE

I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains.
The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. Ecclesiastes 7:26

If any man knew the dangers of sexual temptation, it was Solomon. After all, he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. This may sound strange to us—perhaps even unbelievable—but three thousand years ago it would not have been thought unusual for an oriental monarch to have a vast harem. Having many women under your control was a sign of power and vast wealth.

Recently someone asked me why the Bible doesn't directly forbid polygamy. I answered that in the most basic sense, it does. When God created Adam, He didn't create Eve, Sally, Jennifer, and Kathy. God didn't create a harem for Adam and He didn't give Adam a choice either. In the beginning it was one man and one woman joined together in a binding, lifetime partnership called marriage (see Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). This divine example rules out polygamy as God's highest and best plan for the human race.

So why then did God allow it? Perhaps for the same reason Moses allowed divorce—the hardness of the human heart. Even in cases where multiple wives advanced God's plan, such as Jacob's two wives and two concubines, there was jealousy and competition among the women. Solomon himself is the prime example. Despite the fact that Deuteronomy 17:17 explicitly forbids kings to have multiple wives, he repeatedly violated this scriptural principle. In the end his foreign wives turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:1-4).

It is sometimes suggested that many of these marriages were made for purposes of establishing peaceful relationships with other countries. For instance, a king might marry a royal daughter from a neighboring empire, thus ensuring peace and free trade for many years to come. No doubt Solomon's multiple marriages contributed to the "golden age" of peace that Israel enjoyed during his reign. But in the end the price was too high. After his death the kingdom split and the nation slid into idolatry.

All of this may seem rather far removed from our situation. Most of us aren't faced with the temptation to practice polygamy. But we do face precisely the same temptation to lower our standards and to rationalize our disobedience. It's all too easy for us to justify flirtatious behavior, words spoken in secret, and prolonged sexual fantasies, whether we are married or single.

The wrong man, or woman, can turn us away from God. It happens gradually, imperceptibly, certainly without our conscious consent, just as it happened to Solomon. Slowly we begin to lower our standards—not just physically but spiritually and emotionally too. Soon our hearts have been given to someone who leads us away from the Lord. If you don't think this could happen to you, think again.

If we follow Solomon's bad example, we will discover the truth of his words. This world is filled with men and women who care nothing for God's truth. Let each person who reads this look into his or her own soul. What is the price of your purity?

Lord Jesus, You showed us how to stay clean in a dirty world. May Your life be my example and Your Word my guide. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- How would you assess your own commitment to moral purity? What temptations do you face in this area?
- Are there any relationships that need to be broken in order for you to be clean before the Lord? Any relationships that need to be broken because they keep you from honoring God?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read Matthew 5:27-28; 1 Corinthians 7:2; and 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:27 Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, counting one by one, to find out the account:

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:27 "Here is what I have found," says the Preacher, "Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason,

NET Ecclesiastes 7:27 The Teacher says: I discovered this while trying to discover the scheme of things, item by item.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:27 ὁ το το ε ρον ε πεν κκλησιαστ ς μ α τ μι το ε ρε ν λογισμ ν

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:27 Behold, this have I found, said the Preacher, seeking by one at a time to find out the account,

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:27 "Look," says the Teacher, "I have discovered this by adding one thing to another to find out the explanation,

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:27 Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things--

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:27 "Look," says the Teacher, "this is what I have discovered: "Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things--

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:27 "This is my conclusion," says the Teacher. "I discovered this after looking at the matter from every possible angle.

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:27 See, this I have found, said the Preacher, one to one, to find out the reason

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:27 This is what I think, says Qoheleth, having examined one thing after another to draw some conclusion,

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:27 See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum,

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:27 Behold, this have I found, says Qoheleth, adding one thing to another that I might discover the answer

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:27 The spokesman said, "This is what I've found: I added one thing to another in order to find a reason for things.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:27 Look! this I have seen, said the Preacher, taking one thing after another to get the true account,

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:27 Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum,

- **says the Preacher:** Ec 1:1,2 12:8-10
- **adding one thing to another,** Ec 7:25

Related Passages:

Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

Proverbs 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

Ecclesiastes 7:25 I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness.

