

Ecclesiastes Chapter Seven

Things that are Better (vv. 1-14)

VERSE 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 (שֵׁם מִשְׁמֵן טוֹב וַיּוֹם הַמָּוֶת מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹלָדוֹ)

טוֹב [*adj.m.s.abs. tob + noun m.s.abs. shem name + prep min w/noun m.s.abs. shemen oil,*

ointment + waw w/noun m.s.abs. yom + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. maweth death + prep min w/noun

m.s.abs. yom + Niphal infin.constr.w/3m.s.suff. yalad be born]).

VERSE 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning (טוֹב לָלֶכֶת אֶל-בַּיִת-אֵבֶל)

[*adj.m.s.abs. tob + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. chalak walk, go + prep el to + noun*

m.s.constr. bayith house + noun m.s.abs. ebel mourning]

Than to go to a house of feasting (מִלֶּכֶת אֶל-בַּיִת מִשְׁתֵּה) [*prep min w/Qal infin.constr.*

halak go + prep el + noun m.s.constr. bayith + noun m.s.abs. mishtech banquet]),

Because that is the end of every man (בְּאִשֶּׁר הוּא סוֹף כָּל-הָאָדָם) [*prep beth*

w/rel.pro. asher + pro.3m.s. hu + noun m.s.abs. soph end + noun m.s.constr. kol + d.a.w/noun

m.s.abs. adam]),

And the living takes it to heart (וְהַחַי יִתֵּן אֶל-לֵבּוֹ) [*waw w/d.a.w/adj.m.s.abs. chay*

living + Qal impf.3m.s. nathan give; "takes" + prep el to + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. leb

heart]).

VERSE 3 Sorrow is better than laughter (טוֹב כְּעֵס מוֹשֶׁחֶק) [adj.m.s.abs. tob + noun m.s.abs. ka-as grief; “Sorrow” + prep min w/noun m.s.abs. tsechoq laughter],

For when a face is sad a heart may be happy (כִּי־בָרַע פָּנִים יֵיטֵב לֵב) [part ki for + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. rboa bad; “sad” + noun m.p.abs. paneh face + Qal impf.3m.s. yatab be good; “may be happy” + noun m.s.abs. leb]),

VERSE 4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning (חֲכָמִים בְּבַיִת אֵבֶל) לֵב [noun m.s.abs.leb heart; “mind” + adj.m.p.abs. chakam wise + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. bayith + noun m.s.abs. ebel mourning],

While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure (וְלֵב כְּסִילִים בְּבַיִת שְׂמֵחָה) [waw w/noun m.s.abs. leb heart + noun m.p.abs. kesil fool + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. bayith + noun f.s.abs. semeach joyful; “pleasure”]).

VERSE 5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man (טוֹב לְשִׁמְעַת גְּעֵרַת חָכָם) [adj.m.s.abs. tob + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. shama listen + noun f.s.constr. ge-ara rebuke + adj.m.s.abs. chakam wise])

Than for one to listen to the song of fools (מֵאִישׁ שִׁמְעַת שִׁיר כְּסִילִים) [prep min w/noun m.s.abs. ish man; “Than for one” + Qal part.m.s.abs. shama listen + noun m.s.abs. shir song+ noun m.p.abs. kesil fool]).

VERSE 6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot (הַסִּירִים תַּחַת הַסִּיר) כִּי כְּקוֹל [part ki for + prep kaph w/noun m.s.abs. qol voice; “crackling” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. sir thorn + part. tachath under + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. sir pot]),

So is the laughter of the fool (כִּן שְׂחֹק הַכֶּסֶל) [*part ki + noun m.s.constr. tseboq laughter + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kesil*];

And this too is futility (וְגַם־זֶה הֶבֶל) [*waw w/part gam too + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + noun m.s.abs. hebel vanity*].

