

II. A MAN OF WISDOM WHO WORKS IN HARMONY  
WITH GOD REAPS EARTHLY BENEFITS  
REGARDLESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
CIRCUMSTANCES. 7:1—12:8

A. ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES TEACH WORTHWHILE  
LESSONS BUT IF IMPROPERLY INTERPRETED  
COULD LEAD TO DESPAIR. 7:1-22

1. This lesson taught by comparisons 7:1—7:14

a. A good name is better than precious ointment. 7:1

TEXT 7:1

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.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:1

171. What must one possess to assure that his death is better  
than his birth?
172. Read Proverbs 22:1 and list the three valuable things  
which are not as desirable as a good name and the favor  
of others.

PARAPHRASE 7:1

To have a good name or reputation is of greater value than  
possessing fine perfumed oil. So, too, is the day of death  
better than the day of one's birth.

## COMMENT 7:1

This is the beginning of a rather long section of lessons taught through contrasts or comparisons. The technique is not new to Solomon. On the same subject he had previously written: "A good name is to be more desired than great riches, favor is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). Undoubtedly the primary emphasis here is on one's character and integrity. To be honest and to have the respect of one's peers is the objective. Moral purity should receive the highest priority. The second part of the verse has been discarded by many as incidental to the lessons to be learned and has no particular contribution to make to the meaning here. It is argued that it is employed to simply show that one "thing" is better than another. However, there is purpose in the contrast between life and death that speaks to the lesson in point. The same "theme" of birth and death is carried through verse eight. The correlation is that one's reputation is often determined by serious consideration of the inevitable time of death which comes to every person. There is a real sense in which the honest facing up to the reality of death, whether your own or the death of another, has a sobering effect on decisions which may determine character and ultimately one's destiny.

To the Christian death is not the worst thing that can happen. On occasion it is welcomed as a sweet release from suffering or escape from a disease-ridden body which no longer should be joined with the spirit. To the Christian death is often viewed as a victory, a triumph. Especially is this true when it can be said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13).

It appears that a good man with a good name dies and leaves behind a good reputation. Such an experience would elicit the observation that, in this case at least, the day of one's death is better than the day of his birth for he has lived his life successfully. He now has the assurance that he shall be remembered. (Cf. 2:16; 8:10; 9:15) It has been noted that to be forgotten was cause for despair.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:1

312. What method is employed in this section to teach numerous lessons?
313. What primary lesson is taught in this verse?
314. In what way can the observation concerning death relate to the lesson of the good name?
315. List the reasons that death could be considered blessed to the Christian.
316. Why is the deathday better than the birthday for a good man?
317. Give evidence from Ecclesiastes that to be forgotten was cause for despair.

b. Attendance at a funeral is better than attendance at a birthday party. 7:2

## TEXT 7:2

- 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:2

173. Why is it better to go to the house of mourning?
174. What is the end of every man?
175. If the house of mourning represents death, and the house of feasting is the opposite, what would the house of feasting refer to?
176. From your own observations, list reasons why you think it would be of greater value to attend a funeral than a birthday party.

## PARAPHRASE 7:2

Since all men must share in the experience of death, and since those who are living consider the serious nature of life when they visit the house of mourning, it is better to attend a funeral service than to go to the places of festive enjoyment.

## COMMENT 7:2

In the former verse the emphasis was on the importance of one's reputation and good name. Such an attainment would assure a good memory in the minds of those who outlive you on the earth. In this verse, the emphasis is placed on the living who recall the life lived by the one who is being mourned.

Once again the lesson is taught by comparison. Human nature is such that man naturally gravitates toward festive occasions where the senses are delighted and the heart is made to laugh. However, there are few lasting values in such experiences. It is better to seek out the house of mourning. It is in this house that one is confronted with the issues of life and death. These are the issues which are grave enough to influence destinies and bring about sober reflection on one's present activities. Because man moves naturally to festive occasions, he needs to be reminded and even admonished to seek out opportunities which will lead him to consider seriously his own short sojourn on the earth.

One should not argue too strenuously that the "house of feasting" is a birthday party. However, since birth is the opposite of death and most births are occasions for festivity, it could be reasoned that the contrast is made between the beginning of life and the house where life has been terminated. If such is the case, the lessons are more plentiful in number and more lasting in value. At any rate, honest men admit that death is inevitable and they are sobered by looking upon the face of a friend who in this life will neither smile nor sing again.

The sobering effect is of a permanent nature because the text literally states that the individual takes the idea of death and "gives" it to his heart (mind). He ponders the ramifications of the death event, and allows the fact that he too will one day come to the same end, help him redesign his thinking and subsequently his life. Note the similarity in the prayer recorded in Psalms 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom."

