

All Grown Up

Ecclesiastes 11:9; 12:1

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I. To the Fullest v. 9a

- a. While You are Young
 - i. Young- youth, early manhood
 1. The term *yaldût* may be used of a young adult, as in *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 52b, cited above (see Notes at 4:13). The *bāḥûr* refers to a male in the prime of life (the choice period), someone eligible for military service.
 2. As a result of the brevity of life and the darkness of the future, Qoheleth urges young men to make the most of youth and of manhood's prime.
 - ii. Rejoice - to be merry
 1. In the OT rejoicing is frequently expressed in connection with the feasts; in fact, they are called "times of rejoicing"
 2. Solomon reiterated his advice to enjoy life (cf. v. 8), emphasizing that a person should do so in his youth. Elsewhere Solomon had said that enjoying life consists of eating and drinking (2:24; 3:13; 8:15; 9:7), wearing nice clothes and pleasant lotions (9:8), enjoying marital bliss (9:9), and finding satisfaction in one's work (2:24; 3:22; 5:18)
 - iii. Pleasant – good spirits, agreeable
 1. Heart - "let your heart be pleasant"; "let your heart be glad").
 - iv. Impulses – ways, roads, highways
 1. Heart
 2. The idiom has nothing to do with how one makes ethical decisions (i.e., whether one follows one's heart or obeys divine orders)
 3. That is, it may be interpreted as qualifying the call to enjoy: follow your heart, *but* know that one must not exceed the bounds of what God approves, for God will bring you into judgment
 - v. Desires
 1. Desire - desire," apparently relating the noun to the verb *šḥr* "to seek, search." (*anoia* "want of understanding") no knowledge") probably also reflect the same exegesis—that is, since *šḥr* in Prov 1:28 and 8:17 is used of the search for wisdom, the noun *šahărût* is interpreted to mean a lack of wisdom or a lack of knowledge.
 2. Eyes
 - a. The point is to enjoy what is present before one's eyes.

II. Just Be Sure vs. 9b-10

a. Know

i. God's Judgment

1. Judgment- decision, fair decision, pronouncement
2. For all - there is no reason to believe from either explicit or implicit arguments in this book that Solomon believed this judgment would take place in the afterlife. Instead, like other wisdom writers of his era, he emphasized a temporal judgment within a man's lifetime (cf. comments on 2:24–26 and see 7:17). This may even be indicated in 11:10 where Solomon said a person should banish anxiety from his heart (psychological) and cast off the troubles of his body (physical).
3. The exhortation to follow one's inclinations (v. 9) does not endorse the reckless following of every impulse. Awareness of divine judgment turns the pursuit of joy away from crossing over into sins. The meaning is that one should not be weighed down by vexation over the human condition to the degree that carefree happiness is impossible (v. 10). The days of youth and vigor are few.

b. Remove

- i. Grief – vexation -See Notes at 1:18. In 5:16 (Eng v 17), the days of darkness are said to contain “much vexation (*ka'as*), sickness, and anger.”

ii. Anger

1. Heart
2. These imperatives are obviously the opposite side of the advice to be happy (v. 9) and contrast with the psychological gloom and declining physical vigor depicted in 12:2–5. Yet such passages as Proverbs 5:7–14 and Psalm 39 show that a means of avoiding these effects is a wise lifestyle lived in the fear of the Lord.
3. *Put away vexation from thy heart*]. Take the easiest course both mentally and physically

c. Put Away

i. Pain - misfortune

1. From you Body

- a. *banish unpleasantness*. The noun *rā'â* “unpleasantness” is antithetical to what is *ṭôb* “delightful, pleasant, good” (see 11:7; cf. also *wîṭbēkâ* in 11:9). It refers to one's experience of pain and misery. The reference anticipates *yēmê hārā'â* “the days of unpleasantness” in the next verse, 12:1. One should try to avoid pain and misery, for there will come a time when it will no longer be possible to avoid such unpleasantness.