ANALYSIS: VERSES 1-6

1. Most take verses 1-14 as a separate unit, with verses 13 & 14 as a kind of conclusion to the whole unit.
2. The first twelve verses of this chapter are proverbs, most presented according to the “better-than” pattern.
3. It is useless to try to identify a cohesive progression of thought in this section.
4. The unifying factor is word-repetition.
5. By the use of the “better-than” proverb, Qohelet tells us that there are some things better than others.
6. The list of proverbs begins in verse 1a and sounds like the book of Proverbs (22:1 “A good name is to be more desired than great wealth. Favor is better than silver and gold.”).
7. Here the comparison is between a good name and an expensive item.
8. The choice may be determined in part by the word-play of the line.
9. The line is made up of four Hebrew words, the first and the last (*tob*), being the same.
10. The two middle words sound similar “name/reputation” (*shem*) and “ointment” (*misheman*).
11. That oil was highly regarded during biblical times may be seen in: Pss. 45:7; 133; Amos 6:6 and Matt. 6:17 and 26:7.
12. In the second proverb Q. undermines the common viewpoint affirming that “the day of one’s death is better than the day of one’s birth.”
13. Based on his teaching about death (3:18-21 and 12:1-5), this supports the idea of world-weariness.
14. The second proverb reflects the notion that life is finally over.
15. One view connects the two proverbs where the righteous rejoice at the time of death because their reputation is secure.
16. This proverb could not apply to the fate of the unbeliever.
17. So it is limited in scope.
18. The advantage of death over life continues in verse 2 with another “better-than” proverb.
19. Q. expresses his viewpoint that it is better to go to a funeral than a party.
20. The funeral scene helps remind others that they too will die (hence, “Because that is the end of every person”), and that they ought to live their lives accordingly.
21. He does not explicitly mention God or the afterlife, but certainly that must be what he has in mind.
22. The point isn’t that it is wrong “to go to the house of feasting”, but rather, there is a better venue to stimulate serious thinking about what is to come.
23. The final clause “and the living should take it to heart” supports the idea of a universal fate.

24. Since no one can escape that fate a funeral is simply a reminder to live in the light of the inevitable.
25. That requires divine wisdom.
26. Verse 3 is made up of a brief proverb followed by a motive clause.
27. The noun translated “sorrow” (*ka-as*) is a Hebrew term for ‘anger’ (cf. Deut. 4:25; occurs 76x; but also see Eccl. 1:18 where it is translated ‘grief’ and 2:23 ‘grievous’ and 5:16 ‘anger’ and 7:9 ‘angry/anger’ and 11:10 ‘grief.’).
28. Here the idea is a negative emotion along the lines of grief and vexation.
29. “Vexation is better than laughter” because it is an honest emotion, whereas “laughter” (in the context here of merrymaking) does not necessarily reflect reality.
30. “Vexation” describes a reaction people have to the difficulties of life which cause pain and misery.
31. The reason “vexation is better than laughter” is given in 7:3b: “for a sad face is good for the heart.”
32. The idea is not that a ‘sad face’ improves the heart, but that ‘a sad face’ demonstrates that a person is facing up to a difficult situation.
33. Such a person is not living in a world of denial like the happy-go-lucky fool.
34. The proverb in verse 4 is similar to the proverb in verse 2.
35. Except here there is a transition in 7:4 to the relationship between the ‘wise’ and the ‘fool.’
36. The term ‘heart’ points to the basic orientation of the wise person and the fool.
37. The wise person’s orientation is to the brevity of life and therefore the need to act accordingly.
38. His heart is “in the house of mourning” while the fool’s “is in the house of pleasure/mirth.”
39. The fool does not take the troubles of life (including death) seriously, and either avoids them, nor takes measures to meet them with wisdom (cf. Prov. 14:8, 15; 22:3; 27:12; cf. Eccl. 2:14 “the wise person has eyes in his head but the fool walks in darkness.”).
40. Q. goes on to show with another proverb (v. 5) that the outlook of the wise is much better than that of the fool.
41. Again, the wise person faces reality when confronted with a rebuke from someone like himself who is wise.
42. A rebuke is a verbal warning directed at someone’s behavior or attitude/viewpoint.
43. Although a rebuke can be difficult to bear it is highly valued (cf. Prov. 12:1; 13:1, 18; 17:10; 19:25; 27:5; 29:15).
44. The “song of fools” refers to song of frivolity, which are found in the house of pleasure, but have little to do with reality.
45. In verse 6 “the laughter of the fool” is compared to “the sound/crackling of thorns under a pot.”
46. The loud sound dissipates rather quickly, so the laughter of fools dies down, indicating that for all the celebratory noise, giving the impression of a good time, it is all meaningless in the face of the real world.
47. There is nothing of substance and this stands over against the “rebuke of the wise.”
48. Verse 6 concludes with a *hebel* verdict: “this also is meaningless.”

Miscellaneous Proverbs (vv. 7-14)

VERSE 7 For oppression makes a wise man mad (כִּי הָעֶשֶׂק יְהוֹלִיל חָכָם) [part ki + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. osheq oppression + Poel impf.3m.s. halal shine; in the poel 'make mad' + adj.m.s.abs. hakam wise],

And a bribe corrupts the heart (וַיֵּאָבֵד אֶת־לֵב מִתְּנָה) [waw w/Piel impf.3m.s. abad be destroyed; "corrupts" + d.o. + noun m.s.abs. leb + noun f.s.abs. mattanah gift; "bribe"]).