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:2

318. Who is to benefit from going to the house of mourning?
319. What must one do to receive benefit from such an experience?
320. Man, by nature, gravitates toward what kind of activity?
321. List and discuss the reasons that the "house of feasting" could refer to a birthday party.
322. According to Psalms 90:12, what is the result of seriously considering the few days one has to live on this earth?

c. Sorrow is better than laughter. 7:3

### TEXT 7:3

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may be happy.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:3

177. In the contrast of the two houses in verse two, which house would hold sorrow? Which would hold laughter?
178. Explain this verse in the light of II Corinthians 7:10.
179. List some things that would cause a sad face but result in a happy heart.

## PARAPHRASE 7:3

To understand the circumstances of life which result in sorrowful experiences is better than seeking after laughter. The face may cloud with tears and sorrow, but the mind will benefit and be made happy.

## COMMENT 7:3

The principle taught in this verse is universally true. When one faces the reality of death and the suddenness of judgment before his Creator, he is drawn in his mind to consider his own ways. His countenance is made sad because he is seeing himself with the veneer and sham produced by self-deceit removed. His sinful ways are apparent. Repentance is implied because his sadness results in his heart being made happy. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (II Corinthians 7:10).

Laughter is good for the soul. There are times when it is the manifestation of direct blessing received from the Lord. (Cf. Psalms 126:2) However, it is used here in contrast to sorrow with the latter being more profitable because it leads to repentance while joy is the result.

The term "sorrow" is also rendered "anger, indignation, shagrin," and suggests a more severe attitude one should express toward his own iniquity. (Cf. Psalms 6:8) Sorrow is probably the better word as the visitor is in the house of mourning and this causes him to reflect on his part in the light of the deep emotion of the moment.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:3

323. Identify the principle taught in this verse.

324. Why is it evident that repentance is understood to have taken place?
325. Why is sorrow more profitable than laughter?
326. Why is sorrow more appropriate than anger in this context?

d. Wisdom is better than folly. 7:4

#### TEXT 7:4

4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of the fool is in the house of pleasure.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:4

180. What decision does the wise man make?
181. List the reasons from the first three verses as to why attendance in the house of mourning is a wiser choice than participating in the house of pleasure.

#### PARAPHRASE 7:4

So the mind of the wise man dwells in the house of mourning while the house of mirth naturally attracts the heart of fools.

#### COMMENT 7:4

The thesis of this section which reads, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting," has been thoroughly explained and defended. In this summary verse, a final argument is stated. It is noted that the "wise" man is the one who dwells upon the meaning of life as he faces the reality of death. If one fails to give death its rightful place

in the forming of life's decisions, and only pursues the activities of mirth and folly, he is considered a fool.

Death is never far removed from the mind of a Christian. There is an element of wisdom which is characteristic of the followers of Christ that is indeed foolishness to the world. (Cf. I Corinthians 1:18-23) We rejoice in the death of Christ for us and also our own death to sin which leads us to daily repentance. (Cf. Romans 6:1-7; Matthew 16:24-25) As one contemplates the cross and the death event of Jesus, the face is sorrowful but the heart is made to rejoice.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:4

327. What is the final argument as stated in this verse?
328. When is a man considered a fool?
329. What two death events should the Christian keep in mind?

e. A rebuke from the wise is better than the song of fools.

7:5-7

### TEXT 7:5-7

- 5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools.
- 6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool, and this too is futility.
- 7 For oppression makes a wise man mad, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:5-7

182. What is of greater profit than listening to the singing of fools?
183. Discuss the lesson taught by the analogy of the "crackling of thorn bushes," and the "laughter of fools."



184. State the two reasons given in verse seven for listening to a wise man.

### PARAPHRASE 7:5-7

Grave admonitions which are directed toward us from a wise men are better than listening to the singing of fools. The laughter of fools accomplishes about as much as burning nettles under a kettle—it is but a meaningless illusion. For oppression will make a wise man foolish and a bribe will destroy his understanding.

### COMMENT 7:5-7

Solomon is still contending that one should maintain a good name and protect it. His argument has been that if we give sober consideration to the lessons gained from reflecting on death, rather than pursuing foolish pleasures, we will discover those truths which will enable us to protect our reputation. He continues to argue for the same cause. However, he now suggests that our attention should be directed toward the rebuke from wise men. If we listen and accept the admonition, this will cause us to develop into wise men, too.

v. 5 It is not encouragement that comes from the lips of the wise man, but stern rebuke. The idea is one of offering grave admonition that heals and strengthens while it wounds. Much of life is this way. Physical muscles must be broken down through hard work or exercise before they can be rebuilt with firmness and strength. Sometimes suffering is the direct result of sin. In such instances the sinner has found a friend when he discovers one who will rebuke him with the truth mingled with love and long-suffering. The rebuke of the wise is a blessing in disguise. Rebuke, with a view to repentance and renewal of spirit, has always been characteristic of God's prophetic word. Prophets, apostles and gospel preachers have

all lived under the same mandate to "speak, exhort and reprove" (Titus 2:15).

