

I Intro. (Feb. 8, 2009)

Old age is coming. It is remarkable how quickly. It is just around the corner for some, two corners for others, but it is not far from any one of us. Youth is only for a while, the tiniest little while, and it is whisked away by the blazing fast speed of time itself. Solomon knew it; we all know, academically at least. One day, Lord willing, we will know from first hand experience, many already do. How should we respond?

Remember your Creator now, while you still have time (Ecc. 12:1) before the inevitable effects of old age begin to set in. Things that characterize old age are discussed (12:2-7). In the end, as Solomon is wont to say, all is vanity (12:8).

II Live Responsibly, Old Age Is Coming (Ecc. 12:1-8).

A. Remember your Creator now, while you still have time (12:1).

1. (vs. 1) Of course by remember is more than mere recall, but has to do with acknowledge one's responsibilities to comply with the Creator's standards. It "means to live your life with what you know about God clearly in view, not just to remember that there is a God."¹ Solomon had just pointed to the importance of remembering that God "will bring" us "to judgment for all" the "things" that we do in our youth (11:9). Then he said, "So, remove vexation from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting" (vs. 10).

Obviously by using the term "Creator," Solomon is acknowledging that we are created beings and that we have a responsibility to live accountably. The best time to do this is early in our lives, not late, though it is better than not at all. Remembering God in the days of our youth "before the evil days," means, not moral and spiritual evil, but hard and difficult times when our bodies begin to break down "and the years draw near when" we "will say, 'I have no delight (or pleasure) in them.'" When you are young, you often wake up feeling fabulous, so good that you can hardly stand it; energy abounds and you just have to find challenges and meet them. That is the

time to invest yourself for God. One day, the energy simply will not be there to do it any more. Sometimes we refer to that as the time to retire, and perhaps it is.

B. Things that characterize old age (12:2-7)

1. (vs. 2) In case those who have not experienced it do not yet know what Solomon is referring to here when he said what he said in vs. 1 about the "evil days" coming, He detailed it here. He said to serve "before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain." "Old age is the time when the lights grow dim, both physically and emotionally. The days are dreary, and the nights are long. Gloom and depression settle in."² "Solomon likened the evil days first to an approaching rainstorm (v. 2) that is fearful and uncertain (cf. 11:7-8). The Hebrews regarded any decline in a person's vital energy as a sign that death was beginning to set in (cf. 1 Kings 1:1-4; Ps. 18:4-5; 88:3-5)."³ "As clouds often block out the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars, so old age is a period of diminishing joy (light) and increasing gloom (dark), heralding the approach of the long night of death."⁴ In one's youth, the times of storm and difficulty can seem short-lived. Soon the sun shines again and there is much to look forward to, years of good health and time to serve the Lord our Creator. When old age comes, storms seem to follow one after the other, storm after storm in succession. The future looks bleak, hope for good times fades.

2. (vs. 3) "In the day," when you might think it would be otherwise, "that the watchmen of the house tremble ('the arms and hands grow weak'⁵; 'the arms and hands, once strong and active, now wrinkled, gnarled, and trembling'⁶), and mighty men stoop ('are the legs and thighs, no longer straight and athletic, but bowed like parenthesis marks, as if buckling under the weight of the body'⁷), the grinding ones stand

2MacDonald, William and Arthur Farstad. *Believer's Bible Commentary* : Old and New Testaments. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997. c1995. Ec 12:2.

3Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003). Ec 12:2.

4Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 1:1004.

5Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

6William MacDonald; edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file]*, electronic ed., Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

7William MacDonald; edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file]*, electronic ed., Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

idle because they are few ('refers to the teeth becoming fewer'⁸; 'the teeth are no longer able to chew because there are too few uppers to meet the remaining lowers'⁹), and those who look through windows grow dim ('refers to the eyesight beginning to fail'¹⁰; 'First they needed bifocals, then trifocals, then surgery for cataracts. Now they can only read extra large type with the use of a magnifying glass'¹¹).