Job 28:3 "Man puts an end to darkness, And to the farthest limit he searches out The rock in gloom and deep shadow.

FINDING WISDOM BIT BY BIT PIECING TOGETHER THE PUZZLE

Behold ([hinneh](#)) LOOK! This is a call to pay attention, indicating the importance of what follows.

I have discovered ([matsa](#); Lxx - [heurisko](#) - find by searching) **this," says the Preacher** ([qoheleth](#)) - This verse introduces a conclusion or summary of what Solomon has been discovering through observation and investigation. Solomon is not impulsive—he is methodical, reflective, and analytical in his pursuit of truth.

The Preacher ([qoheleth](#)) - Solomon's title in Ecclesiastes. [Qoheleth](#) is derived from qāhal, meaning "to assemble." Thus, this in effect describes one who speaks to the assembly (Eccl 1:1). In other words this statement is made not just as a personal reflection, but as a public proclamation of truth to the assembly.

Adding one thing to another to find ([matsa](#); Lxx - [heurisko](#)) **an explanation** - Literally "one to one," suggesting he made an incremental analysis. **Explanation** (ḥešbōn) means reasoning, calculation, analysis and is used of logical evaluation (cf. Eccl 7:25). Explanation is literally "the sum" and denotes the conclusion which is reached by human reasoning. Solomon is saying, "I've pieced this together slowly—bit by bit—to form an understanding." Though God's full wisdom is beyond reach (Eccl 7:23–24), Solomon still urges intellectual and moral diligence in discovering what can be known

Truth Comes to the Patient - Solomon didn't rush to conclusions. He gathered, examined, and tested—adding one truth to another. In a world of instant opinions, this is a refreshing model. God honors the seeker who is patient, thorough, and humble. He may not reveal everything, but He gives light to those who walk in it step by step (Psalm 119:105). The path of wisdom is not always bright—but it is always lit just enough for the next step. Wisdom requires careful, progressive seeking. You won't understand everything all at once. Truth is often discovered "one piece at a time." Don't expect clarity without study, prayer, and life experience. God invites us to wrestle with mystery, not avoid it. Asking hard questions in faith is a mark of spiritual maturity.

Ray Pritchard - [Something New Under the Sun](#) - A BETTER WAY TO PRAY

"Look," says the Teacher, "this is what I have discovered: Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things—while I was still searching but not finding—I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes." Ecclesiastes 7:27-29

Let's get one thing out of the way immediately. I don't think Solomon intended in verse 28 to make a relative comparison as to the worth of men and women in general. That wouldn't be fair and his conclusion wouldn't be right. Remember that Solomon was a consummate lady's man. How else can you explain the hundreds of wives and concubines—most of whom were foreign women whose religion was at odds with the worship of the living God? Among those women—those foreign women—he didn't find a single woman who could be called "upright."

The record for the men is not much better—one out of a thousand. The key to this passage lies in Ec 7:29: God made man upright. This statement takes us back to the Garden of Eden and God's original design for the human race. This world is not right at present, Solomon says, but it's not God's fault. Men have gone in search of sensual pleasures and by following their base desires have strayed far from God. All of this is reminiscent of Isaiah 53:6+, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."

Years ago I heard someone say that you shouldn't pray, "Lord, bless me," because sometimes we're simply not the kind of people God can bless. Sometimes—too often, I fear— we live self-centered lives and merely ask God to stamp His blessing on our personal agendas.

There is a better way to pray, and it goes like this: "Lord, please show me what You are blessing in the world so I can be a part of it." In essence, instead of asking God to adjust Himself to your will, you are saying, "Lord, show me what You are doing and let me be a part of it." Or to put it another way, instead of asking God to bless your agenda, you're asking God for the privilege of joining His agenda and making it your own.

There is truly a world of difference in those two prayers. Don't forget the principle: Find out what God is blessing and then go be a part of it.