The listening to the singing of fools is the equivalent of luxurating with the world in pleasure and mirth. In such circumstances one is seldom confronted with a rebuke which leads to godly sorrow and healing of the soul. The reason is simple: *wise men* are not found singing songs that fools sing or frequenting places where fools seek pleasure and mirth.

v. 6 The lesson taught in the former verse is now illustrated by a simple but vivid analogy. The laughter of fools is short-lived, meaningless, loud, and without lasting value. In like manner, quick-burning, dried thorn bushes will crack and pop while appearing to give lasting heat beneath the kettle. However, their contribution to the cooking process is meaningless. In the original Hebrew, there appears to be a play on words which may be translated in our language as "nettles under the kettle." The point of the lesson is that the laughter of fools is a temporary contribution without redeeming value.

The oft-defined "vanity" is once more employed to underscore the uselessness of mirth and pleasure. That which once gave occasion for joy and laughter now lies in ashes. James summarized the lesson in the following words, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom" (James 4:8-9).

v. 7 One needs to safeguard his good name and maintain personal integrity. Especially is vigilance required when oppression is rampant and the universal practice of bribe-taking is corrupting the hearts of influential leaders. Rulers, who are tempted (Cf. Proverbs 16:8), need the rebuke of wise men just as those who are poor and suffer under oppression. The Jewish tradition surrounding Proverbs 31:1-9 is that in this section Solomon's mother is reprimanding him because he failed to act wisely. Her words conclude, "Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy." When one is given to strong drink he cannot judge

wisely. In like manner, when one is influenced by a bribe he renders distorted judgments.

A corresponding observation concerning the destructive nature of taking a bribe is found in Proverbs 15:27. The heart is corrupted to the point where a man will abandon wisdom and sound judgment. The bribe-taker has fallen prey to compromise. He is now vulnerable to numerous areas of corruption. A reflection of verse five enables the reader to weigh the warning in the light of a positive declaration.

Numerous writers have expressed attitudes that verse seven is misplaced and unrelated to the preceding materials. However, the theme of this section, the protection of a good name through wise behavior, is threatened by oppression and bribe taking. The idea is that a wise man will safeguard himself against both hazards.

#### FACT QUESTIONS 7:5-7

330. Identify the objective that is still being sought by Solomon.
331. Define the term "rebuke" as it is used in verse five.
332. Explain what is meant by the "singing of fools."
333. What similarities exist between the singing of fools and the crackling of thorn bushes?
334. In what sense is such singing vanity?
335. Name the two dangers facing a wise man which are found in verse seven.
336. Which of these two dangers would one consider the greater threat to a ruler?
337. Explain why verse seven is not out of place in this section.

f. Patience is better than anxiety. 7:8-9

#### TEXT 7:8-9

8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience

of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:8-9

185. To what previous statement in this chapter could the first part of verse eight have reference?
186. What one word is synonymous with "haughtiness of spirit"?
187. Explain what you think is meant by "*eager . . . to be angry.*"
188. One who harbors anger in his heart is considered to be what?

### PARAPHRASE 7:8-9

Better is the end of something than its beginning, and better is a patient spirit than a proud spirit. Do not become impatient and angered in spirit for he who allows anger to reside in his heart is a fool.

### COMMENT 7:8-9

Why is the end of a thing better than its beginning? There are numerous answers which could be given as many experiences of life underscore the truth that "hind sight is better than foresight." One who enters rashly into a business deal or enterprise, bragging concerning his personal ambitions and goals, may discover that the wiser action would be to wait and see how events finally materialize. Jesus said concerning the individual who boasted of his intention to build, only to discover that he ran out of funds, that "all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying 'This man began to build and was not

able to finish' ” (Luke 14:29-30). A similar statement comes to us from the Old Testament in the classic statement of Ahab: “Let not him who girds on his armor boast like him who takes it off” (I Kings 20:11). Thus, the wise man knows that it is better to resign all of one’s future plans into the providential control of the Creator. This does not relieve one of the responsibility of planning for tomorrow, but it does safeguard against the proud spirit.

The purpose of a thing is best understood by looking back upon it. Wisdom is gained by patiently waiting even when one is tempted to press and force the situation to fit desired or predicted ends.

A quick temper in company with frustration is the earmark of a fool. Another mark of the fool is to welcome, harbor and entertain anger. The wise man will be careful not to become easily agitated or react physically without just provocation. Such irresponsible behavior will not produce a “good name.”

#### FACT QUESTIONS 7:8-9

338. Simple observations of life lead to what conclusion?  
 339. If one wishes to be thought of as a wise man, what is a better course of action than proud bragging over proposed projects?  
 340. Give two earmarks of a fool.

g. The now is better than the former days. 7:10

#### TEXT 7:10

- 10 Do not say, “Why is it that the former days are better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:10

189. What would be considered the "former days"?

190. Why is it unwise for us to long for "the good old days"?

## PARAPHRASE 7:10

If you wish to be wise, do not be longing for the past and say, "The good old days were much better than these days!"

