

# **A Study of the Wisdom Literature**

## **OT Survey Lesson 299—Eccl. 7:1-8:1**

**Introduction:** The preacher recommends in this book a life of faith under God that seeks to enjoy His gifts with fear and submission to His will. In this section, however, he shows how this faith must also learn to find the good in life's trials and temptations. Thus, in a general way, the preacher, in this section, discusses how wisdom responds to these circumstances.

**Lesson aim:** To show how to profit from life's trials and temptations.

### **Facing life's difficult circumstances—Eccl. 7:1-14**

There is much in life to cause frustration, disappointment and anger. Solomon gives series of proverbs that address the proper response to these things.

1. What did the preacher affirm about a good name? (v. 1) What else did he affirm was better? How do you think this would be true?

Eaton offers an interesting way of connecting the two phrases which he says is allowed in Hebrew grammar. Just as a good name is better than oil, so the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. At face value the first phrase is true and relevant to the theme. It is not our outward fragrance that matters nearly as much as our inward character. Jesus spoke of the Pharisees as "white washed sepulchers". But it appears that the comparison moves more toward the second phrase which sets the stage for this chapter's discussion. Life is filled with much that hurts. The day we are born we live in anticipation of all this. The day we die is the day of relief from all of it. Of course, also for the man of faith there is hope for a better life as well.

2. Why is it better to go to a house of mourning than a house of feasting? (v. 2)

Parties don't make people think very seriously about life; but death does. Do you ever ponder what people will say at your funeral when you attend the funeral of another?

3. Why is sorrow better than laughter? (v. 3) Consequently, the mind of the wise is where? (v. 4)

Sorrow is not an automatic adjuster of attitude; but it certainly may be. Laughter tends to make us less sober and introspective; but sorrow makes us really look inside, see what we are, and try to be better.

4. What did the preacher say is better in v. 5? What is the point of the explanation in v. 6?

In a similar way, the rebuke of the wise, though unpleasant, is preferable to the light-hearted jesting of the fool. There is a play on words in Hebrew ‘sir’ for “pot”; “sirim” for “thorns”. Old timers know of various kinds of wood that make a lot of noise but put out little heat. So the “laughter of fools” is superficial and of little ultimate use to us. Think about that next time you watch Leno or a sitcom.

The preacher moves logically from these things that test us and make us better to things that may make us worse, inciting anger and disobedience.

### 5. What dangers attend wicked behavior like oppression and bribery? (v. 7)

The point here is that oppression may make a wise person resort to angry displays. And even a good man can be corrupted by gifts or bribes.

### 6. What two things did the preacher say were “better” in facing life’s trials? (v. 8)

Instead of meeting life’s trials with anger, we need patience rather than pride. And recognize that trials endured are better than those that have not issued forth in our lives.

### 7. What warning did he issue in v. 9? Why?

This comes at last to the practical point he has been working toward—anger. It is a quality of the fool, or disobedient man.

### 8. What sentiment do people often express in times of difficulty? (v. 10) Is it wise to speak thus?

Another temptation is to wax nostalgic about the past and long for the “good old days”, a trait particularly characteristic of the elderly in times of trial.

### 9. Is there an advantage to wisdom? (v. 11) How can wisdom help us in life’s trials? (v. 12)

What we receive from the Lord or others is good if it is managed with wisdom. It brings protection and preservation of life which enables us to enjoy what God has bestowed upon us. This wisdom is set forth in contrast to the frustration that often sets in upon us in life and abides in our “bosom” (cf. v. 9)

### 10. What does the preacher urge his readers to consider? (v. 13) What course does he recommend in light of this? (v. 14)

The “work of God” is the providence under which we all live, those unchangeable features of life under the sun mentioned in chapter 3: 1ff. They cannot be changed. If things go well, be happy. If not, recognize that these things too have their purpose in God’s providence. God has made it that way so that we all will face an uncertain future and fear Him.

## **Facing life's temptations—Eccl. 7:15-8:1**

1. What injustice had the preacher seen in life? (v. 15) What two warnings did he issue? (v. 16-17)

Though we have some confidence in the general administration of justice by God, it is not met out perfectly in this life. Bad things do happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. In dealing with temptation we face two dangers: 1) Putting on an air of self-righteousness; 2) pretending to know more than we know.

2. What is the point of the proverb in v. 18? What did he affirm about wisdom? (v. 19)

On the other hand, the answer is not to abandon oneself to wickedness or to live in folly. What we should try to do is get a hold on both righteousness and wisdom. Wisdom and its attending righteousness is a source of strength to a person.

3. What fact about all men is it important for the wise person to remember? (v. 20) This will enable him to do what? (v. 21-22)

It is important to remember in the quest for righteousness that no one reaches the state of perfection. Knowing this will make us more patient and forgiving with others who sin. It may cause us to “cover” the transgression of someone who has spoken badly about us.

4. To what did the preacher aspire? (v. 23) Yet, what had the preacher come to realize? (v. 24)

Solomon of course was very wise. He used the wisdom God gave him to discover that his wisdom was not adequate to discover all God was doing. I think this may refer to God's purpose in every event.

5. What did he purpose to do? (v. 25) What one certain discovery came from this investigation? (v. 26)

Solomon simply draws attention to the thoroughness or full scope of his deliberations. He has discovered a great source of bitterness in life—the woman who seeks out like a hunter a man for immoral purposes. The wise, the one pleasing to God, will escape her; but the fool will be captured by her lures.

6. What additional observation did the preacher make? (v. 27-28)

Solomon is not asserting that there are no wise women; but both wise men and women are rare. He does say that he found wisdom slightly less often in women than men. I wonder if he was thinking of his 1000 wives?

7. In pondering life, what had the preacher discovered about man? (v. 29) Yet, what blessing did he see in attaining wisdom in life? (8:1)

What this all boils down to is that man is responsible for the deplorable condition of human injustice and sin. God made man upright; but man has chosen to invent various forms of evil that destroy. The question of 8:1 is rhetorical. Who is like the wise man? His identification is made known in His face, and in the gentleness of His demeanor. He is not brooding or mean-spirited; but pleasant and loving toward others. James spoke similarly, “the wisdom from above is... gentle”.