

Study of Ecclesiastes: Chapter 7
Questions for Discussion

1. Why is a good name vital in a Christian's life? Why does the Koheleth say that the day of one's death is better than the day one's birth?
(vv. 1; Job 29:6; Prov 21:20; Matt. 5:13-16)

2. Why is sorrow and mourning better than feasting, laughter and pleasure? What effect does a house of mourning have on those that are still living?
(vv. 2-4; 2:14-16; 3:19-20; 6:6; Jer 16:5)

3. Why is it important to listen to those who are wise? How does the Koheleth illustrate the laughter and pleasure that a fool enjoys? What does this say about the fool?
(vv. 5-6; 2:2; 4:13; Prov 13:1; 17:10; 27:5)

4. What destroys a wise man's reason (into madness)? What corrupts his heart?
(vv. 7; 4:1-3)

5. How can patience keep us from behaving foolishly? (vs. 8-10; Prov 14:17, 29; 16:32; 19:11; James 1:19-21)

6. What two things does man use as a shelter (or defense)? Which of these two is better for man? Why? (vv. 11-12)

7. How should we regard the work of God? What should we do in days of prosperity? In days of adversity? Why? (vv. 13-14; Mt 8:20; Lk 10:38; Rom 8:28; 2Co 1:4-7; Phil 4:4-13)

8. What two things had the Koheleth seen in the days of his vanity? (v. 15)

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9. Against what does the Koheleth caution? How do we avoid this problem? (vv. 16-18; Matt 5:20; 23:1–36; Phil 3:4-9)

10. How strong is wisdom? (v. 19)

11. What is the danger in paying attention to what others say about us? (vv. 20-22; Prov 20:9; Job 4:17)

12. In his effort to be wise, what did the Koheleth find? (vv. 23-25; 1:16)

13. What did he find more bitter than death? Who can escape such a woman? (v. 26; 9:9; 1 Kings 11:3–4; Proverbs 31)

14. In his search, what had the Koheleth found, and not found? What is the significance of these numbers? (vv. 27-28)

15. What else had he found? (v. 29)

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Notes & Answers

(1) Why is a good name vital in a Christian's life? Why does the Koheleth say that the day of one's death is better than the day one's birth? (vv. 1; Job 29:6; Prov 21:20; Matt. 5:13-16)

Ecclesiastes 7:1 (ESV)

¹ A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth.

Job 29:6 (ESV)

⁶ when my steps were washed with butter,
and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!

Proverbs 21:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man's dwelling,
but a foolish man devours it.

Matthew 5:13–16 (ESV)

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

(2) Why is sorrow and mourning better than feasting, laughter and pleasure? What effect does a house of mourning have on those that are still living? (vv. 2-4; 2:14–16; 3:19–20; 6:6; Jer 16:5)

Ecclesiastes 7:2–4 (ESV)

² It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for this is the end of all mankind,
and the living will lay it to heart.

³ Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Ecclesiastes 2:14–16 (ESV)

¹⁴ The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. ¹⁵ Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. ¹⁶ For of the

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wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!

Ecclesiastes 3:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.

Ecclesiastes 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

Jeremiah 16:5 (ESV)

⁵ “For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them, for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy, declares the LORD.

(3) Why is it important to listen to those who are wise? How does the Koheleth illustrate the laughter and pleasure that a fool enjoys? What does this say about the fool? (vv. 5-6; 2:2; 4:13; Prov 13:1; 17:10; 27:5)

Ecclesiastes 7:5–6 (ESV)

⁵ It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.

⁶ For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of the fools;
this also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 2:2 (ESV)

² I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?”

Ecclesiastes 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.

Proverbs 13:1 (ESV)

¹ A wise son hears his father’s instruction,
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

Proverbs 17:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding
than a hundred blows into a fool.

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Proverbs 27:5 (ESV)

⁵ Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.

***(4) What destroys a wise man's reason (into madness)? What corrupts his heart?
(vv. 7; 4:1-3)***

Ecclesiastes 7:7 (ESV)

⁷ Surely oppression drives the wise into madness,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Ecclesiastes 4:1–3 (ESV)

¹ Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them. ² And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive. ³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

(5) How can patience keep us from behaving foolishly? (vs. 8-10; Prov 14:17, 29; 16:32; 19:11; James 1:19-21)

Ecclesiastes 7:8–10 (ESV)

⁸ Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,
and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
⁹ Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,
for anger lodges in the heart of fools.
¹⁰ Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

Proverbs 14:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ A man of quick temper acts foolishly,
and a man of evil devices is hated.