## COMMENT 7:10

There is undoubtedly more implied in this verse than merely a rebuke of being dissatisfied with the present and the fruitless longing for days gone by. If the conditions of the present time which produce suffering are a result of disobedience and sin, then the present is a time of just retribution. In such a case, it is not wise to question the circumstances of the present or long for the past. There is evidence that Solomon detected three signs of lack of wisdom: impatience, willingness to harbor anger, and a failure to inquire wisely concerning the circumstances of the present.

It is easy to imagine that former days were better than the present time regardless of the age in which one lives. With the passing of time there is the tendency to forget the evil experience of the day-to-day living that constitutes life in every age. Thus, the present *appears* to be more difficult than what one overhears concerning the joy of past experiences. However, the wise man interprets the present in the light of wisdom. This will enable him to interpret the past and make necessary adjustments to live wisely in the present.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:10

341. The adverse conditions of the present time may be the result of what?
342. List the three signs of lack of wisdom noted by Solomon.
343. Discuss the attitude a wise man has toward his own present age.

h. Wisdom is better than haughty judgment. 7:11

## TEXT 7:11

- 11 Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:11

191. Who are the ones meant by "those who see the sun"?
192. Wisdom plus what is an advantage?

## PARAPHRASE 7:11

Wisdom like an inheritance is good and is profitable to those who are now living upon the earth.

## COMMENT 7:11

There are two ways to view this verse. One suggests that wisdom "plus" an inheritance is good. The other is that wisdom "like" an inheritance is good. The original language will permit either. The English translations are varied.

Wisdom is likened unto an inheritance. This suggests that it is a permanent possession. An inheritance was kept in the

family to be passed on from parents to children. It is wisdom, however, that is under discussion and not an inheritance. Wisdom is good like an inheritance, it is permanent like an inheritance, and it is superior to an inheritance. Other related passages in Ecclesiastes verify these conclusions. It is also true that wisdom enhances the value of an inheritance. However, when one is reduced to wisdom alone, he still has the greater treasure. Note Proverbs 3:13-14: "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver and its gain than fine gold."

There is also a reciprocal nature that exists between wisdom and money: Wisdom lends value to wealth and wealth lends prestige to wisdom.

Wisdom is an advantage to those who see the sun. This conveys the idea that one can make more of life upon this earth than normally thought. The word "advantage" probably does not mean financial increase but rather that wisdom will add more to the enjoyment and purpose of living than would an inheritance. This conclusion is also supported by verse twelve.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:11

344. Give the two ways the first part of this verse can be interpreted.
345. Why doesn't the original language settle the issue?
346. Give reasons why wisdom is superior to an inheritance.
347. Discuss what is meant by wisdom being an advantage to those who possess it.

i. Wisdom is better than money. 7:12

### TEXT 7:12

12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection. But



the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:12

193. What advantage does wisdom have over money?

194. Wisdom leads us to whom? (Cf. Proverbs 8:35)

### PARAPHRASE 7:12

To live beneath the shadow or shelter of wisdom is like living beneath the shadow or shelter of wealth, but there is the added blessing with wisdom and that is the blessing of knowing that wisdom gives life to its possessors.

### COMMENT 7:12

This verse adds another comparison to the growing list that exists between wisdom and other possessions which are discovered upon the earth. It is intended to help the reader understand that a wise man will value knowledge, which is synonymous with wisdom in this instance, above other things. To maintain a good name, one must place wisdom at the top of his priorities.

The additional comparison here is to illustrate the protective nature of wisdom. Yet, wisdom has greater value than offering protection to the one who possesses it. Solomon states that wisdom also preserves or keeps the one who possesses it. The analogy of the "shadow" is appropriate in that the heat of adversity ("oppression" v. 7) is evidently threatening. The shadow offers a shelter of protection from such heat. One can escape from certain threats in life by employing wisdom just as he can escape certain threats through the use of money. (Cf. v. 11) Examples of how both wisdom and money serve in

this capacity are found in Ecclesiastes 9:15 and Proverbs 13:8.

Some translations suggest more the idea that wisdom *gives* life rather than *preserves* life. The idea of giving life is consonant with other passages in the Bible which speak to the subject. One example is found in I Samuel 2:6, 8: "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up. . . He raises the poor from the dust, He lifts the needy from the ash heap." It is also true that wisdom preserves life. (Cf. Proverbs 3:18) Either way, wisdom is the prize possession.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:12

348. Is knowledge synonymous with wisdom as it is used in this verse?
349. Name the distinctive advantage that wisdom now offers.
350. Why is the analogy of the shadow appropriate?
351. What variations of translations appear in the last half of this verse? Discuss.

j. Trusting God for tomorrow is better than knowing about tomorrow. 7:13-14

### TEXT 7:13-14

- 13 Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent?
- 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 may not discover anything that will be after him.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:13-14

195. Note the similarities between 7:13 and 8:17. List them.
196. Can man discover the work of God? (Cf. 3:11)

197. What reason is offered that man should accept both the good days and the bad?
198. Give evidence from this passage that man cannot predict the future events as God works them out.

