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The Crook in the Lot
Ecclesiastes 7: 13-22

The crook in the lot DIG: What observations inspire the warnings in verses 15-18? What is meant by overly righteous or overly wicked? Would the Teacher say, "Nothing in excess, everything in moderation?" How does such a view square with genuine fear of the LORD? Is verse 20 a confession, an excuse, or an accusation? What light does it shed on verse 19? What is the danger of paying too much attention to gossip? What theme unites 7:19-22?

REFLECT: If God put a crook in your lot, would you try to make it straight? Would you get rid of your disability or disease? Would you change your job or your financial situation? Would you change your appearance, or your abilities, or your situation in life? Or would you trust God for all the crooked things in life and wait for Him to make them straight, even if you had to wait until the resurrection, just like Yeshua did when He died on the cross?

In His sovereignty over our suffering, God is at work to accomplish our spiritual good.
We are, therefore, called to trust Him, even when things seem to be crooked.

Maybe your life is so carefree that you have been untouched by human suffering. Then again, maybe not. Maybe you have had to deal with a lot of brokenness: chronic illness, depression, anxiety, personal betrayal, broken relationships, false allegations, destructive sins, bereavement and sorrow. When things like this happen to us or the ones we **love**, two things can happen. We can turn away *from* **the Lord** in pain and anger, or we can run *to* **the Lord**, believing in **His** sovereignty over our lives, seeking **His** help and comfort.

The sovereignty of God (7:13-14): Consider the work of God (7:13a). The command here is to **consider** – to make a careful observation of the way **God**

works. **Solomon** noticed the world around him. **He** studied the seasons of **life**, learned when it was time for this and time for that. **He** watched the way people worked and played. **He** saw how they lived and how they died. Here, **he** invites us to join **him** by considering the work of **ADONAI** in the world. Then **the Teacher** asked a rhetorical question: **Who can make straight what He has made crooked (7:13b)?** The answer, of course, is no one. Things are the way **God** wants them to be; we do not have the ability to overrule **the Almighty**.

When **the Teacher** is talking about something **crooked**, **he** is talking about some trouble we have in **life** that we wish we could change, but cannot. It happens to all of us. We struggle with physical limitations. We suffer the breakdown of personal or family relationships. We have something that we wish we didn't have, or don't have something we wish we did. Sooner or later, there is something in **life** that we wish to **God** wasn't there. According to **Solomon, ADONAI** has given each of us a different situation in **life**. **This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them – for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth, possessions and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil – this is a gift of God (5:18-19).** When some people here **Solomon** talk along these lines they assume **he** is a fatalist. Some things in **life** are straight, other things are **crooked**. But whether things are **crooked** or **straight**, there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. It all comes down to fate, or predestination.

But there is another way to look at these verses. We need to see our situation in terms of the sovereign goodness of **God**. If there is a **crook** in our **lot**, it is the work of **God**, which it would be futile for us to try and change. One way to see the difference between despairing of our **lot** and hoping in **YHVH** is to compare **Ecclesiastes 7:13** to what **Solomon** said back in **Ecclesiastes 1:15**. The wording in the earlier verse is almost identical: **What is crooked can't be straightened.** Notice, however, that the first time **the Teacher** made this statement **he** left **ADONAI** out of the picture, giving us a clear, old picture of man's **life** without **God**. But here in **Chapter 7, Solomon** brings **God** back into the picture. **He** looks at the world according to **the LORD**, and puts both the **straight** things and the **crooked** things under **His** divine care.