d. Prime of Life

- i. Childhood
- ii. Prime - literally blackness, meaning black hair; b) from שְׁהוּרָא the prime of youth (early youth, the first stage of youth)
- iii. Fleeting - all is vanity

III. Keep in Mind Ecclesiastes 12:1

a. Remember

- i. Creator -deity, the God and creator of heaven and the earth Gn 1:1, the ends of the earth Is 40:28, the heaven Is 42:5 45:18, a new heaven and a new earth
 1. The epithet for God, “your Creator,” emphasizes Him as the Author of life, who gives it and takes it away (cf. Ecc. 12:7; and the allusion to Gen. 2:7; 3:19).
 2. The command Remember your Creator means to revere God, to keep His laws faithfully, to serve Him responsibly, remembering that because He created people, everyone owes Him his life. This meaning is obvious (a) from the preceding verses (11:9–10) on living joyously but responsibly, (b) from the final advice at the end of the book to “fear God and keep His commandments” (12:13), and (c) from the meaning of the verb “remember” (in Deut. 8:18 and Ps. 119:55 “remember” is parallel to keeping the Law; in Jud. 8:34 it is contrasted with self-reliance and worship of other gods; in Ps. 63:6 it is parallel to meditating on and faithfully following God).
 3. Nor is the exhortation to remember the Creator a contradiction to the exhortations to rejoice. Instead we have a warning against mindless self-indulgence and profligacy during the days of one’s vigor. To forget the Creator of youth is to invite bitter regrets and an empty existence in old age. To remember the Creator is to follow the path of wisdom and extend the joy of life.

ii. In your Youth

b. Before Evil Days

- i. Using a wordplay on the word “troubles” in Ecclesiastes 11:10 (“the troubles of your body”), Solomon advised responsible living in one’s youth, before the days of trouble come, that is, the days of old age whose troubles he figuratively depicted in 12:2–5, the years in which he said they would find little or no pleasure
- ii. *the days of unpleasantness*. Hebrew *yēmê hārā’â* refers to a time of suffering and misery including especially, but not limited to, old age. See *yôm rā’â* “time of adversity” in 7:14

c. Days Draw Near

- i. I have No Delight- - joy, delight

Word Studies

Rejoice - but not totally distinguished in meaning from 1, to rejoice¹

Youth - **young** (fully-grown, vigorous, unmarried) man²

Childhood – youth, early manhood

Pleasant – good spirits, agreeable

Judgment – decision, fair decision, pronouncement

Grief – vexation

Pain – **misfortune**

Fleeting - all is vanity

Delight - **joy, delight**

Creator - man, male and female Gn 1:27 5:1f 6:7 Dt 4:32 Is 45:12, us Mal 2:10 Ps 89:48 Sir 15:14, your, his creator Qoh 12:1 (v.s.³), Jacob Is 43:1, Israel 43:15, Jerusalem as הַיְלֵךְ and his people as 65:18 שִׁשְׁתֵּי, the individual Jew for his (God's) glory 43:7, the smith 54:16, an individual person Qoh 12:1⁴

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1334.

² Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 118.

³v.s. *vide supra* referred to later in the entry

⁴ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 153.

9. *while you are young*. We should read *běyaldûtekā* with the Ben Ḥayyim edition of the Rabbinic Bible and some MSS (so Kennicott nos. 18, 77, 157, 166), instead of *běyaldûtêkā* in Codex Leningrad and numerous other MSS. Certainly the correct forms should be *běyaldûtekā* // *běḥûrôtêkā* (cf. 12:1), instead of *běyaldûtêkā* // *běḥûrôtêkā*, as we have it in *BH*⁵. It is possible to take the preposition *bě-* as indicating the object of the enjoyment (so Ehrlich: “enjoy your youth”), but the parallelism with *bîmê bēḥûrôtêkā* “in the days of your prime” suggests that the expression is temporal: “in your youth” = “while you are young” // “in the days of your prime.” Cf. *byldwty* “in my youth” (*b. Hull.* 24b) and *byldwtk* “in your youth” (*b. 'Abod. Zar.* 52b). Given the fact that a *bāḥûr* “youth” is addressed, we should probably interpret *yaldût* not as “childhood” (NAS⁶B) or “boyhood” (NE⁷B). The term *yaldût* may be used of a young adult, as in *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 52b, cited above (see Notes at 4:13). The *bāḥûr* refers to a male in the prime of life (the choice period), someone eligible for military service.