### PARAPHRASE 7:13-14

Look into and thoughtfully weigh the things which God has done, and yet you will never be able to straighten out what he has bent—that which has grown crooked because of sin. Rejoice when days are good and life goes well, but watch for the bad days for they will come too—God has made them both, placed them side by side so man will never know what lies ahead of him.

### COMMENT 7:13-14

v. 13 A wise man will consider the work of God. There are unlimited advantages in searching out God's involvement in His world. Some of these advantages have been clearly stated in the previous verses. Now others are called to the reader's attention. Certain traits of a fool, such as a haughty impatient spirit, can be averted if one seriously fixes his mind on God and his works.

The inability to alter the plans of God and the awareness that He is in complete control of His world results in humility on the part of men who consider this. Such action also causes one to discover serenity and calmness as anxieties are eliminated and trust is exercised. These are positive benefits from acknowledging that man cannot straighten what God has bent. The declaration here is positive confirmation that God has ultimate control of every-day events which are often so besetting to men. Man is not capable of arranging the events and circumstances of life in such a way as to satisfy his own ends. Otherwise, he would not remain under the burden of oppression.

A wise man will, therefore, acknowledge that what he cannot change or control he will accept. It is comparable to the declaration of Paul who wrote, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Additional evidence of Paul's wisdom is found in Philippians 4:11-12 when he writes, "Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

How can God make anything crooked? The term "crooked" is used in reference to the wicked, as it is stated that God ". . . makes crooked the way of the wicked" (Psalms 146:9). Study once again the COMMENTS on 1:15. It is said that God makes things crooked only because His righteous judgments demand penalties be attached to the violations of His commands.

v. 14 "In the day of prosperity be happy." This is in harmony with the wise man's conclusions (Cf. 2:24, 3:12 and 3:22). Both the good days and evil days will serve the higher purposes of God. Therefore, one should learn to cope with the troublesome days as well as enjoy the good ones. He should realize that God remains the same regardless of the emotional "ups" and "downs" experienced by men. One indication of a person being mature is that he is not unduly influenced by his environment. Such a person maintains a spiritual constancy under all circumstances. Inner peace is a mark of wisdom. Discontent, longing for the former days, and giving anger a place in the heart are the marks of a fool. God does not allow us to see the future. Withholding such information from men should cause him to learn to look to God. Peter suggested that we cast our all upon Him and trust Him. (Cf. I Peter 5:7)

The remaining part of this verse corresponds with the former verse. There is the additional thought, however, that man cannot know if tomorrow will be a good day or an evil one. The conclusion is that man should learn to rejoice in the day

of prosperity and thoughtfully consider the true nature of God when evil days are experienced. No man can know what will be after him. "After him" does not refer to eternity; neither does it refer to some period of time upon the earth after one dies. The context demands the interpretation we have given: No man knows what *tomorrow* will hold for *him*.

### FACT QUESTIONS 7:13-14

352. Read the COMMENTS on these two verses and then write your own summary as to what you think Solomon is saying.
353. After reading the COMMENTS on 1:15, explain what is meant by the statement that God makes things crooked.
354. What will be the end result in one's life when he finally acknowledges that God has ultimate control of all things?
355. What should one do in the days of prosperity?
356. What should one do in the days of adversity?
357. Identify one indicator that a person is mature.
358. What is meant by "after him" in the last part of verse 14?

2. This lesson is taught even when the opposite appears to be true. 7:15-18

- a. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous suffer. 7:15

### TEXT 7:15

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.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:15

198. What two "crooked" ways are apparent?
199. What word qualifies "lifetime"?

## PARAPHRASE 7:15

I have seen everything during my short stay on this earth! I have seen death come swiftly to cut off the righteous man in the midst of his righteous activities. I have seen the wicked man live for a long time in spite of his wickedness.

## COMMENT 7:15

Can a man interpret the riddle of life which states that the innocent perish while the wicked prosper? He can if he is a wise man. Wisdom offers the advantage of looking beyond the apparent anomalies to the higher purposes of God.

Not only is life transitory and unfulfilling, it is also inconsistent. A wise man will acknowledge the inequities but he will not despair. He will remember that God controls the ultimate outcome.

