

Ecclesiastes 11:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.

Analysis

But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all—the conjunction 'but' (כִּי) introduces qualification to verse 7's celebration of life. The Hebrew *samach* (חַמַּח, rejoice) commands active joy throughout life's duration. However, the verse immediately adds sobering perspective: **yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many**. The 'days of darkness' (יְמֵי הַחֹשֶׁךְ) likely refer to death and what follows—the grave, Sheol, the state of death. The phrase 'they shall be many' (הַרְבֵּה יִהְיוּ) creates striking contrast: however long earthly life lasts, death's duration far exceeds it.

The verse concludes: **All that cometh is vanity** (הַכֹּל הֶבֶל, vapor, breath, transience). This doesn't negate verses 7-8a's call to enjoy life but provides essential context: rejoice in life while remembering mortality. The tension is characteristically Ecclesiastean—affirm life's goodness while acknowledging its brevity. This prepares for 12:1-7's extended meditation on aging and death. The Christian hope transforms this: death is not endless darkness but sleep before resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and believers possess eternal life transcending temporal existence (John 11:25-26).

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's understanding of death involved Sheol—the shadowy realm of the dead described in Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Old Testament revelation about

afterlife was limited compared to New Testament clarity. The 'days of darkness' reflected this perspective: death ended conscious enjoyment of God's creation, making earthly life precious (Psalm 115:17). Solomon's era preceded Daniel's clear resurrection teaching (Daniel 12:2) and Jesus's full revelation of eternal life. Post-exilic Jews increasingly developed afterlife theology through apocalyptic literature (1 Enoch, 2 Maccabees 7). Christ's resurrection transformed death from many dark days to momentary sleep before eternal light (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does regularly remembering mortality shape your priorities and daily choices?
2. In what ways does Christian hope in resurrection transform this verse's warning about 'days of darkness'?

Interlinear Text

בְּכֹל יְמֵי חַיָּוְיוֹ	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה
H3605	H3588	H518	H8141	H7235	H2421	H120
But if a man	live	for they shall be many	years	and rejoice	in them all yet let him remember	the days of darkness
H3605	H3588	H518	H8141	H7235	H2421	H120
וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים
H3605	H3588	H518	H8141	H7235	H2421	H120
But if a man	live	for they shall be many	years	and rejoice	in them all yet let him remember	the days of darkness
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וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים	יִחְיֶה	וְאִם שָׁנִים רַבִּים
H3605	H3588	H518	H8141	H7235	H2421	H120
But if a man	live	for they shall be many	years	and rejoice	in them all yet let him remember	the days of darkness
H3605	H3588	H518	H8141	H7235	H2421	H120

Additional Cross-References

John 12:35 (Darkness): Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.

Deuteronomy 32:29 (Parallel theme): O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!

Ecclesiastes 7:14 (Parallel theme): In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

Joel 2:2 (Darkness): A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

Jeremiah 13:16 (Darkness): Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.

Ecclesiastes 8:12 (Parallel theme): Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:

Ecclesiastes 8:15 (Parallel theme): Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 6:11 (Parallel theme): Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?

Jude 1:18 (Parallel theme): How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.