let your heart delight you. The verb is to be parsed as the Hiphil imperfect of *ḥwb* (thus, ^{8*}*wěyēḥwbēkā* ⁹> *wiḥwbēkā*), rather than the Hiphil of *yḥb*. The choice of the root *ḥwb* recalls the use of *ḥôb* in 11:7. In any case, we should not emend the text to read the Qal imperfect, as Ehrlich, Galling, and others have done (cf. NAS¹⁰B: “let your heart be pleasant”; NA¹¹B: “let your heart be glad”). The idiom is not the same as *yḥab lēb* “the heart will be glad” in 7:3, where there is no direct object of the verb. Here we have a direct object, so the Hiphil is correct. The heart is the active (personified) subject here, as it is in 2:1–3.

in the days of your prime. The form *bēḥûrôtêkā* is unique to Ecclesiastes (see also 12:1). Elsewhere in the Bible, we find the masculine plural form, as in Num 11:28. But one may compare the use of the unique form *nē 'ûrôt* “youth” in Jer 32:30 for the more common noun *nē 'ûrîm*. In any case, the noun here and in 12:1 is abstract (cf. B¹²L §61.y.α); it must not be confused with *baḥûrîm/baḥûrôt* (with the virtual doubling of *ḥet*) “young people” (see Joüon-Muraok¹³a §136.h.Note 2).

Follow the ways of your heart. Hebrew *wēḥallēk bēdarkê libbēkā*, lit. “walk in the ways of your heart.” The idiom may be compared with Egyptian *šms-ib* “follow the heart” = “follow one’s desire” = “enjoy” (cf. also the idiom *swt nt šms-ib* “places of following the heart” = “places of enjoyment” (see *WbÄ*¹⁴S IV, pp. 483–84). After the phrase “follow the ways of your heart,”

⁵*BHS Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*

⁶NASB New American Standard Bible

⁷NEB New English Bible

^{8*} hypothetical form

⁹> text emended

¹⁰NASB New American Standard Bible

¹¹NAB New American Bible

¹²BL H. Bauer and P. Leander. *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache*. Halle: Niemeyer, 1922. Reprinted 1991.

¹³Joüon-Muraoka P. Joüon, trans, and rev. T. Muraoka. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991 [1922].

¹⁴*WbÄS* A. Erman and E. Grapow, eds. *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*. 7 Volumes. Leipzig: Akademie Verlag, 1926–31. Reprinted 1982.

LX¹⁵X adds *amōmos* “blamelessly” and, instead of “and what your eyes see (*ûmar’ê ênêkâ* in M¹⁶T), it reads: *kai mē en horasei ophthalmōn sou* “and not in the sight of your eyes” (although the negative particle is omitted in some Greek witnesses). These moves indicate that the injunction to follow one’s heart did not sit comfortably with everyone in antiquity, perhaps because it appeared to contradict Num 15:39 (“do not search after your own heart and your own eyes”). The discomfort is evident in Tar¹⁷g, as well: “walk in humility with the ways of your heart and be careful with what your eyes see that you do not see evil...” The Egyptian parallels, however, show that the point here is enjoyment. The idiom has nothing to do with how one makes ethical decisions (i.e., whether one follows one’s heart or obeys divine orders).