There is a sense in which man receives an equitable return for his investment in life whether that investment is made in righteousness or in wickedness. (Cf. Proverbs 10:28, 11:21) However, there are exceptions to the rule that "Whatever a man sows he shall also reap." At the same time, the exceptions are but temporary—that is it only appears for a short time that the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper (Cf. 8:12-13). Solomon does not propose to his readers that they pursue wickedness because it pays or shun righteousness because suffering is often associated with it. He is still speaking to the theme of a good name. He points to the apparent reversal of the rules because this is a facet of life that wise men will eventually face. The next two verses in this chapter amplify his contention.

## FACT QUESTIONS 7:15

359. What riddle of life is stated?

360. Why will a wise man not despair over the success of the

wicked?

361. Is Solomon suggesting that one pursue wickedness because it pays? Explain.
362. What goal is Solomon still trying to achieve?

b. Warnings against the wrong interpretations of life 7:16-17

TEXT 7:16-17

- 16 Do not be excessively righteous, and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?
- 17 Do not be excessively wicked, and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:16-17

200. What kind of righteousness is undesirable? (Cf. Matthew 5:20; Philippians 3:9; Luke 18:10-14)
201. What kind of wisdom is undesirable? (Cf. I Corinthians 3:19)
202. What will cause one to die before his time?

PARAPHRASE 7:16-17

Avoid self-righteousness and putting your trust in a false wisdom which is of this world. Both of these things will ruin you; so why destroy yourself? Why play the role of a fool through excessive wickedness? Such behavior will lead you to an early grave!

COMMENT 7:16-17

v. 16 There is a righteousness that is unhealthy and a wisdom which should be avoided. One would normally pursue both.

However, upon closer study of the Word of God, it is apparent that there is a kind of righteousness that causes spiritual and mental harm. There is also a wisdom which fosters pride and produces a false foundation upon which to build a life.

We call this kind of righteousness "self-righteousness." It questions God's dealings and judgments. (Cf. Romans 9:19ff.) It elevates man and leads him into arrogance. It is this strained, dangerous righteousness that Jesus publicly derided and condemned. (Cf. Matthew 23; Luke 18:10-14) Solomon is warning his readers against such temptations as this will lead them to grow bitter and resentful. Especially would this be a threat when the truly righteous person is persecuted and suffers while the wicked person prospers. Losing sight of God's higher purposes in history will lead to a crooked or perverted sense of ethical behavior. This is vividly illustrated in the words of Malachi 3:13-15: " 'Your words have been arrogant against Me,' says the Lord. 'Yet you say, "What have we spoken against Thee?" 'You have said, "It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in the mourning before the Lord of hosts? So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape." ' ' ' Such attitudes and behavior are indeed dangerous. If you persist in this direction, Solomon states, you will "ruin yourself."

He also warns against false wisdom. Here again the Bible is clear concerning the type of wisdom which destroys. This wisdom grows out of self-righteousness. Paul wrote concerning it: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, 'he is the One who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless ' ' " (I Corinthians 3:19-20). The wise man will not ruin himself. He will cope with the pressures of the day as he properly interprets the events of life in the light of God's overall purpose. Once again, Paul summarized the proper attitude one should have when he said, "For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to



think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

v. 17 God can neither condone nor encourage the slightest degree of wickedness. This statement in verse 17, like the preceding ones, must be explained in the context of the passage. Solomon is pointing out that righteousness is not immediately rewarded. Neither does God's judgment fall suddenly upon all who engage in wickedness. However, this does not give one God's approval to sin. Neither does the wise man interpret it as discouraging righteousness. One is indeed a fool if he thinks that he can entangle himself in sin and not pay the penalty for such involvement. As it is written, "The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened" (Proverbs 10:27). Exceptions to this rule are just that—exceptions! No sin will go unpunished forever. This principle is foundational and is expressed throughout the Bible.

There can be no such thing as excessiveness in *true* righteousness. There are no limitations which God places upon us in respect to *true* wisdom. On the other hand, God cannot approve of any sin, nor does He want man to play the part of a fool. The explanation given here to the problems of these two verses is in harmony with the general purposes of Scripture. Furthermore, it fits the immediate context of this chapter. Solomon's contention is to find a wise man. He will be a man who protects himself from the deceitfulness of self-righteousness, the power of self-indulgence, the destruction of self-esteem and the pitfalls of foolishness. He will not knowingly ruin himself or die before his time.

#### FACT QUESTIONS 7:16-17

363. What kind of righteousness should be avoided?
364. Why would one be tempted to grow bitter and resentful?
365. What will happen to a person who persists in the wrong kind of righteousness?

366. False wisdom grows out of what?  
367. Should long life for the wicked and short life for the righteous be considered exceptions to the general rules of life? Explain.  
368. A wise man will protect himself from what four general areas which, if pursued, could kill him before his time?

c. Choose the best in life. 7:18

#### TEXT 7:18

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.

#### THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:18

203. Identify the two things one should hold on to. (vs. 16, 17)  
204. What condition must one meet in order to come forth with both of them?