Lord, I don't ask that You bless my agenda but that You show me Your agenda so that I may be blessed by doing the things that matter to You. Amen.

SHINING THE LIGHT

- How many truly wise people do you know? What character qualities do they share?
- What is God blessing today? Are you a part of it?

MORE LIGHT FROM GOD'S WORD Read 1 Kings 11:1-3; Proverbs 31:10-31; and Titus 3:3-5.

Ecclesiastes 7:28 which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these.

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:28 Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:28 Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, But a woman among all these I have not found.

NET Ecclesiastes 7:28 What I have continually sought, I have not found; I have found only one upright man among a thousand, but I have not found one upright woman among all of them.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:28 ν π ζτησεν ψυχ μου κα ο χ ερον νθρωπον να π χιλ ων ερον κα γυνα κα ν π σι τοις ο χ ερον

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:28 which my soul sought after, but I found not: for I have found one man of a thousand; but a woman in all these I have not found.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:28 which my soul continually searches for but does not find: among a thousand people I have found one true man, but among all these I have not found a true woman.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:28 which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:28 while I was still searching but not finding-- I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all.

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:28 Though I have searched repeatedly, I have not found what I was looking for. Only one out of a thousand men is virtuous, but not one woman!

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:28 (that still my soul had sought, and I had not found), One man, a teacher, I have found, and a woman among all these I have not found.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:28 which I am still looking for, although unsuccessfully: one man in a thousand, I may find, but a woman better than other women-never.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:28 which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:28 which my soul still seeks and has not found: One man out of a thousand have I come upon, but a woman among them all I have not found.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:28 I am still seeking a reason for things, but have not found any. I found one man out of a thousand who had it, but out of all these I didn't find one woman.

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:28 For which my soul is still searching, but I have it not; one man among a thousand have I seen; but a woman among all these I have not seen.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:28 which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

- yet: Ec 7:23,24 Isa 26:9
- one: Job 33:23 Ps 12:1
- but: 1Ki 11:1-3

Related Passages:

Proverbs 31:10 An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

Micah 7:2 The godly person has perished from the land, And there is no upright person among men. All of

them lie in wait for bloodshed; Each of them hunts the other with a net.

THE RARITY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

which I am still seeking but have not found. - This verse continues Solomon's reflection (Ecclesiastes 7:23–29) on the limits of human wisdom. In v.27, Solomon describes his careful, cumulative approach to discovering truth. In v.28, he reports a painful observation: godly, trustworthy people are rare, especially those who reflect God's wisdom and integrity. Solomon has pursued wisdom and moral integrity earnestly but hasn't found what he longed for—not in most people.

I have found one man among a thousand - Among many people, only one in a thousand possessed the integrity or insight Solomon sought. A poetic expression of how rare true righteousness is.

but I have not found a woman among all these - Solomon confesses he did not find a woman who matched the standard of righteousness or wisdom he was seeking—in his experience. This verse should not be read as a blanket condemnation of women. It reflects: Solomon's personal experience, likely shaped by his 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3), many of whom led him astray spiritually (1 Kings 11:4). The broader theme of human depravity, not just female failure. Solomon is lamenting: righteous, wise people are rare—male or female. He uses his own sad relational history as an example.

William Barrick - ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#)) So, what does Solomon mean when he declares, **"I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these"** (Eccl 7:28)? He utilizes a **hyperbole** ("one among a thousand")¹⁸ to express the uniqueness of one individual (cp. Job 33:23). Gender wars and an over-emphasis on political correctness encourage modern readers to accuse the author of chauvinism and sexism.¹⁹ Solomon did tend to marry pagan women of influence and of use to him politically. What godly woman would place herself willingly in the midst of the jealousies, ungodliness, and politics of Solomon's royal harem?²⁰ Although Solomon had a thousand wives, there is no guarantee that this "thousand" refers only to them—certainly they may be included, at least some of them. It is just a large rounded figure to express the rarity of a wise person, be that person male or female. Bartholomew summarizes the message of verse 26 with **"Flee folly!"**²¹ If one's folly involves love of money, flee! If one's folly is lust, flee!—whether the person representing that folly is male or female.