and what your eyes see. See Notes at 6:9 on *mar’ēh ênayim* “what the eyes see” (cf. also 5:10 [Eng v 11]). *Ketib* has the plural form *mr’y*, but *Qere*, followed by numerous MSS, LX¹⁸X, Vul¹⁹g, and Syr²⁰r assume the singular, *mr’h*, as in 6:9. The evidence in Tar²¹g is mixed (Sperber has the singular, but Lagarde has the plural). The plural form is never used in this sense elsewhere (although it is attested with a different meaning in Nah 2:5; Song 2:14); but its occurrence here may have been derived secondarily through the influence of *bēdarkê*: thus *bēdarkê // bēmar’ê*. In either case, the meaning of the text is not affected. The point is to enjoy what is present before one’s eyes.

and know. The conjunction may be translated as “and” or “but,” depending on one’s interpretation of the verse. Those who take this line to be an editorial gloss, a caveat by an orthodox editor, interpret it to mean “but” (Galling, Lauha, Zimmerli). That is, it may be interpreted as qualifying the call to enjoy: follow your heart, *but* know that one must not exceed the bounds of what God approves, for God will bring you into judgment. The similarity of this line with 12:14a (in the epilogue) raises for these scholars the possibility that this gloss was supplied by the epilogist. Qohelet, however, does speak of God’s judgment in the present (see Comment at 3:17), and it is possible that the epilogist in 12:14 is simply reiterating or slightly reinterpreting the point that Qohelet makes in 11:9. The line should not be deleted.

10. *vexation.* See Notes at 1:18. In 5:16 (Eng v 17), the days of darkness are said to contain “much vexation (*ka’as*), sickness, and anger.”

banish unpleasantness. The noun *rā’â* “unpleasantness” is antithetical to what is *ṭôb* “delightful, pleasant, good” (see 11:7; cf. also *wīṭibēkâ* in 11:9). It refers to one’s experience of pain and misery. The reference anticipates *yēmê hārā’â* “the days of unpleasantness” in the next verse, 12:1. One should try to avoid pain and misery, for there will come a time when it will no longer be possible to avoid such unpleasantness. One may compare the injunction here with Sir 30:21–25, esp. the Greek text in v 23: *kai lypēn makran apostēson apo sou* “and remove grief far from you.”

¹⁵LXX Septuagint

¹⁶MT Masoretic Text

¹⁷Targ Targum

¹⁸LXX Septuagint

¹⁹Vulg Vulgate

²⁰Syr Syriac (Peshitta)

²¹Targ Targum

the dawn of life. The noun *šahărûṭ* occurs only here in Hebrew. The ancient versions are confused about its meaning. Vul²²g has *voluptas* “desire,” apparently relating the noun to the verb *šhr* “to seek, search.” LX²³X (*anoia* “want of understanding”) and Sy²⁴r (*l’ yd’ t’* “no knowledge”) probably also reflect the same exegesis—that is, since *šhr* in Prov 1:28 and 8:17 is used of the search for wisdom, the noun *šahărûṭ* is interpreted to mean a lack of wisdom or a lack of knowledge. Clearly, the translators of these ancient versions did not think that “blackness” was an appropriate meaning. One version of Tar²⁵g (see Lagarde), however, reads: “youth and the darkness of hair are vanity.” Here the word *šahărûṭ* is taken to mean “blackness of hair,” a metaphor for youth and, thus, a term against *šêbô* “gray hair” = “old age” (so BD²⁶B and most modern commentators). Support for this interpretation may be found in the Talmud (*b. Ned.* 30b), where *šhwry hr’š* “black-headed” is contrasted with *qrhyn* “bald” and *b’ly šybwt* “gray-haired” (see Salters, *Studies in the Versions*, pp. 234–35). So NJP²⁷S translates: “youth and black hair are fleeting.” One may also relate this word to *šahar* “dawn” and note the close association of *yaldûtekâ* “your youth” and *mišhâr* “dawn” in Ps 110:3, although that text is uncertain as it stands in M²⁸T. The noun *šahărûṭ* may be related to Arabic *šahr* “first period or stage of youth,” which is a metathesized form of the more common noun *šarḥ* “the prime and best period of youth” (Lan²⁹e, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, Part 4, pp. 1515, 1531). Whatever the etymology, it is difficult to believe that the audience would not have connected the word with dawn. The noun *šhrt* appears with the meaning “dawn” on the Moabite Stone (KA³⁰I 181.15).

vanity. See Notes and Comment at 1:2.