#### PARAPHRASE 7:18

It is good that you take hold of the true righteousness, and also that you grasp the idea that you should not lead a life of sin. Hold on to both of these for the one who departs from evil and seeks the good will escape the power of wickedness.

#### COMMENT 7:18

Solomon is now *admonishing* his readers to follow the wisdom of acting upon the previously stated observations. He adds the incentive that if they will do this, they will always

be free from the evils which destroy us and kill us before our time. The condition that must be met which enables one to maintain his good name and attain unto wisdom is to practice the fear of God. This fear is a healthy reverence for God which results in departing from evil and following that which is good. Such pious activity will safeguard one against the dangers delineated in the two preceding verses.

The latter part of this verse presents a problem in translation and subsequently in interpretation. *The Anchor Bible* reads: "He who fears God will consider both sides." In a footnote on this verse, the translators openly state that it does not refer to "wisdom" and "folly" but to both sides of a question. However, there is more involved here than just the investigation of both sides of a question. Solomon is specific in pointing to the evils of self-righteousness, false wisdom, indulging in wickedness, and acting foolishly. The pursuit of any of these evils would destroy one's good name. The high good of attaining unto wisdom would thus be missed.

The *New American Standard Version* states that the wise man will "come forth with both of them." In this case the *them* would refer to purity of life and wisdom. The preposition "with" suggests that he desires to have them and figuratively holds them in his hands.

An opposite view is that the *them* refers to self-righteousness and folly, and that the wise man will escape from them. The following translations are based on this interpretation: "For he who fears God will come forth from every case" (Leupold); ". . . he that feareth God shall escape from all" (Hengstenberg).

Although the difficulty in translation exists, the main message is not diminished. Solomon is teaching that the wise man, who labors to maintain his good name, will do all within his power to "turn away from evil and do good" (I Peter 3:10). In his honest pursuit he will be delivered from the snare of the Devil and he will come forth with righteousness and wisdom in his hand.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:18

369. What incentive to do good does Solomon now suggest?  
370. Define "fear" as it is used in this verse.  
371. Identify and explain the two main interpretations of the latter part of the verse.  
372. Explain what the main message of the verse is, and why neither interpretation violates the primary lesson of this section.
3. Wisdom leads to proper attitudes and conduct. 7:19-22

- a. Wisdom strengthens the wise. 7:19

TEXT 7:19

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

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:19

205. What theme is still under discussion?  
206. What is of greater value than ten rulers who rule a city?

PARAPHRASE 7:19

Wisdom is strength to a wise man; more strength than ten rulers, although they are surrounded by their advisors, masters in their own right, and dwelling in a city.

COMMENT 7:19

Wisdom gives strength. This is the first observation in a list that runs through verse twenty-two. When wisdom is accepted

as a companion, strength of such proportion is added to one that ten competent leaders cannot equal. Some argue that the verb will not allow "strengthen" but rather conveys the idea of a separate entity that can be called upon to fight for and defend the one who calls for such assistance. It has previously been noted that wisdom is better than money (v. 12), and here it is declared to be better than the accumulative power of ten rulers in a city. They may be wise in the ways of the world, but if they do not "fear" the Lord, they do not possess the true strength. As Psalms 127:1-2 states: "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who built it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep."

The fact that "ten" rulers are mentioned is used by some to argue for a late date for the writing of Ecclesiastes on the basis that ten rulers often ruled Hellenistic towns and this is a reference to such instances. However, ten has a significant meaning in all Biblical periods. It represents completeness and may be suggesting nothing more than the fact that true wisdom is better than the accumulated wisdom of ten men which suggests in this context the complete, united effort of the strength of all non-wisdom sources. For the use of the number ten in Bible times, study the following:

- (1) The ten antediluvian patriarchs: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and Noah (Genesis 5);
- (2) The ten righteous men who would have saved Sodom (Genesis 18);
- (3) The ten plagues of Egypt (Exodus 8-12);
- (4) The ten commandments (Exodus 20);
- (5) The ten servants of Gideon (Judges 6);
- (6) The ten elders who accompanied Boaz (Ruth 4);
- (7) The ten virgins of the parable (Matthew 25);
- (8) The ten pieces of silver (Luke 15);
- (9) The ten servants entrusted with ten pounds (Luke 19);

- (10) The ten days tribulation predicted for the church of Smyrna (Revelation 2)<sup>1</sup>

The recognition that the ten rulers are *in a city* is also significant. Power, resources and authority would be assets of a city. In addition, there would be many from whom the rulers would be selected which suggests the choice of talented and competent men. The import is that of a superlative: *Wisdom* is a better companion and offers greater benefits than ten of the finest rulers chosen from the major population centers of the land. In light of the various ways the number ten is employed in the Bible, it would be a mistake to attribute significance to it beyond that which has been discussed here.