14 Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms, 349.

15 Garrett, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, , 325.

16 Ibid.

17 Estes, Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms, 349; C. L. Seow, Ecclesiastes, Anchor Bible 18C , 272.

18 R. N. Whybray, Ecclesiastes, New Century Bible Commentary (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 127.

Eccl 7:27 returns to the "explanation" (cf. "I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an**explanation**" Eccl 7:25) toward which he has systematically worked. He still seeks it ("I am still seeking" Eccl 7:28), because it has eluded his search. **Among a thousand**, Solomon has found one man, but not one woman. Remember the discussion above— Scripture characterizes Solomon's experience with women quantitatively, not qualitatively. No wonder he could not find a wise woman—those who dominated his life drew him into idolatry and a departure from God and His Law. The writer interprets verse 28 with Eccl 7:29: **"Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices"** God is not to blame for the absence of wisdom, mankind is. From the Fall to the present, people have turned away from God and away from wisdom. They have all walked the path of folly. Isaiah penned the same truth by means of a different metaphor: **"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way"** (Isa 53:6). Thus, the chapter concludes with the observation that people pervert the right way of God—they bend that which He had created straight. The irony of this leaps off the page, since no human being can "straighten what He has bent" (Eccl 7:13). The wording augments the enigma of mankind's existence and his pursuit of wisdom.

At the conclusion of his exposition of Eccl 7, Swindoll asks three questions that every believer ought to ponder after studying Eccl 7:15–29. Each question concerns one of the products of God-given wisdom: 1. Regarding balance: Is wisdom guarding us from extremes? 2. Regarding strength: Is wisdom keeping us stable? 3. Regarding insight: Is wisdom clearing our minds? (Borrow Swindoll, [Living on the Ragged Edge, 231](#)) ([Ecclesiastes 7:15-29 Commentary](#))

Questions for study:

- What helps you to resolve the seeming contradictions between what you see in life and what the Word of God promises?
- How do enjoying life and pursuing godliness sometimes come into conflict?
- What is the connection between life "under the sun" and life beyond the sun?
- Why do some interpreters so readily accuse Solomon of chauvinism?

19 Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 204.

20 Esther 2:1–19 provides an account of the type of process involved in being chosen to join a royal harem in ancient near eastern cultures. Ahasuerus conducted a beauty pageant including sleep-overs so the candidates could demonstrate their qualifications to be his wife and queen.

21 Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 267.

Rare is the Righteous - Solomon's words sting—not because he blames others, but because they expose a universal truth: true godliness is rare.

He searched through relationships, through wisdom, through people—and found very few who truly feared God. His disappointment reminds us of Jesus' words: "The road is narrow... and few find it." (Matt. 7:14) But don't let that discourage you. Let it stir you to become the one in a thousand. Be what Solomon was looking for: a person of truth, loyalty, humility, and deep reverence for God. Few people walk in consistent integrity and godly wisdom. This is not a denigration of women—but an illustration of the scarcity of godly people.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."

KJV Ecclesiastes 7:29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

NKJ Ecclesiastes 7:29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes."

NET Ecclesiastes 7:29 This alone have I discovered: God made humankind upright, but they have sought many evil schemes.

BGT Ecclesiastes 7:29 πλ ν ὃ το το ε ρον πο ησεν θε ς σ ν τ ν νθρωπον ε θ κα α το ζ τησαν λογισμο ς πολλο ς

LXE Ecclesiastes 7:29 But, behold, this have I found, that God made man upright; but they have sought out many devices.

CSB Ecclesiastes 7:29 Only see this: I have discovered that God made people upright, but they pursued many schemes."

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:29 See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

NIV Ecclesiastes 7:29 This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes."

NLT Ecclesiastes 7:29 But I did find this: God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path."

YLT Ecclesiastes 7:29 See, this alone I have found, that God made man upright, and they -- they have sought out many devices.

NJB Ecclesiastes 7:29 This alone is my conclusion: God has created man straightforward, and human artifices are human inventions.