12:1. *your creator.* BH³¹S has *bôř’ êkâ*, apparently a plural, but many MSS read the singular form *br’k/bwr’k* “your creator.” The former is, however, the *lectio difficilior*; the latter may represent an attempt to correct the text. The form is sometimes explained as the “plural of majesty” (so Delitzsch), but in Isa 43:1 we find the form *bôra’ âkâ* “your creator” used of the deity; the “plural of majesty” is not used there. It is better not to interpret the form as a plural, but as the result of the frequent confusion in late Hebrew of III-’*Alep* and III-Weak roots (see Notes at 2:26). The form is, thus, comparable with the participle *’ôšeh* “maker” (used of God), which is also attested with a pronominal suffix (see Isa 54:5; Ps 149:2; Job 35:10). There is no need to emend the text or to interpret the form as a plural of majesty. The more serious problem is with the meaning of the word.

²²Vulg Vulgate

²³LXX Septuagint

²⁴Syr Syriac (Peshitta)

²⁵Targ Targum

²⁶BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.

²⁷NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

²⁸MT Masoretic Text

²⁹Lane E. W. Lane, ed. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. 8 Parts. London: Williams & Norgate, 1863–93. Reprinted 1980.

³⁰KAI H. Donner and W. Röllig, eds. *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*. 3 Volumes. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1962–64.

³¹BHS *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*

All the ancient versions understand the form (either reading *bwr`k* or *bwr`yk*) to mean “your creator,” but not all commentators agree that “your creator” is best suited to the context, especially since the deity is always called *’ēlōhîm* in Ecclesiastes. Hence, instead of *bôřĕ`ĕkā* or *bôra`ăkā*, various alternatives have been proposed. These include: (a) *bĕrû`ĕkā* “your well-being” or “your health” (Ehrlich); (b) *boryāk* “your vigor” (Zimmermann); (c) *bĕ`ĕrĕkā* or *bôřĕkā* “your well” (Graetz), a metaphor for one’s wife, as in Prov 5:15; (d) *bôřĕkā* “your pit,” a synonym for the grave (Galling).

None of these explanations is entirely satisfactory. Only *bwr`k/bwr`yk* is supported by the textual witnesses. If the consonantal text is correct, as all the witnesses attest, it is difficult to think that something other than “creator” is the primary meaning. Certainly by the time one gets to the end of the passage (12:7), with its allusion to the creation of humanity (Gen 2:7; 3:19), it is difficult not to think of the creator. The author may indeed intend to evoke other connections in using this word. Given his penchant for wordplays, it seems likely that he might have intended his audience to hear more than one meaning in the word. An early interpreter, Rabbi Akabya ben Mahallalel (first century C.E.), is said to have understood the text just so (*m. ’Abot* 3:1; *Qoh. Rabb.* on 12:1; *Lev. Rabb.* section 18). Said the rabbi: “Consider three things and you will not come into the power of sin: Know whence you came; where you are going; and before whom you are destined to give an accounting.” Rabbi Akabya’s interpretation is based on three different Hebrew words: *b`rk* “your source” (from whence you came), *bwrk* “your pit” (whither you are going), and *bwr`k* “your creator.”

Since the context has to do with the enjoyment of life in one’s youth (see 11:7–10), we may surmise that anyone first hearing the exhortation, might easily have assumed that Qohelet meant *bôřĕkā* “your cistern.” If so, the hearer might recall the proverb “drink water from your own cistern (*bôřĕkā*), streams from your own well (*bĕ`ĕrĕkā*),” particularly since the passage in Proverbs continues to say, “let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the *wife of your youth*” (Prov 5:15, 18; cf. Song 4:15). But it is possible that the author also intends for one to think of death. If not in 12:1, certainly by the time one gets to v 6, with its mention of the shattering of the pots at the pit (*habbôr*), the grave comes to mind. In sum, the primary meaning is creator: the word is *bôřĕ`ĕkā* “your creator,” but it is also appropriate to think of enjoyment (*bôřĕkā* “your cistern” = “your wife”) and/or death (*bôřĕkā* “your pit”).

