

## THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

### "Better Things"

Ecclesiastes 7:1-10

#### Introduction

1. Solomon has given six full chapters to seeking out the good in this life. He has not found it! All of his observations and expressions have ended in futile worthlessness. It is all a striving after wind (bubbles!).
2. The second major section of the book (chapters 7-12) entertains some items of conclusion. First on the list is a series of proverbs. Is this vain life worth living at all? Is there any good for which man should labor? From the confused vanities of life, what can be made of living after all?
3. The key to the series of "better things" here in this chapter lies with 6:11. From that single verse rises a number of other "better things." In the Hebrew it is the word "tov" which is commonly used in the phrase "mazel tov" (good luck or congratulations). Check out these suggestions provided by Solomon. They are his attempt to resolve the problems of life with something worthwhile:

#### 1. NAME--OINTMENT v. 1.

The thought is clear. A man who has character and is a godly man in life and word holds a special place. Such a man has a good, honorable, and venerable name. It is not just a reputation, but something the man has before God. This is better than ointment used lavishly at banquets. Odor is good, but it cannot compare with the very being of a man. Cf. Proverbs 22:1.

#### 2. DEATH--BIRTH v. 1.

At least one Thracian tribe, the Trausi, actually celebrated birthdays as days of sadness, while their day of death was one of rejoicing. The point is that there is nothing here which is really worthwhile. Here is a snatch of evidence that Solomon considered the afterlife to be real and valuable. The present life is not the chief good. Divine revelation shows this to be forever true (Phil. 1:23).

#### 3. MOURNING--FEASTING v. 2.

The "house" is mentioned here because it speaks of death. It was customary to sorrow for a dead person for 7 days, but this was often extended to 30 days (Deut. 34:8). Following the burial there was the "trostmahl" (comforting repast) and this is the "feast" mentioned. The house of mourning is better because there one is faced with the matter of what is coming. There men take things to heart while the feasting shuts out God and the afterlife.

4. SORROW--LAUGHTER vv. 3, 4.

The word for "sorrow" in this verse is rendered "anger" (v. 9). It relates to serious thoughts in relation to eternity. Sorrow penetrates the heart and draws the thoughts of a person to deep consideration and purification. Reckless mirth or extravagant merriment is meant by "laughter." There is a connection between the face and the heart (v. 4). Solomon noted the thought expressed here in Proverbs (14:13).

5. REBUKE--SONG vv. 5, 6.

The word "rebuke" concerns the severe warning of the wise. They are impressive, emphatic, and salutary. In opposition to this is the "song" of the fool. The latter ruins the soul of man while the former is a help. The word for "thorns" and the word of "pot" are a paronomasia (forming a word by a slight change and thus causing a pun). Nettles are fired up and rise to a quick blaze, but soon extinguish themselves. The laughter of a fool is like this: empty, devoid of earnestness, and just a crackle!

The connection between vv. 5, 6 and v. 7 is not clearly known. There seems to be a hiatus. The thought might well be the same as expressed elsewhere (Psa. 37:16; Prov. 16:8).

6. END--BEGINNING v. 8a.

This proverb is not without limitation (cf. Prov. 5:4; 23:32). But if a matter is not evil, the reaching of a goal is always better than its beginning. The beginning always leaves a matter uncertain, but not its end.

7. PATIENT--PROUD vv. 8b, 9.

This is quite related to the first part of the verse. The frequently long and tedious situation between beginning and end will require patience. Those proud in spirit or haughty will fret at the delay and often seek to reach the goal by violence. The haughty feel that everything should be at their beckon call immediately! This compassionate excitement is warned against (v. 9). This sort of anger or fretfulness is at home in the heart of fools (Prov. 14:33). It is a fool who loses his equilibrium under every opposition to his wishes.

Conclusion The final verse is a review in a sense. It does not have the familiar "better than" of the previous verses, but still has the catchword "tov" (good, better). It is like a question: how comes it that you suggest that the former days were better than the present? Each time period has its bright and dark sides. So to question is to simply be discontent with the present. While Solomon provides some helpful proverbs, life is still a mystery.