It is still true that there is nothing we can do to **straighten** out what is **crooked**. We cannot change what **God** has done unless, and until, **He** wants to change it. We do not have the power to edit **God's** agenda. But far from driving us to despair, the

sovereignty of **YHVH** gives us hope through all **the trials** of **life**. We *do* suffer the frustration of **life i**n a fallen world. But the Bible promises us that **God** has a plan to set us free from all this **futility**, and that as **He** carries out the plan **He is working all things together for our good (Rom 8:20, 28).**

Trusting in the sovereign goodness of **God** helps us know how to respond to both **the joys** and **trials** of life. Whether we are having **a good day** or **a bad day**, there is always some way for us to glorify **God**. So **the Teacher** says: **When things are going well, enjoy yourself; but when things are going badly, consider that God made the one alongside the other, so that people would learn nothing of their futures 7:14).** This perspective puts today and every day under the sovereignty of **God**. Some days are full of prosperity. **The sun** is shining, the birds are singing, and ll is right with the world. Every good day, every tasty meal, every financial windfall, every meaningful conversation, every single pleasure, every success in ministry – every blessing of any kind at all is a gift from **God's** grace that calls us to joy.

Not all days are like that, of course. Some days are full of adversity rather than prosperity. **The sun** is not shining, the birds are not singing, and nothing seems right with the world. It looks like our **trials** will never end, and we wonder if we have even one friend in the world. Yet, this day also comes from the hand of **Ha'Shem**; it is under **His** sovereign care. **The Teacher** does not have the heart to be joyful on such a difficult day, but **he** does call us to consider the ways of **YHVH**. When adversity comes, we should recognize that this too is **a day that the Lord has made.**

We must entrust every day of our lives to the loving care of a sovereign **God**, then we will be ready for anything and everything that **life** throws at us. In his comments on this verse, Martin Luther advised, "Enjoy the things that are present in such a way that you do not base your confidence on them, as though they were going to last forever . . . but reserve part of your heart for **God**, so that with it, we can bear the day of adversity." Whatever **trials** we have in this life, it helps to go through them with **Yeshua** at our side. If we are wise, we will offer whatever joys we experience back to **God** in thanksgiving. This is all part of what it means to **consider the work of God (7:13a). Solomon** is telling us to accept what **ADONAI** has done and surrender to **His** sovereign will, praising **Him** for all our prosperity and trusting in **Him** through every adversity.[293]

Two dangers that lead to destruction: If **the Teacher's** perspective seems a

little simplistic so far, a little too easy, then we can probably relate to what **he** says next. No sooner has **he** told us to **consider the works of God** than **he** struggles with **God's** sovereignty. Remember, **Solomon** promised that **he** was totally committed to telling us the truth about **life**. What he tells us here is that sometimes **life** can be desperately unfair. **In my pointless life, I've seen everything – from the righteous person perishing in** spite of **his uprightness to the wicked one who lives a long life** in spite of continual **wickedness (7:15).** That is exactly the opposite of what most people expect. **The righteous people** ought to rejoice in **their** prosperity, while **the wicked** suffer adversity until **they** finally admit that **God** is in control. All too often, what we see instead is what **Solomon** saw: **righteous people** dying before **their** time while **their** enemies kept on living. Godly pastors are martyred for their faith, while their murderers live to terrorize the congregations of **God** another day. Innocent victims get cut down in the prime of their life, yet their attackers never get caught. It's just not fair!

There are some **crooked** things in life that we wish we could **straighten** out. But since we can't, **the Teacher** gives us some practical advice: **So don't be overly righteous or overly wise; why should you disappoint yourself? But don't be overly wicked, and don't be foolish; why should you die before your time (7:16-17)? Solomon** is not being cynical here. If that was what **he** meant, then **he** would have had to be looking at life **under the sun** again, leaving **God** out of the picture, and thinking about good and **evil** the way that only an unbeliever can. No. When **he** tells us **not to be overly righteous**, he meant they should not depend on their own **righteousness** or wisdom to guarantee **God's** blessing because **they** might be **disappointed** like ones whom **Solomon** had seen **perishing** in spite of **their** own supposed **righteousness (7:15)**.

To help us avoid thinking of ourselves too highly, **the Teacher** warns us not to be – so to speak – *too* **righteous**. We should never think that we are *too* good to suffer, or that it would be unfair if someone likes us to have a **crook** in our **lot**. Yet, it is often tempting to say, "**God**, I don't deserve this. Don't you know who I am? And it's only a short step from there to saying, "Who does **God** think **He** is anyway?"