3. (vs. 4) The expression "the doors on the street are shut," "may picture the lips sinking in, due to the loss of teeth,"¹² "as the sound of the grinding mill is low" may refer to the fading ability to hear. "Loud noises, like the grinding of the mill, are very low and indistinct."¹³ On the other hand, it does not take much to awaken such a person as insomnia sets in, "one will arise at the sound of the bird." What one heard clearly when young is no longer the case as "all the daughters of song will sing softly." At the same time, the picture may be of one's own inability to make sound as "the vocal chords are seriously impaired. The voice is crackling and unsteady, and song is out of the question."

4. (vs. 5) "Furthermore," and not surprisingly at all, "men are afraid of a high place," suffering from acrophobia, they never want to get too far from the ground. Ladders, aircraft, tall buildings, or taking a skyline drive in the mountains are all matters of terror.

Going out on the road can in itself be frightening as the old man imagines the "terrors on the road," and all the things that could go wrong out there. So he prefers the safety of his own house.

The "almond tree blossoms" probably refers to the hair turning gray and then perhaps falling out, as the blossoms fall to the ground.

"The grasshopper drags himself along" "caricatures the old man, bent over and twisted, inching forward in jerky, erratic movements."¹⁴

"The caperberry is ineffective." "The 'caperberry,' apparently an appetite stimulant, is a poor translation that the Septuagint introduced. The text should read 'and desire fails,' which gives the same meaning."¹⁵

"For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street." Of course, this last sentence anticipate death itself along with the funeral procession and grieving people. "Man's 'dark house' (rather than 'eternal home') is a reference to the grave, Sheol."¹⁶ ("For reasons why 'dark house' is the preferable translation of the Hebrew *bet olam*, see Ronald F. Youngblood, 'Qoheleth's "Dark House" [Eccles. 12:5], in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*'¹⁷)

5. (vs. 6) "*Remember Him*" reiterates the exhortation from vs. 1. The first figure here is, "before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed." "Solomon then referred to life under the two common figures of light ('golden lamp,' JB) and water (cf. Ps. 36:8-9 for a similar use of these two figures of speech)."¹⁸ "The 'golden bowl' is a bowl that holds a flame. When the 'silver cord' that holds it breaks, the bowl crashes to the floor and the light goes out. Gold and silver express the great value of life."¹⁹

The second figure is, "the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed." It appears that the picture here is "of life poured out or ended."²⁰ So with the pitcher now shattered and the device for lowering it now ruined, the "water" of life "can no longer" be drawn "out of" the "well."²¹ So it is "a picture of the ruined apparatus plus the wheel as they have crashed down into the old cistern. So man breaks down and falls into a pit also."²²

6. (vs. 7) This is simply a description of what actually happens when a man dies; "then the dust will return to the earth as it

⁸Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

⁹William MacDonald, edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

¹⁰Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

¹¹William MacDonald, edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

¹²Walvoord, John F., Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985. 1:1005.

¹³William MacDonald, edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

¹⁴William MacDonald, edited with introductions by Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible commentary: Old and New Testaments [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995 by William MacDonald.

¹⁵Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 12:5.

¹⁶Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 12:5.

¹⁷Tom Constable, Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

¹⁸Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

¹⁹Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 12:6.

²⁰Believer's Study Bible. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995. Ec 12:6.

²¹Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 12:6.

²²Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 12:6.

was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” This is essentially a “reversal of the process by which God originally created man.”²³ “This makes it evident that Solomon was not referring to the return of individual human spirits to God for judgment. Similar descriptions of death (as a dissolution of the body and the withdrawal of the breath of God) are referred to in Job 34:14-15 and Psalm 104:29-30 (cf. Job 10:9).”²⁴ Solomon is subscribing to the notion of the preexistence of souls, but simply refers to God as the one who gives the breath of life to a man.

C. In the end, as Solomon is wont to say, all is vanity (12:8).

1. (vs. 8) This section is Solomon’s final proof for what he has insisted upon throughout the book, and that is that viewed merely from the perspective of under the sun only, life in and of itself has no meaning or purpose. It is temporary, absurd and pointless. Nevertheless, his counsel is good. See verse one.

III Conc.

The message here is simple and its wisdom is inescapable. We are only here for a while, we are young for an even shorter while. Old age is coming with all of its attendant difficulties culminating in death. How should you then live? Remember your Creator! See 12:13.

²³Tom Constable. Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible. Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003. Ec 12:7.
²⁴Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.