before. Hebrew *’ad`ăšer lō`*, lit. “until when not,” means “before” (so Sym³²m *prin*; Vul³³g *antequam*). Cf. also the common Mishnaic idiom *’d šl`* “until not when” = “before” (*m. Mak.* 2:4; *Ter.* 1:3). See Brockelman³⁴n, *Syntax*, §174; Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*, §513. The phrase appears at strategic points in the poem (vv 1b, 2a, 6a).

the days of unpleasantness. Hebrew *yĕmĕ hārā`â* refers to a time of suffering and misery including especially, but not limited to, old age. See *yôm rā`â* “time of adversity” in 7:14 (cf. Prov 16:4; Pss 27:5; 41:2 [Eng v 1]; Jer 17:17, 18; 51:2). It is equivalent to *yĕmĕ haḥōšek* “the days of darkness” in 11:8. It may also be observed that *hārā`â* “unpleasantness” stands in contrast to what is delightful (*ṭôb*) in 11:7. The text is referring to a time when one can no longer put away unpleasantness. The unpleasantness is the unpleasantness that one tries to get

³²Symm Symmachus

³³Vulg Vulgate

³⁴Brockelmann C. Brockelmann. *Hebräischen Syntax*. Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1956.

rid of when one is still young enough to do so (see 11:9). Gregory Thaumaturgos, however, begins his eschatological interpretation here; instead of the plural *yēmê hārā'â* “days of unpleasantness,” he has *tēn tou theou megalēn hēmeran kai phoberan* “the great and terrible day of God,” words which recall Joel 3:4 (Eng 2:31); Mal 3:22 (Eng 4:5); Zech 1:14–18. See Jarick, *Gregory Thaumaturgos' Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes*, p. 289.

when you will say. The particle *’ăšer* is probably temporal, not “of which (you will say).”

“I have no pleasure in them.” There is some ambiguity about the translation of this phrase, depending on how one interprets the suffix in *bāhem*. If the suffix refers to the *šānîm* “years” (a feminine plural, but see 2:6, 10; 10:9; 11:8), we should translate “I have no pleasure in them” (i.e., I have no pleasure during this period because I am too old). This is probably the correct interpretation, since *šānîm* is the closest antecedent. If, however, the suffix refers to “the days of your youth” in 12:1a, then one should translate the phrase as “I had no pleasure in them” (i.e., I did not have pleasure back then, when I could have, and now it is too late).³⁵

9^a. *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth*]. As a result of the brevity of life and the darkness of the future, Qoheleth urges young men to make the most of youth and of manhood’s prime. It is a natural argument which has occurred to others also. Herodotus (2⁷⁸) tells how the Egyptians at their feasts had the image of a dead body in a coffin carried about and shown to each of the company who was addressed thus, “Look on this, then drink and enjoy yourself, for when dead you will be like this.” That it had also been used by the Babylonians has been shown in the notes on 9:7 ff.—*Walk in the ways of thy heart*]. Gratify thy desires. From these come all the pleasures man is ever to receive, so self-denial is self-destruction. Cf.³⁶ 1 Cor. 15:32. This verse is controverted in *Wisdom*, 2:6.—**9^b.** *But know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment*]. This is so out of harmony with the context, but so in accord with the *Chasid* point of view, and especially with 3:17, which we have already recognized as a *Chasid* gloss, that there is no doubt but that McNeile is right in regarding this phrase here as the work of the *Chasid* glossator.

10. *Put away vexation from thy heart*]. Take the easiest course both mentally and physically.—*For youth and prime are vanity*]. Youth and the prime quickly flee. The *vs*³⁷ is a restatement of the thought of *vs*³⁸. 9a. If we are right in seeing in 12:1a another *Chasid* gloss, the argument to make the most of swiftly passing youth is continued in 12:1b–7.

