



### Overview

**Author:** King Solomon

**Date:** c 931 BC (end of Solomon's reign)

**Purpose:** to reveal the vaporous nature of life without God; to instruct us to use what we have been given in thanksgiving to God; to encourage enjoyment of and contentment with present blessings.

#### Outline:

I. 1-2 Solomon's Quest for Wisdom

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

- A. **Sorrow is better than laughter (7:1-4)**
- B. **Wisdom & Folly (7:5-10)**
- C. **Pros & Cons of Wisdom (7:11-14)**
- D. **Avoiding extremes (7:15-18)**
- E. **No one is righteous (7:19-22).**

III. 12:9-14 Postscript

(Adapted from James Bollhagen. *Ecclesiastes*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: CPH, 2011)

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## Around the Word Bible Study

Trinity, 2015

# Contentment Ecclesiastes 7:1-22

### Opening: Psalm 90

<sup>1</sup>Lord, you have been our | dwelling place\*  
in all gener- | ations.

<sup>2</sup>**Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth | and the  
world,\***

**from everlasting to everlasting | you are God.**

<sup>3</sup>You return | man to dust\*  
and say, "Return, O chil- | dren of man!"

<sup>4</sup>**For a thousand years in your sight  
are but as yesterday when | it is past,\*  
or as a watch | in the night.**

<sup>5</sup>You sweep them away as | with a flood;\*  
they are like a dream,  
like grass that is renewed in the | morning:

<sup>6</sup>**in the morning it flourishes and | is renewed;\*  
in the evening it fades and | withers.**

<sup>7</sup>For we are brought to an end by your | anger;\*  
by your wrath we | are dismayed.

<sup>8</sup>**You have set our iniquities be- | fore you,\*  
our secret sins in the light of your | presence.**

<sup>9</sup>For all our days pass away un- | der your wrath;\*  
we bring our years to an end | like a sigh.

<sup>10</sup>**The years of our life are seventy,  
or even by reason of strength | eighty;\*  
yet their span is but toil and trouble;  
they are soon gone, and we | fly away.**

<sup>11</sup>Who considers the power of your | anger,\*  
and your wrath according to the | fear of you?

<sup>12</sup>**So teach us to number | our days\*  
that we may get a heart of | wisdom.**

<sup>13</sup>Return, O LORD! | How long?\*

Have pity on your | servants!

<sup>14</sup>**Satisfy us in the morning with your | steadfast  
love,\***

**that we may rejoice and be glad | all our  
days.**

<sup>15</sup>Make us glad for as many days as you have  
af- | flicted us,\*

and for as many years as we have seen | evil.

<sup>16</sup>**Let your work be shown to your | servants,\*  
and your glorious power to their | children.**

<sup>17</sup>Let the favor of the Lord our God be up- | on us,\*  
and establish the work of our hands upon us;  
yes, establish the work | of our hands!  
**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son\*  
and to the Holy | Spirit;  
as it was in the be- | ginning,\*  
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

### Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-22

#### 7:1: "A good name is better than precious ointment"

How does a good name affect the spiritual sense of smell? See 2 Corinthians 2:15. What connection between one's name and fragrant oil does Solomon make in Song 1:3?

How should this affect our relationships with others?

#### 7:1 The day of death is better than the day of birth

What practical advantage do the dead have over the living? See Job 3:11-13? What is the disadvantage of the living? See Job 3:26.

How is the day of death better from a spiritual perspective? See Philippians 1:23. Why continue living? See Philippians 1:21, 24-26 and Galatians 2:20. How does 1 Corinthians 15:26 describe death?

Why is it beneficial to live with an awareness of our mortality? See Psalm 90:12.

#### 7:2-3: Mourning & sorrow is better than laughter & feasting

How does God use our affliction and sorrow for the benefit of others? See 2 Corinthians 1:6. What attitude does St. Paul take toward his own suffering in 1 Timothy 2:10? How should we regard ourselves in relation to others? See 2 Corinthians 12:15?

What does Solomon say about those who think life should be only fun and laughter? See Proverbs 14:12-13? How does he provide a balanced view in Ecclesiastes 3:4?

How do we make sense out of Solomon's statement in this verse that sorrow is better than laughter in light of what he says in 5:18?

Consider the above question in light of the following comments from Luther: "Although he had said above that it is good to be happy, here he seems to be asserting the opposite: *Sorrow is better than laughter*. These two things surely do not seem to be in agreement. But matters that have to do with godliness are difficult and are always being carried to the opposite extreme. If we teach that nothing but faith alone justifies, then wicked people neglect all works. On the other hand, if we teach that faith must be attested by works, they immediately attribute justification to these. A fool always veers to one or the other extreme. It is so difficult to remain on the royal road, as, for example, here: neither sadness alone nor happiness alone, but the middle between them is what one is to keep. One must keep one's spirit happy, free, and peaceful; it must keep its equanimity in human affairs, regardless of whether happy things or sad things occur. Therefore he says: "In evil or distress the heart, etc." It is as though he were saying: "I distinguish between the sadness of the countenance and the sadness of the spirit. I always want to be happy in spirit, on the inside; but on the outside this cannot be, because sad things happen." Thus the apostle says in 2 Cor. 6:10: "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." You should refer the first to the outside, the second to the inside," (AE 15:111-112).

How does Luther say it is possible to be sorrowful and rejoice (2 Cor. 6:10) at the same time? (recall especially his distinction between inner and outward sorrow/happiness). What is the unchanging basis of our joy? See 1 Corinthians 15:3–4.