VERSE 8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning (אַחֲרֵית דְּבַר יִמְרָאֲשִׁיתוֹ) טוב [adj.m.s.abs. tob + noun f.s.abs. acharith end + noun m.s.abs. dabar word; "matter" + prep min w/noun f.s.constr.w/3m.s.suff. reshith beginning]);

Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit (טוֹב אֶרְךָ־רוּחַ מִגְּבוּהַ־רוּחַ) [adj.m.s.abs. tob + adj.m.s.constr. arek long + noun both s.abs. ruach spirit + prep min w/adj.m.s.constr. gaboah high; "haughtiness" + noun both s.abs. ruach spirit]].

VERSE 9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry (אַל־תַּבְהֵל בְּרוּחְךָ לְכַעֵס) [part al not + Piel imperf.2m.s. bahal be in a hurry + prep beth w/noun both s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. ruach spirit; "heart" + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. kaas be angry],

For anger resides in the bosom of fools (כִּי כַעַס בְּחִיק פְּסִילִים יָנוּחַ) [part ki for + noun m.s.abs. ka-as anger + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. cheq bosom + noun m.p.abs. kesil fool + Qal impf.3m.s. ruach rest; "resides"]).

VERSE 10 Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these

אַל־תֹּאמַר מָה הָיָה שְׁהַיָּמִים הָרִאשׁוֹנִים הָיוּ טוֹבִים מֵאֵלֶּה) [part al not + Qal impf.2m.s. amar say + interrog. mah why? + Qal perf.3m.s. hayah be; "is" + rel.pro. prefix asher w/d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. yom day + d.a.w/adj.m.p.abs. rishon former + Qal perf.3m.s. hayah "were" + adj.m.p.abs. tob "better" + prep min w/adj.p.abs. elleh these]?)"

For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this (כִּי לֹא מִחֻכְמָה שָׁאַלְתָּ עַל־זֶה)

[conj ki for + neg lo + prep min w/noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + Qal perf.3m.s. sha-al inquire, ask + part al "about" + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this]).

VERSE 11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good (טוֹבָה חֻכְמָה עִם־נַחֲלָה)

[adj.f.s.abs. tob + noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + part am with + noun f.s.abs. nachalah inheritance])

And an advantage to those who see the sun (וַיֵּתֵר לְרֹאֵי הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ) [waw w/noun

m.s.abs. yitron advantage + prep lamed w/Qal part.m.p.constr. ra-ah see + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun]).

VERSE 12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection (כִּי בְצִל הַחֻכְמָה

בְּצִל הַכֶּסֶף) [part ki + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. tsel "protection: + d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + prep eth w/noun m.s.abs. tsel "protection" + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. keseph silver; "money"]],

But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors (וַיִּתְרוֹן הַעֵת הַחֲכָמָה תְּחַיֶּה בְּעַלְיָהּ) [waw w/noun m.s.abs. yitron advantage + noun f.s.abs. da-ath knowledge + d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. chokmah wisdom + Piel impf.3f.s. hayah sustain + noun m.p.constr.w/3m.s.suff. ba-al owner]).

VERSE 13 Consider the work of God (רְאֵה אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים) [Qal impf.3m.s. ra-ah see; “Consider” + d.o. + noun m.s.constr. ma-asheh work + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim]),

For who is able to straighten what He has bent (כִּי מִי יוּכַל לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עִוְתָהּ) [part ki + interrog. mi who? + Qal impf.3m.s. yakol be able + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. taqan be straight + d.o. + rel.pro. asher + Piel perf.3m.s.w/3m.s.suff. awath bend])?

VERSE 14 In the day of prosperity be happy (בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הִיָּה בְּטוֹב) [prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. yom + noun f.s.abs. tob good; “prosperity” + Qal imper.m.s. hayah be + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. tob “be happy”]),

But in the day of adversity consider -- God has made the one as well as the other (וּבְיוֹם רָעָה רְאֵה גַם אֶת־זֶה לְעַמְת־זֶה עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים) [waw w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. yom + adj.f.s.abs. ra-ah evil; “adversity” + Qal imper.m.s. ra-ah “consider” + conj gam alike + d.o. + adj.m.s.abs. zeh “the one” + prep lamed w/part. amah with + adj.m.s.abs. zeh “the other” + Qal perf.3m.s. ashah “made” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim])