12:1^a. *Remember now thy creator in the days of thy prime*]. This is as McNeile has pointed out an insertion of the *Chasid* glossator. As Cheyne has suggested, it contains exhortation based on psychological principles, for as age advances it is less easy to remember one’s creator unless

³⁵ C. L. Seow, [Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 18C, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 349–353.

³⁶ Cf. confer, compare.

³⁷ vs. verse.

³⁸ vs. verse.

it has been done in youth. It is needless to point out how unlike Qoheleth it is. For efforts to bring it into harmony with his prevailing thought, see critical note.

1^b. *While the evil days come not*]. This is the continuation 11:10, from which it has been severed by the gloss inserted in 12:1a. Qoheleth urged:

Put away vexation from thy heart
And remove misery from thy flesh,—
For youth and prime are vanity,—
While the evil days come not, etc.

“*The evil days*” do not refer to the days of darkness in Sheol mentioned in 11:8, but to the period of old age which he now goes on to describe. They are “evil” in the sense of “miserable” because less full of pleasure than youth and prime. This is the meaning of *I have no pleasure in them*.³⁹

11:9–10 The exhortation to follow one’s inclinations (v. 9) does not endorse the reckless following of every impulse. Awareness of divine judgment turns the pursuit of joy away from crossing over into sins. The meaning is that one should not be weighed down by vexation over the human condition²²⁴⁰⁶ to the degree that carefree happiness is impossible (v. 10). The days of youth and vigor²²⁴¹⁷ are few.

12:1–7 This final poem, a series of metaphors,²²⁴²⁸ exhorts the reader to remember the Creator²²⁴³⁹ before the days of age and death set in. Verse 1a is not a *hasid* gloss,²³⁴⁴⁰ nor should “your Creator” be emended to “your wife”²³⁴⁵¹ or the like. Nor is the exhortation to remember

³⁹ George A. Barton, [A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1908), 184–186.

⁴⁰²²⁶ וְהִסַּר כַּעַס מִלִּבִּי וְהִעֲבִיר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרִי is in effect a hendiadys for, “Cast away grief from yourself [over the human condition].” רָעָה is not personal sin here but the trouble and evil that is part and parcel of human life. Even this command, of course, is not absolute: the point is that one should not allow consternation over human ills to consume one, not that one should be stupidly oblivious to human troubles.

⁴¹²²⁷ וְהִשְׁחֲרוּת is literally “blackness” (i.e., of hair) as opposed to grey hair.

⁴²²²⁸ The poem is not an allegory (cf. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 165), and thus a single, unified picture should not be sought. Some interpreters, such as Fox (*Qohelet*, 305), can be needlessly concerned with petty details, e.g., that in 12:5a, “afraid of heights,” the poem moves “from figurative to literal statement.” But there is no reason why the poem should not do precisely that. Fox’s objection is especially odd since he points out that a Sumerian poem on aging mixes literal and metaphorical statements (pp. 295–96).

⁴³²²⁹ The plural form בּוֹרְאֵיךְ is often regarded as a plural of majesty or a result of morphological analogy of the third ה verb. But note also the plural עֲשׂוּהוּ in 2:12 (see commentary above).

⁴⁴²³⁰ Barton, *Ecclesiastes*, 185.

⁴⁵²³¹ Thus Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 184–85. Crenshaw accepts the emendation of בּוֹרְאֵיךְ to בְּיָדֶיךָ, “your well,” and on the basis of Prov 5:15 understands this as a metaphor for

the Creator a contradiction to the exhortations to rejoice. Instead we have a warning against mindless self-indulgence and profligacy during the days of one's vigor. To forget the Creator of youth is to invite bitter regrets and an empty existence in old age. To remember the Creator²³⁴⁶² is to follow the path of wisdom and extend the joy of life.