Proverbs 14:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,
but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

Proverbs 16:32 (ESV)

³² Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Proverbs 19:11 (ESV)

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¹¹ Good sense makes one slow to anger,
and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

James 1:19–21 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

(6) What two things does man use as a shelter (or defense)? Which of these two is better for man? Why? (vv. 11-12)

Ecclesiastes 7:11–12 (ESV)

¹¹ Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
an advantage to those who see the sun.

¹² For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

(7) How should we regard the work of God? What should we do in days of prosperity? In days of adversity? Why? (vv. 13-14; Mt 8:20; Lk 10:38; Rom 8:28; 2Co 1:4–7; Phil 4:4-13)

Ecclesiastes 7:13–14 (ESV)

¹³ Consider the work of God:
who can make straight what he has made crooked?

¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

Matthew 8:20 (ESV)

²⁰ And Jesus said to him, **“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”**

Luke 10:38 (ESV)

³⁸ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

2 Corinthians 1:4–7 (ESV)

⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for

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your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Philippians 4:4–13 (ESV)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

(8) What two things had the Koheleth seen in the days of his vanity? (v. 15)

Ecclesiastes 7:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

(9) Against what does the Koheleth caution? How do we avoid this problem? (vv. 16-18; Matt 5:20; 23:1–36; Phil 3:4-9)

Ecclesiastes 7:16–18 (ESV)

¹⁶ Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?¹⁷ Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?¹⁸ It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

Matthew 5:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 23:1–36 (ESV)

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat,³ so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they

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themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.⁹ And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.¹⁰ Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.¹¹ The greatest among you shall be your servant.¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

¹³ “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.¹⁵ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

¹⁶ “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’¹⁷ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?¹⁸ And you say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.’¹⁹ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?²⁰ So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.²¹ And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.²² And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.

²³ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.²⁴ You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

²⁵ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.²⁶ You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

²⁷ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.²⁸ So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

²⁹ “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,³⁰ saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’³¹ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.³³ You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?³⁴

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,³⁵ so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar.³⁶ Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

Philippians 3:4–9 (ESV)

⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as

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to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

(10) How strong is wisdom? (v. 19)

Ecclesiastes 7:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

(11) What is the danger in paying attention to what others say about us? (vv. 20-22; Prov 20:9; Job 4:17)

Ecclesiastes 7:20–22 (ESV)

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

²¹ Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. ²² Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Proverbs 20:9 (ESV)

⁹ Who can say, “I have made my heart pure;
I am clean from my sin”?

Job 4:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ ‘Can mortal man be in the right before God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?’

(12) In his effort to be wise, what did the Koheleth find? (vv. 23-25; 1:16)

Ecclesiastes 7:23–25 (ESV)

²³ All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me. ²⁴ That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

²⁵ I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

Ecclesiastes 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”

(13) What did he find more bitter than death? Who can escape such a woman? (v. 26; 9:9; 1 Kings 11:3–4; Proverbs 31)

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Ecclesiastes 7:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

Ecclesiastes 9:9 (ESV)

⁹ Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

1 Kings 11:3–4 (ESV)

³ He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. ⁴ For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.

Proverbs 31 (ESV)

¹ The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him:

² What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb?
What are you doing, son of my vows?

³ Do not give your strength to women,
your ways to those who destroy kings.

⁴ It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine,
or for rulers to take strong drink,

⁵ lest they drink and forget what has been decreed
and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

⁶ Give strong drink to the one who is perishing,
and wine to those in bitter distress;

⁷ let them drink and forget their poverty
and remember their misery no more.

⁸ Open your mouth for the mute,
for the rights of all who are destitute.

⁹ Open your mouth, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

¹⁰ An excellent wife who can find?
She is far more precious than jewels.

¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her,
and he will have no lack of gain.

¹² She does him good, and not harm,
all the days of her life.

¹³ She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.

¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant;
she brings her food from afar.

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- ¹⁵ She rises while it is yet night
and provides food for her household
and portions for her maidens.
- ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it;
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- ¹⁷ She dresses herself with strength
and makes her arms strong.
- ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
Her lamp does not go out at night.
- ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
- ²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- ²¹ She is not afraid of snow for her household,
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.
- ²² She makes bed coverings for herself;
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- ²³ Her husband is known in the gates
when he sits among the elders of the land.
- ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them;
she delivers sashes to the merchant.
- ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
- ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- ²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- ²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
- ²⁹ "Many women have done excellently,
but you surpass them all."
- ³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
- ³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates.

(14) In his search, what had the Koheleth found, and not found? What is the significance of these numbers? (vv. 27-28)

Ecclesiastes 7:27–28 (ESV)

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²⁷ Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things— ²⁸ which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found.

(15) What else had he found? (v. 29)

Ecclesiastes 7:29 (ESV)

²⁹ See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.