

Ecclesiastes 12:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

Analysis

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened—this verse begins Ecclesiastes' famous allegory of aging (12:1-7). The phrase 'while... be not darkened' (עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִחְשַׁךְ) introduces the extended metaphor: act while these celestial lights still shine, before old age's diminishment. The luminaries—sun, light, moon, stars—likely represent vitality, mental clarity, and life's brightness. Their darkening depicts aging's progressive loss of faculties. The phrase **nor the clouds return after the rain** adds a second image: unlike normal weather where sun follows rain, old age brings persistent gloom—'clouds returning' after brief respite suggests recurring difficulties without relief.

This verse continues 12:1's exhortation to remember the Creator in youth, before decline begins. The imagery is both literal (failing eyesight makes celestial bodies appear dim) and metaphorical (joy and vitality fade). The passage teaches urgent stewardship of youth: serve God while faculties remain strong, before aging's inevitable diminishment. The New Testament echoes this: 'the night cometh, when no man can work' (John 9:4)—opportunity for service is limited, making present faithfulness urgent.

Historical Context

Ancient cultures lacked modern medicine's ability to mitigate aging's effects. Old age brought pronounced physical and cognitive decline. The celestial imagery would resonate in a pre-electric world where night's darkness was complete and

oppressive. Israel's wisdom tradition honored old age (Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31) while honestly acknowledging its difficulties. The metaphor's sophistication suggests literary artistry—Solomon or a skilled poet crafted this allegory. Post-exilic readers facing uncertain futures found urgency in this call: serve God now, while able. The church fathers applied this passage to spiritual vigilance: prepare for eternity before death's darkness.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What aspects of vitality, clarity, or joy that you currently possess might diminish with age, and how does this motivate present faithfulness?
2. How does this verse's urgency about aging challenge youth culture's assumption of unlimited time and perpetual vitality?

Interlinear Text

עַד	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא	תִּחְשֶׁךְ	הַשֶּׁשֶׁשׁ	וְהָאֵר	וְהַיָּרֵחַ
H5704	H834	H3808	be not darkened	While the sun	or the light	or the moon
			H2821	H8121	H216	H3394
וְהַכּוֹכָבִים	וְשׁוֹבוּ	הַעֲנָנִים	אַחֲרָיו	הַגֶּשֶׁם		
or the stars	return	nor the clouds	after	the rain		
H3556	H7725	H5645	H310	H1653		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 5:30 (Light): And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

1 Samuel 4:15 (Parallel theme): Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

1 Samuel 4:18 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Psalms 42:7 (Parallel theme): Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

Psalms 71:20 (Parallel theme): Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

Psalms 77:16 (Parallel theme): The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled.

Genesis 27:1 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I.

Genesis 48:10 (Parallel theme): Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them.

1 Samuel 3:2 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see;