That is not to say that we should be *unrighteous***,** of course. **Solomon** warns against this mistake in **verse 17**, when **he** tells us not to be **too wicked**. **His** point here is not that it's okay for us to be a-little-bit **wicked**, as if there could ever be such a thing. Rather, **the Teacher's** point is that there is a danger in giving ourselves over to **evil**. It is one thing to **sin** from time to time, as everyone does. **Solomon** will say in verse **20, "For there isn't a righteous person on earth who does only**

good and never sins." Though he believed that complete righteousness is unattainable, and that some **foolishness** is unavoidable, **h**e never advocated **folly** or **wickedness**. Instead, **he** advocated living life in light of **God's judgment (11:9** and **12:14)**. Though **he** had observed exceptions to the doctrine of retribution **(7:15** and **8:10-11), he** nevertheless believed that **God** would **judge (3:11** and **17)**. Therefore, people should avoid **foolishness** and **wickedness** as much as possible and live **wisely** and as **righteousl**y as possible.

Thus, there are two dangers for us to avoid: *self*–**righteousness** and *unrighteousness*. Both errors will lead to destruction; they may even lead to an untimely death. But there is a way to avoid both dangers, and this is to live every day in **the fear of God**. **Solomon** says: **Don't grasp just one of these rules; take hold of the other as well; for he who is in fear of God will live by both of them (7:18).** To **fear God** is to know that **He** is **God** and we are not. It is to hold **Him** in awe for **His** majestic beauty. It is to have respect for **His** mighty and awesome power. This helps us not to pretend to be something that we're not. It also keeps us from living a **wicked** life, because when we understand **God's** holiness, the last thing we will want to do is fall under **Ha'Shem's** righteous **judgment**.[294]

Solomon gives **wisdom** high value. **To a wise man wisdom is better protection than ten rulers in a city.** Power from within is needed more than advice from without. **Also, don't take every word spoken seriously, such as when you hear your servant speaking badly of you; because often, as you yourself know, you have spoken badly of others (7:19 and 21-22).** Our own experience is sufficient proof that vindictiveness arises from human sinfulness and is frequently inaccurate.[295]

Why God allows suffering: When we really fear **Ha'Shem**, it will help us to look beyond our present difficulties and see the work of God, accepting all the **crooked** things in our lives until **He** chooses to make them **straight**. But as with many who have suffered greatly, we ask *why* does **God** leave some things **crooked**, even when we pray for **Him** to make them **straight**? Let's look at the **four main reasons**:

> **First, the cooked things in life are a test to help us determine whether we really are trusting in Messiah for our salvation.** Think of **Job**, for example, who was afflicted with many painful **trials** in order to prove the genuineness of **his** faith. Our own sufferings may have the same purpose by the grace of **God**, they confirm that we are holding on to **Messiah**, and that

He is still holding on to us (see the commentary on **Jude, to see link click Bb – To Him Who is Able to Keep You from Stumbling**).

Second, God carefully designs whatever crooks we have in our earthly lot to turn our hearts away from this pointless world and teach us to look for happiness in the world to come. Suffering is part of our preparation for eternity. Consider **the Prodigal Son** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Hu – The Parable of the Lost Son and His Jealous Brother**), who didn't return to **his father** until **he** had lost everything **he** had. **His** sufferings were part of a pilgrimage that led **him** back home where **he** belonged. When something in life seems **crooked**, remember that a day is coming when **God** will make it straight.

Third, God uses the crooked things in life to convict us of our sins. The reason that anything is **crooked** at all is because there is sin in the world, including our own **sin**. **The Spirit** often takes the crooks in our **lot** and uses them to touch our conscience, reminding us of some particular **sin** that we need to confess. It would be a mistake to think, every time we suffer, that this must be because of our **sins**. But it would also be a mistake to miss the opportunity that every **trial** brings to repent for any unconfessed **sin**.