Luther: "When things are troubled, the heart is made better. "A good heart" is a Hebrew phrase meaning a joyful and happy heart. Solomon speaks this way to direct his hearers toward his goal, for his intention is to make them happy regardless of how things fall," (AE 15:111).

#### **7:5: Rebuke is better than flattery**

What advice does Solomon give in Proverbs 13:18? Why is it necessary to heed the advice of James 1:19 in order to grow in wisdom? For what especially do the wise listen? See Proverbs 9:8. What does the Lord's rebuke demonstrate? See Proverbs 3:11–12.

#### **7:6: Crackling thorns under a pot & the laughter of fools**

Luther explains the comparison between the crackling pot and the laughter of fools by saying both give the impression of something that's actually not the case. The crackling thorns are like a "a sudden fire and one which makes a lot of noise, but it is over very quickly, with more flame than fire in it. It threatens a horrible conflagration, but soon, when the flame and the noise have passed, the fire is out... Therefore a fire of thorns or of stubble does not give any heat and does not penetrate, and yet it gives a greater appearance of burning than a fire of live coals, which do not have much flame but a great deal of heat. In the same way the happiness of the fools gives the impression that it will last forever, and one thinks that it has as much strength as it has flame; but it is nothing of the kind, for they are happy for a moment, but soon adversities come, and they go to pieces and are in utter despair... when the happiness is over, there remains trouble in the spirit," (AE 15:114–115).

See Psalm 118:1–14. How does this psalm describe the enemies of the Lord? Compare especially verse 12 to Ecclesiastes 7:6. How does Isaiah 40:8 describe the things of this world? The Word of God? How does our Lord reaffirm this teaching in Matthew 7:24–27? Compare also 1 Peter 2:6–9.

#### **7:7: Oppression drives the wise into madness**

Luther: "For when a wise man wants to help the world and be of aid and counsel to things and when he does everything with the utmost correctness, he is still covered with filth by fools, and he experiences the extreme of ingratitude," (AE 15:115).

Compare Luther's comments with Matthew 21:33–39. What example does Christ set for us? See also Romans 12:14–21.

#### **7:8: The end is better than the beginning**

How does our Lord expand on Solomon's teaching in Matthew 21:28–31 and Luke 14:27–35?

#### **7:10: A foolish question**

What does Solomon have to say to those who long for "the good ol' days"? See also Ecclesiastes 1:9.

#### **7:12: The benefits of wisdom & money**

While Solomon is careful to warn about the dangers of wealth (Eccl. 2:8–11), he acknowledges that money, like wisdom has its benefits. Did Jesus need money to conduct his ministry? See Luke 8:1–3 and John 12:6.

#### **7:13: Who can make straight what God has made crooked?**

What does this verse, along with Titus 3:10 and Matthew 10:14 suggest about evangelism?

Luther: ""A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject." When you have done your part, let God do His part. To refuse to quit unless you have corrected things first is to put yourself in the place of God, that is, to be obviously insane... If you are a preacher of the Gospel, do not preach as though you could gain all men for Christ, for not all heed the Gospel (cf. Rom. 10:16); but if you convert three or four souls and lead them to Christ, like the tips of burning brands (cf. Amos 4:11), give thanks. For one should not quit simply because so few are changed for the better to hear the preaching of the Gospel. But do what Christ did: He rescued the elect and left the rest behind. This is what the apostles did also. It will not be better for you. You are foolish if you either presume that you alone can accomplish everything or despair of everything when it does not go your way," (AE 15:120, 124).

#### **7:14: God makes both joy and adversity**

Luther: "Prepare yourself in such a way that you are also able to be sorrowful; enjoy the things that are present in such a way that you do not base your confidence on them, as though they were going to last forever," (AE 15:120).

#### **7:16–18: Do not be overly righteous or overly wicked**

What warning does our Lord give to those who put on excessive displays of piety? See Matthew 6:1–8, 16–18.

What should we keep in mind when correcting wickedness? See Matthew 7:3. Luther: "Therefore if we ourselves often fall short of the Law and if we sin in word and deed, let us bear with the same thing in others," (AE 15:128).



Bollhagen summarizes these verses as follows: "Keep on working hard. Seize new opportunities and keep your hands on the old ones until they are completed. Be persistent in accomplishing your tasks. Grab on to whatever challenge faces you, and don't let go. And all the while you are doing these things, keep on trusting your God one hundred percent of the time for everything you need for this life and the life to come... never mind [asking whether you should keep working or leave it in God's hands]; just keep on working and keep trusting," (263–264).

#### **7:20: "Not a righteous man on earth"**

For additional texts on the doctrine of total depravity, see Romans 3:23; Psalm 51; Proverbs 20:9. Compare also Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple and the cure for our unrighteousness in 1 Kings 8:46–51. How should we conduct ourselves, especially given our unrighteousness? See Deuteronomy 4:9, 15, & 23.

How does Solomon indicate that unrighteousness is limited to earth here in Ecclesiastes 7:20? Compare also Revelation 22:3.

**Closing: O God, Our Help in Ages Past** (LSB, 733)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** Rev. Eric Andersen (rev.ena40@gmail.com) is pastor of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Summit, IL and Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hodgkins, IL. He is also the Associate Editor of Brothers of John the Steadfast, co-host of Steadfast Throwdown, Bible Study Editor for Around the Word, and teaches theology at Wittenberg Academy.