

Eccl. 11:7-12:8, Enjoy Life and Expect Death
July 16, 1988
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A. Structure and Overview

1. vv.7-8 present a summary, expounded in the rest of the section.
2. The basic theme is to enjoy life without losing sight of the certainty of death. Thus avoid the two major philosophical errors:
 - a) Irresponsible indulgence of our appetites, as though there would never be a day of reckoning;
 - b) Cynicism and despair in the face of certain death.
3. The emphasis on death summarizes all that the book has taught about the vanity and uncertainty of life, while the exhortation to joy summarizes all the encouragements to receive God's gracious gifts.

B. 7-8, Summary

1. Relation between 7 & 8 is a bit of a puzzle.
 - a) Grounds (7) - Conclusion (8)

Take imperfects in 8 as jussives. Because light is pleasant, we should both enjoy it and recognize that it will end.
Puzzle: expect KY to introduce the grounds, not the conclusion!

This may be possible if we read KY as "yea," but it would be nice to have other examples where the usual causal direction of the particle is reversed. In Isa. 7:9, it introduces the apodosis in a conditional sentence, with)M in the protosis. See GKC 159ee for other exx, but all with other markers of conditional structure, KY thus serving only as an intensifier of a relation already otherwise marked.
 - b) Grounds (8) - Conclusion (7).
 - 1) Take imperfects in 8 as futures. Because men do rejoice in light and also recognize when it is not there, we conclude that light is good. Seems insipid, and also contrary to the tenor of the book, which is that men in general do not take this balanced view.
 - 2) (Delitzsch) There must be an ellipsis. Light is good, because [it is God's will that] men rejoice in the light and recognize its absence. That which is intrinsic and absolute is not the light, but the command of God, expressed in 8. He has ordained the pleasantness of light as a means to teach men.
 - c) Summary (8a of 7, 8b) (Mann and Thompson p.72).

Now KY is no longer a conjunction, but the affirmative particle "Yea," emphasizing the summary (8a) sandwiched

between the two component parts (7, 8b). Light is pleasant (7), but that is not all that there is to life. All is vanity (8b), but that is not all there is to life, either. We should enjoy the pleasant things throughout all our long life, without ignoring or forgetting that there are unpleasant things too (8a). Note the chiasmus in v.8, emphasizing the parity between enjoying the good and remembering the evil.

Truly the light [is] sweet,
and a pleasant [thing it is] for the eyes to behold the sun:

YEA,
if a man live many years,
LET HIM rejoice in them all
AND LET HIM remember the days of darkness;
for they shall be many.

All that cometh [is] vanity.

2. First detail, 7: It's pleasant to see the sunshine. A simple detail, easy to miss in the bustle of daily life. Stop to smell the roses.
3. Second detail, 8b: All that comes is vanity. Cannot find satisfaction in the events of life "under the sun."
4. Summary, 8a: two injunctions, each with a conditional modifier emphasizing the abundance of the two conditions.
 - a) Rejoice in them all. Every year offers something for enjoyment. NB: rejoice IN, not FROM. Even in the midst of frustration and suffering.
 - b) Remember the days of darkness. Recognize the need to depend on God. No Pollyanna here.
5. The point of joy is echoed in 11:9-12:1a (series of imperatives to the young man, joined by waw's); the reality of suffering is emphasized in 12:1b-8 (three repetitions of (*ad*)a\$er lo)).

C. **"Let him rejoice in them all," 11:9-12:1a.**

These exhortations fall into two parts: three positive (to seek joy) and two negative (to avoid sorrow), each with its own reminder not to forget God, and one summary.

1. Positive: Seek Joy, 11:9.
 - a) Exhortations
 - 1) When? in youth, the time of health and freedom from care.
 - 2) How? Follow your heart and your eyes. "Do what you please."
An admonition to be carefree.
 - b) Reminder: God will judge all that you do. If we are mindful of God's judgment, it will sufficiently guard us against the

errors of youth.

2. Negative: Avoid Sorrow, 11:10.
 - a) Exhortations: both mental anguish and physical discomfort.
NB: rules out asceticism.
 - b) Reminder: "childhood and youth [are] vanity." This rejection of pain must not grow into a frustrated struggle with the structure of the world. You can never be free of vanity, because God has made the creation subject to vanity. But you can make each moment as comfortable as possible.
3. Summary: Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth.
 - a) As the one who will judge excesses.
 - b) As the one who has placed you in this vain world.

D. **"Let him remember the days of darkness," 12:1b-8.**

The "days of darkness" are described as old age. Three statements, each beginning with "while not" or "before," 1b, 2, 6.

1. First evil, 1b
Old age is not pleasant. Our bodies deteriorate and bring pain and sadness. American model: work hard now and enjoy riches later. Qohelet: enjoy your youth, for when you get old you will not be able to enjoy it.
2. Second evil, 2-5
A detailed metaphor of old age. Lots of variant interpretations, but the general thrust is clear.
 - a) *The sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are darkened.*--The senses are dulled and the understanding clouded.
 - b) *The clouds return after the rain.*--One sickness follows another. Not a life of health with intermittent sickness, but a life of sickness with intermittent health.
 - c) *The keepers of the house shall tremble.*--The arms shaking.
 - d) *The strong men shall bow themselves.*--The legs, crouched in weakness.
 - e) *The grinders cease because they are few.*--Most of the teeth have fallen out.
 - f) *Those that look out of the windows are darkened.*--Diminished eyesight.
 - g) *The doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low.*--"Doors" (dual) are the lips, closed and sucked into a toothless mouth as he gums his food.
 - h) *He shall rise up at the voice of the bird.*--Frightened by

inconsequential things, because he can no longer perceive them clearly.

- i) *All the daughters of music shall be brought low.*--2 Sam. 19:36, no longer takes pleasure in musicians.
- j) *They shall be afraid of [that which is] high.*--Can't climb stairs!
- k) *Fears [shall be] in the way.*--Will not venture out on trips, because of the fear of physical limitations.
- l) *The almond tree shall flourish.*--Its abundant white blossoms recall the white hair of the aged.
- m) *The grasshopper shall be a burden.*--Pictures the bent-over gait of the aged.
- n) *Desire shall fail.*--The physical appetites are diminished.
- o) *Man goeth to his eternal [kjv long] home.*--This world is only a temporary dwelling. Man must leave it for his permanent abode. (Qohelet does not have the full light of understanding that we do on the nature of that abode.)
- p) *The mourners go about the streets.*--Paid mourners, waiting outside the house for the last breath to expire.

3. Third evil, 6-7

Three pictures of the final event, death.

- a) *The silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken.*--Imagine a precious bowl hanging from the ceiling by a silver wire; that is our life. When the wire breaks, the bowl is dashed against the floor and destroyed.
- b) *The pitcher is broken at the fountain, when the wheel disintegrates into the cistern.*--The "wheel" is the pulley used to lower the pitcher into the well. When the pulley falls into pieces, the pitcher crashes down into the pit.
- c) 12:7, reversal of Gen. 2:7; fulfillment of Gen. 3:19. NB: Qohelet does know of man's heavenly destiny.

4. Inclusio with 1:2, v.8

Delitzsch: "The author has now reached the close. [He] has made all earthly things small, and at last remains seated on this dust-heap of 'all is vanity.' The motto-like sayin, i.2, is here repeated as a *quod erat demonstrandum*, like a summary conclusion."

E. Conclusion

Two errors to avoid:

1. Abandon to pleasure, without recognizing the vanity and sorrow of life;
 2. Cynicism and pessimism.
- The heart of the section is 11:7,8.