Fourth, God may use the crooked things in life to correct us for our sins. There are times when suffering serves as an instrument of **God's** justice. So it was for **David**, after **he** had murdered **Uriah**. **Ha'Shem** justly decreed that **the sword would never depart from his house** (see the commentary on **the Life of David Dd – Nathan Rebukes David**). When we suffer it may be because, as a consequence for our **sin**, we are under discipline of **God** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz – God Disciplines His Children**).

These are not the only reasons why **ADONAI** makes some things **crooked**. Sometimes **God** allows us to suffer in order to keep us from committing **sin**, or else to uncover a **sinful** attitude of the heart so deep that it could only be revealed by suffering a painful **trial**. Or maybe – and this is the happiest reason of all – **God** puts **a crook** into our **lot** in order to display **His** grace through our godliness under **trial**. We are prone to "fits of spiritual laziness." But when we have **a crook** in our **lot**, it rouses us from our spiritual slumber and produces many acts of faith, hope, **love**, self-denial, and other graces.

The Shepherd's crook: The point in listing these possible reasons for our suffering

is not to suggest that we can always figure out why **ADONAI** has put some particular **crook** in our **lot**. Rather, the point is that **God** knows why He has put it there. When something in life seems **crooked**, we are usually quick to tell **YHVH** how **He** should **straighten** it out. Instead, we should let **the Lord straighten** *us* out! In **His** sovereignty over our suffering, **God** is at work to accomplish our spiritual good. We are, therefore, called to trust **Him**, even when things seem to be **crooked**.



Whenever we have trouble believing that **God** knows what **He** is doing, we should consider the work of our **Savior**. Remember that our **Good Shepherd** once had **a crook** in **His lot** – **a crook** that came in the shape of **a cross**. In **His** prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane, **Yeshua** asked **His Father** if there were any way to make **the cross straight** instead of **crooked**. But there was no other way. As **Yeshua** considered the work of **ADONAI, He** could see that the only way to make atonement for our **sin** was to **die** in our place. So, **Messiah** suffered on **the crooked cross** that it was **His God**-given **lot** to bear. And **He** trusted **His Father** through **His** sufferings, waiting for **Him** to **straighten** things out when the time was right by raising **Him** up from the tomb on the third day.

If **God** can **straighten** out something as **crooked** as **the cross**, then surely we can trust **Him** to do something with **the crook** in our **lot**. This was the testimony that James Montgomery Boice gave the last time he spoke to his congregation at Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church. Dr. Boice had been diagnosed with a fatal and aggressive cancer; by the time he announced his illness, he had only weeks to live. This was **the crook** in his **lot**. So, in his farewell address Dr. Boice raised a serious question that was based on the sovereignty of **God**. "If **God** does something

in your life," he asked, "would you change it?" To say this in a way **Solomon** would have said, "If **God** put **a crook** in your **lot**, would you try to make **it straight**?"

Well, would you? Would you get rid of your disability or disease? Would you change your job or your financial situation? Would you change your appearance, or your abilities, or your situation in life? Or would you trust **God** for all **the crooked** things in life and wait for **Him** to make them straight, even if you had to wait until the resurrection, just like **Yeshua** did when **He** died for you on **the cross**?

Dr. Boise answered his rhetorical question by testifying to the goodness of **God's** sovereign will. **He** said that if we tried to change what **God** has done, then it would not be as good; we would only make it worse. **The Teacher** who wrote **Ecclesiastes** said something similar. **Consider the work of God, he** said: **Don't try to straighten out what God has made crooked (7:13).** Our **Savior** would say the same thing. "When you **consider the work of God**," **He** would say, "remember most of all, My **love** for you through **the crooked cross**, and trust our **Father** to **straighten** everything out in **His** own good time."[296]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **Your love** and presence is the most awesome reward that anyone could have. When we need someone to talk to for guidance or just for fellowship, people are often busy or gone, but **You** are always with those who **love You**. **Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (John 14:23).** We can live with the comfort of knowing that **You** are always available to help us**. For God Himself has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you," so that with confidence we say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear" (Hebrews 13:5c-6).** Thank **You** for being so wonderful. In **You**r holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*