So that man will not discover anything that will be after him (הָאָדָם אֲחַרָיו מְאֻמָּה) (עַל־דְּבַר־תּוֹרָה שֶׁלֹּא יִמָּצֵא) [part al not + noun f.s.constr. dabbarah + rel.pro. asher w/neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s. matsa find; “discover” + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam man + adv achari after + noun m.s.abs. me-umah anything]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 7-14

1. The proverb in verse 7 is designed to demonstrate that wise man's wisdom can be undermined by sin.
2. The first part of the proverb features the noun "oppression" and is the same word found at 4:1.
3. The term (*osheq*) can also be rendered "extortion" (cf. Lev. 6:4) a form of oppression.
4. The question here is whether the wise man is the victim or the perpetrator.
5. The second part of this verse indicates the latter—he is the one taking a bribe.
6. The weakness of wisdom does not lie with wisdom, but with the STA of the wise man gone bad.
7. There is no apparent link between the proverb in verse 8 to the preceding proverb.
8. "The end of a matter is better than its beginning" can refer to a wide variety of circumstances.
9. This is true with regards to those who conduct themselves properly, especially those who adhere to God's will.
10. The second line (v. 8b) augments the first line.
11. "Patience of spirit" is literally, 'long of spirit.'
12. "Patience" is the adjective 'long' (*arek*).
13. The idea here is that "patience" is needed to reach "the end of a matter."
14. On the other hand, "haughtiness of spirit" characterized the person who is not humble enough to wait out "the end of a matter."
15. The proverb in verse 9 expands on the one in verse 8.
16. The person who cannot wait patiently for the resolution of the matter is the type who is easily frustrated and resorts to the sin of anger.
17. Being quick to anger is a characteristic of fools (line 2 of v. 9).
18. When things do not develop according to their timetable, they resort to fits of anger.
19. This proverb is not at odds with the one in verse 3.
20. The term "bosom" refers to that which is held to be most dear to a person.
21. Here it is used of a deep-seated disposition characteristic of fools.
22. Fools are known by how they react to difficult situations (Prov. 12:16).
23. The prohibition of verse 10 elaborates on the "better-than" saying of verse 7a, which says that "the end of a thing is better than its beginning."
24. The question "Why is it that the former days were better than these?" refers to the human tendency of every age to glorify the past and live with a nostalgic view of the past.
25. Such an outlook does not come "from wisdom", says Q.
26. The rationale goes against the saying of verse 8: "the end of a thing is better than its beginning."
27. Verses 11 & 12 are a subunit focusing on wisdom.
28. "Wisdom" is taken here as simply conducting one's life in a sane and proven fashion.
29. It is to be viewed natural wisdom that produces positive benefits in the temporal realm.
30. As such it has limitations as it cannot produce eternal benefits as with divine wisdom.
31. In v. 11 Q. does not say wisdom is "better-than" inheritance; only that both are "good, and an advantage to those who see the sun."
32. The same idea is expressed in verse 12a where wisdom and money are both designated a "protection."
33. This term is the Hebrew noun "shadow" (*tse*l).

34. In light of 6:12 and the statement “who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime”, along with “the few years of his futile life he will spend like a shadow”, this “protection” is not to be taken as an unqualified positive.
35. The idea here is that of a relative advantage.
36. The knowledge that comes from wisdom is to be preferred as it “preserves the lives of its possessors.”
37. Money without wisdom cannot do that, he says.
38. The term “possessors” is the plural of *ba-al* which means master/owner of something.
39. In verse 13 Q. focuses on the activity of God in general: “consider the work of God for who is able to straighten what He has bent?”
40. This statement parallels 1:15 “What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.”
41. But here God is the One who makes things crooked.
42. In 1:15 the emphasis is on the inability to solve the ills of life.
43. The term “crooked” is used in contexts where individuals are struggling with the fairness of God (Job 8:3; 19:6; 34:12; Pss. 110:76; 146:9), which is the topic of verses 15-18.
44. In verse 14 life is made up of good and bad days.
45. If one is experiencing “a day of prosperity” or “a good day” (*tob*) his advice is “be happy.”
46. If on the other hand, one is experiencing a “day of adversity”, the reader is to “consider” the fact “that God made the one as well as the other.”
47. The fact that good days and bad days come from God is taught in other Scriptures (Amos 3:6; Isa. 45:7).
48. There is no guarantee that even the wise will experience only the good in the future; in fact it is impossible to “discern anything *that will be* after him.”
49. The future is uncertain so enjoy life as it is, because there is no way it can be changed.
50. This is in line with Jesus’ teaching to His disciples (Matt. 6:34 “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”).