

Commentary on Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:7, 13 [14]

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, October 16, 2011**, is from **Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:7, 13**. Five **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the [Bible Lesson Commentary](#) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, which are also available on the [Bible Lesson Forum](#), will aid teachers in conducting class discussion.

Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:7, 13 [14]

(Ecclesiastes 11:9) Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

Solomon's book tells young people to enjoy being young while they can, for they will soon be old. He also tells young people the choice before them. They can do what they want (set their own goals and follow their feelings) or they can "keep God's commandments" (see Ecclesiastes 12:13). If they obey or disobey God when following their feelings or setting their own goals, then God will judge whether their choices and actions are right or wrong, good or evil (see Ecclesiastes 12:14). God will hold everyone accountable and responsible for their way of life.

(Ecclesiastes 11:10) Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

The "dawn of life" (meaning "infancy and childhood") and youth are vanity or meaningless depending on what a child or youth plans to do and what actions they take. If they learn to obey God's commands, they add meaning to their life (see Ecclesiastes 12:13). The Bible tells us not to be anxious or worry. Jesus emphasized that we should not worry (see Matthew 6:25-34). Some people abuse their bodies, perhaps to look more beautiful or become stronger (think of surgeries or drugs to enhance beauty or a person's physical performance). Some speak much of their suffering, perhaps for sympathy. In some religions, some afflict their bodies to "draw closer to God," as they suppose. We should avoid unnecessary pain and suffering, especially when our vanity is involved.

(Ecclesiastes 12:1) Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no pleasure in them";

Solomon tells young people to think about their future, their plans, their old age and eventual death before they do things that may damage their future or bring them agony, guilt, and pain in their old age (because they misused their minds and bodies when they were young). If people misuse themselves, then their old

age can be more painful than just the normal weakening of body and mind with aging. When young people choose a life purpose, make big decisions, or are tempted to do wrong, they need to remember that God created them, and if they obey God, then God will bless, guide, and help them at every age or stage of life.

(Ecclesiastes 12:2) before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain;

Solomon keeps his focus on what people can lose in their old age. In his day, glasses, preventive surgeries, and wonder drugs were not available to correct vision or prevent blindness in old age. The light from the sun, moon, and stars would gradually become darker until the lesser lights could no longer be seen, until the light from the sun could no longer be seen by someone in old age. Neither would the person be able to see the clouds before or after a rain as they blend in with the color of the sky as one loses their eyesight.

(Ecclesiastes 12:3) in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly;

If a person does not stay close to God, then in time of war or societal decay when people do not feel safe they may tremble in fear. The human guards or protections they depended on will fail them. In old age, one who was strong most likely will become too frail to defend themselves or their families. The women who provided food will not be able to work and there will be no grain and few women to harvest the grain or grind it into flour. Violence, economic woes, hunger, loss of strength and sight may bring debilitating fear if one has little or no faith in God.

(Ecclesiastes 12:4) when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low;

Society can degenerate to the point that for safety all doors are shut and locked, because many do not have the internal restraint not to steal or molest others if people fail to lock their doors. There is little or no sound of economic activity (of grinding, the example of grinding grain for flour). Perhaps from lack of clouds or rain the animals suffer so hearing a bird sing draws special attention for there are so few. Young women are oppressed so they suppress their singing and sing only very quietly. These verses may, however, relate mostly to what can happen as a person advances in age, of what can happen to the elderly. Some interpret these verses to mean that in old age some people have lost their teeth and cannot grind their food; they have lost their hearing and cannot hear singing; they lock their doors in fear.

(Ecclesiastes 12:5) when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because all must go to their eternal home, and the mourners will go about the streets;

Again, some interpret this verse as a further description of old age. The elderly can be afraid of falling, so they are afraid of heights, of climbing ladders or stairs. They are afraid to travel for fear of being robbed (when society has degenerated, robbery of the helpless becomes more common). The “almond tree blossoms” may signify the white hair of the elderly, and the “grasshopper drags itself” may mean that our bodies have become burdens that we drag around. We lose our desires for the pleasures of this world. We face death and the loss of friends and family through death. God has provided an eternal home for everyone, and God will judge everyone and assign each person their eternal home (heaven or hell).

(Ecclesiastes 12:6) before the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern,

The silver cord probably signifies the thin but valuable strand that connects our body and soul. When it snaps in death, our body goes back to the dust and our soul goes to meet our Creator (see Ecclesiastes 11:9). With time, the most valuable thing can be broken (a golden bowl, perhaps meaning a human life). Those things most necessary for life can be broken; if the pitcher is broken or the wheel at the cistern is broken, a person cannot get water to live and will die.

(Ecclesiastes 12:7) and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.

When we ourselves wear out, get broken, and die, our dust (body) returns to the earth and our breath (soul or spirit) returns to God. God breathed into Adam and gave him life and he became a “living soul” (see Genesis 2:7 in KJV). All human life comes from God who gave it, and all things depend on God who created all things; whether a person recognizes these facts to be true or not, these facts are reality. For the believer and follower of Jesus Christ, new joys come after death.

(Ecclesiastes 12:13) The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.

As Solomon concluded his book, having learned both good and evil by experience, observation, and the law of God, having both obeyed and disobeyed God, having received both the blessings of God and the discipline of God, having heard God’s judgment for his sins and the consequences for his children and the nation, he concluded that the responsibility of every person is to fear (reverence God for God is Holy) and obey God’s commands as revealed in the Bible (he had the Books of Moses and some other parts of the scriptures). If we trust and obey

God, we can rest securely in God in old age, and we can look forward to eternal joy with God and all who love God (remember the Gospel of Jesus had not been revealed yet).

(Ecclesiastes 12:14) For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. [*Not included in the actual Bible lesson, but this truth is the last verse of the Book of Ecclesiastes.*]

In this verse, Solomon concludes with a summary statement of this lesson and his entire book. Though we may feel uncomfortable with this truth about God's judgment, we should not expect less from a holy, just, and truthful God. The verse is similar to Ecclesiastes 11:9. God will judge our every deed, those known and those we have kept secret, those good and those evil. God holds us accountable and responsible for our behavior, because He created us, gave us reason, the Bible, and the ability to make significant choices. For this reason and others, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world so He could act with loving justice and merciful in forgiving us our sins and giving us eternal life through faith in Him (see John 3:16).

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How often do you hear people talking about the judgment of God? If often, why? If seldom, why?
2. What are some dangers people face if they allow anxiety a place in their minds?
3. Why does Solomon advise young people to remember their Creator?
4. What are some of the disadvantages of old age and how does obeying God help?
5. What commandments does the Bible and Jesus especially stress that we obey?

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