The following metaphors all describe the deterioration of the body as old age comes on. To take these verses as literal references to the decline of one's household and estate is perverse. At the same time, the richness of the language has not been exhausted at the moment one recognizes a particular metaphor's referent. The darkening of the sky and the silence on the street give to the text an atmosphere that is surreal and even apocalyptic.²³⁴⁷³⁴⁸

11:9–10. Solomon reiterated his advice to enjoy life (cf. v. 8), emphasizing that a person should do so in his **youth**. Elsewhere Solomon had said that enjoying life consists of eating and drinking (2:24; 3:13; 8:15; 9:7), wearing nice clothes and pleasant lotions (9:8), enjoying marital bliss (9:9), and finding satisfaction in one's work (2:24; 3:22; 5:18). Now Solomon encouraged his readers to do whatever their hearts desired ("follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes," 11:9; NAS^{49B}). However, those desires should be tempered with an awareness that **God will** judge.

As previously noted (cf. comments on 2:24–26; 3:17; 7:15–18), there is no reason to believe from either explicit or implicit arguments in this book that Solomon believed this judgment would take place in the afterlife. Instead, like other wisdom writers of his era, he emphasized a temporal judgment within a man's lifetime (cf. comments on 2:24–26 and see 7:17). This may even be indicated in 11:10 where Solomon said a person should **banish anxiety from his heart** (psychological) and **cast off the troubles of his body** (physical). These imperatives are obviously the opposite side of the advice to **be happy** (v. 9) and contrast with the psychological gloom and declining physical vigor depicted in 12:2–5. Yet such passages as Proverbs 5:7–14 and Psalm 39 show that a means of avoiding these effects is a wise lifestyle lived in the fear of the Lord.

the wife. Not only is this emendation without any textual or versional support, but it is highly doubtful that the reader could be expected to make the connection to Prov 5:15 Crenshaw proposes. See also the remarks in Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 148; Gordis, *Koheleth*, 340; and Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 163.

⁴⁶²³² The choice of the term "Creator" is not by accident. It both looks back to the creation narrative, which plays so prominent a role in Ecclesiastes, and maintains the perspective of wisdom that a joyful life is found through adherence to the principles built into the creation. context, however, it is best to take "daughters of song" as a reference to the sounds they make and not to the people themselves and being "low" as meaning that they are inaudible (cf. 2 Sam 19:35).

⁴⁷²³³ Cf. Fox, *Qohelet*, 281–98.

⁴⁸ Duane A. Garrett, [Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs](#), vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 340–341.

⁴⁹NASB New American Standard Bible

3. LIVE RESPONSIBLY IN YOUR YOUTH FOR OLD AGE AND DEATH ARE COMING (12:1–7)

Solomon underlined the thought of responsible living in one's youth by vividly depicting in a series of word pictures the increasing gloom and declining powers of old age which culminate in death. These word pictures are arranged in three groups, each introduced with "before" (vv. 1–2, 6) and modifying the basic imperative, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (v. 1).

a. Live responsibly before the miseries of old age come (12:1)

12:1. The command **Remember your Creator** means to revere God, to keep His laws faithfully, to serve Him responsibly, remembering that because He created people, everyone owes Him his life. This meaning is obvious (a) from the preceding verses (11:9–10) on living joyously but responsibly, (b) from the final advice at the end of the book to "fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13), and (c) from the meaning of the verb "remember" (in Deut. 8:18 and Ps. 119:55 "remember" is parallel to keeping the Law; in Jud. 8:34 it is contrasted with self-reliance and worship of other gods; in Ps. 63:6 it is parallel to meditating on and faithfully following God).

The epithet for God, "your Creator," emphasizes Him as the Author of life, who gives it and takes it away (cf. Ecc. 12:7; and the allusion to Gen. 2:7; 3:19).

Using a wordplay on the word "troubles" in Ecclesiastes 11:10 ("the troubles of your body"), Solomon advised responsible living in one's **youth, before the days of trouble come**, that is, the days of old age whose troubles he figuratively depicted in 12:2–5, **the years** in which he said they would find little or **no pleasure**.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Donald R. Glenn, "[Ecclesiastes](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1004.