#### FACT QUESTIONS 7:19

373. What is the first benefit of wisdom as noted here?  
374. Why is the number ten used in this verse?  
375. What is meant by the term *superlative*?  
376. Why say the ten rulers are in a city?

b. Wisdom leads one to see his own sin. 7:20

#### TEXT 7:20

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

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<sup>1</sup> William Taylor Smith, "Significant Numbers," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), IV, p. 2162. This summary is taken in part from the article "The Number Ten."

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:20

207. What truth is stated here that is also taught in Romans 3:10?
208. In the light of this verse, why does man need wisdom as a corrective?
209. Write a definition of *righteous*.

## PARAPHRASE 7:20

There isn't a man on earth who doesn't need wisdom. Where is the righteous man who always does good and never sins? He cannot be found!

## COMMENT 7:20

This second benefit of wisdom—to teach us to be humble and to depend upon strength gained apart from human resources—is based on the conclusion of the former verse. Israel had the treasure of revelation and this alone should have kept her free from the wickedness which typified the heathen communities around her. Such wisdom should also eliminate the evils of self-righteousness which would be the major temptation of those who possessed the true revelation.

Since there is no man so righteous that he always does what is best, it logically follows that he needs all the assistance he can get. Wisdom is the very best source of such assistance.

Solomon had previously asked, "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin' " (Proverbs 20:9)? A section of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple spoke to this point when he said, "When they sin against Thee (for there is no man who does not sin) and Thou art angry with them and dost deliver them to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, if they take thought in the land where they have been

taken captive, and repent and make supplication to Thee in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly' " (I Kings 8:46-47). Repentance and confession are fruit of wisdom. In Solomon's prayer he foresees the people of God following this path of healing back to God. It is a wise man who recognizes that he has need of strength to withstand temptation, and also see the pathways to repentance, supplication, and forgiveness should his own strength fail him. No man, on his own, is able to hold on to the best pathways of life. He needs the strength which wisdom affords.

FACT QUESTIONS 7:20

377. What is the second benefit of wisdom?
378. What characteristic identified those of the heathen community?
379. What special temptation is presented to those who have revelation from God?
380. What fruit of wisdom did Solomon speak of in his dedicatory prayer at the Temple?

c. Wisdom protects against false accusations and self-righteousness. 7:21-22

TEXT 7:21-22

- 21 Also, do not take seriously all words which are spoken, lest you hear your servant cursing you.
- 22 For you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.



## THOUGHT QUESTIONS 7:21-22

210. Wisdom will keep one from falling into what danger?  
211. Identify the reason given why one should not busy himself with taking seriously all that he hears.  
212. Why would a servant know about his master's faults and deficiencies?

## PARAPHRASE 7:21-22

Do not give your heart to ascribe too much value to what men say concerning you. If you do, you will soon hear your own servant cursing you. If you stop and consider your own past behavior, you will have to admit that you have many times reviled others.

## COMMENT 7:21-22

There is yet another benefit wisdom will bring to the one who turns to it for strength. In this instance, it is a two-fold blessing. First of all, it will keep one from prying into every bit of gossip or information circulating in the area; secondly, it will safeguard against a self-righteous attitude.

It is indeed the mark of a foolish man to pursue every tidbit of information that may be spoken concerning himself or others. So much of what is said is best unheard, and if heard soon forgotten. Wisdom will lead one to correct behavior and thus eliminate many sorrowful experiences because information gained was weighed and dismissed on the basis of lack of merit. How many heartaches in life would have been avoided if the whole matter would simply have been dropped. Solomon does not have reference here to information which will benefit the hearer. If in the sharing of truth, there will be benefit, then the one who possesses such knowledge has a moral obligation to speak. However, the idea here is that it is gossip or unprotected

words which wend their way into the communicative fabric of every culture and society.

The servant is mentioned for two reasons. Since he is a servant, he will most likely know the weaknesses of his master, or at least be near when his master loses control of his tongue. On the other hand, the master would be nearby and would overhear the conversation of the servant.

The idea of "cursing" in this context suggests more of a reviling than what one normally considers either "to curse" or "to swear." *Base* men curse and swear, but *all* men, whether of high or low estate, have difficulty controlling their tongues. The master is reminded that he has *often* "reviled others." He must admit that he, too, has spoken words in a moment of weakness or heated discussion which he would like to recall. He confesses that he would like such words to be forgotten.

#### FACT QUESTIONS 7:21-22

381. What two-fold blessing does wisdom offer?
382. When should information be withheld?
383. When is one obligated to share information?
384. Give two reasons why the *servant* is mentioned here.
385. What prompts the "cursing" (reviling) which comes forth from the master of the house?

#### B. IMPORTANT LESSONS DRAWN FROM THESE OBSERVATIONS 7:23-29

1. Practical lessons can be learned but the deeper things are unattainable. 7:23-24

#### TEXT 7:23-24

23 I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me.