NRS Ecclesiastes 7:29 See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.

NAB Ecclesiastes 7:29 Behold, only this have I found out: God made mankind straight, but men have had recourse to many calculations.

GWN Ecclesiastes 7:29 I have found only this: God made people decent, but they looked for many ways to avoid being decent."

BBE Ecclesiastes 7:29 This only have I seen, that God made men upright, but they have been searching out all sorts of inventions.

RSV Ecclesiastes 7:29 Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many

devices.

- God: Ge 1:26,27 5:1
- they: Ge 3:6,7 6:5,6,11,12 11:4-6 Ps 99:8 106:29,39 Jer 2:12,13 Jer 4:22 Eze 22:6-13 Mk 7:8,9 Ac 7:40-43 Ro 1:21-32 3:9-19 Eph 2:2,3 Titus 3:3

Related Passages:

Genesis 1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 2:7 Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Deuteronomy 32:5 "They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation.

Psalms 14:2-3 The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. 3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.

Isaiah 53:6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

GOD'S DESIGN, MAN'S DEVICES

This verse is the concluding theological statement of Ecclesiastes 7:23–29. After Solomon: Sought wisdom (vv.23–25), Reflected on sin's seductive power (v.26), Lamented the rarity of godly people (vv.27–28), He now summarizes with a profound truth about human nature: The problem is not with how God created us—it's with what we've become by choice. This verse echoes Genesis 1–3: humanity was created "very good" (Gen. 1:31), but chose rebellion.

Behold ([hinneh](#)) LOOK! This is a call to pay attention, indicating the importance of what follows.

I have found ([matsa](#); Lxx - [heurisko](#) - find by searching) **only this, that God made men upright** - What Solomon has failed to find in people (righteousness) leads him to this foundational insight. God created humanity morally straight, with integrity and capacity for righteousness. This verse echoes Genesis 1:26–27 where God made man in His image.

But they have sought out ([baqas](#); Lxx = [zeteo](#)) **many** (not a few!) **devices** - **Devices** (chishshabon from chashab - to think, devise; Lxx - [logismos](#)) is used only here and 2Ch 26:15 where during the reign of King Uzziah, devices for shooting arrows and catapulting stones were built to fortify the defenses of Jerusalem. In the present context **devices** (chishshabon) refers to evil plans or evil inventions that persons have discovered and that do not necessarily foster uprightness. This includes schemes, inventions, contrivances, morally or intellectually twisted plans. One is reminded of Paul's dirty laundry list in Romans 1 where he described depraved men as "inventors of evil" (Ro 1:30+). Humanity, despite being made upright, has devised countless ways to go astray—philosophies, excuses, sins, idols, corruptions. God created man good. Man chose self-reliant paths, which led to spiritual brokenness. Sin is not just behavior—it's invention. We twist truth, rationalize wrongdoing, and follow deceptive devices.

This verse presents (and confirms) an interesting paradox of human dignity (created upright) and human depravity (turned away by choice).

TSK - The descendants of Adam have sought out an immense number of inventions, in order to find happiness in the world, without God, which have only proved so many variations of impiety and iniquity.

Bob Utley - This verse asserts two truths from Genesis: Initially all of God's creation was good (cf. Gen. 1:31). Humans can understand and implement God's will. Fallen humans are creative and energetic in the area of evil and rebellion (cf. Genesis 3-4; 6:5,11-12,13; 11). Though morally capable, humans turn from God's will to self-will at every opportunity (i.e., the lingering results of Genesis 3)!

"God's Way, Our Wandering" This verse is both hopeful and haunting. It reminds us we were made for uprightness—for beauty, justice, truth, and communion with God. But it also confronts us with the truth: we sought our own way. We built "devices"—mental, moral, and emotional inventions—to excuse our rebellion. Yet hope is not lost. The Second Adam—Jesus Christ—came to restore

what was lost: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf..." (2 Corinthians 5:21) In Christ, what was twisted can be made straight again (Eccl 1:15).