

Ecclesiastes 12:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

Analysis

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high—the elderly develop fear of heights and uneven ground due to balance issues and fragility. **Fears shall be in the way**—simple walking becomes anxiety-producing due to fall risk. **The almond tree shall flourish**—this likely refers to white hair (almond blossoms are white), a sign of advanced age. **The grasshopper shall be a burden**—even lightweight insects feel heavy; the smallest exertion becomes exhausting. **Desire shall fail**—the Hebrew *aviyonah* (אֲבִיּוֹנָה, desire/appetite) indicates loss of appetite, sexual desire, and general zest for life. **Because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets**—the 'long home' (בֵּית עוֹלָמוֹ) is death's permanent dwelling. Professional mourners already circulate, anticipating the funeral.

This verse brings the aging allegory near its conclusion with vivid imagery: fear, white hair, weakness, loss of desire, approaching death. The cumulative effect is sobering yet purposeful—remember the Creator before these days arrive (v. 1). The phrase 'long home' acknowledges death's permanence from earthly perspective, yet Christian hope transforms it: believers' true 'home' is with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23), and death is not the end but transition to eternal life.

Historical Context

Ancient Israel practiced professional mourning—hired women who wailed and lamented at funerals (Jeremiah 9:17-18; Amos 5:16). The 'mourners in the streets' vividly depicted approaching death's public recognition. The almond tree imagery was particularly apt in Israel where almond blossoms appeared early each spring, their white flowers resembling aged hair. The progression described—from trembling hands (v. 3) through failing capacities (v. 4) to imminent death (v. 5)—traced aging's full trajectory. Pre-modern medicine meant these declines were irreversible and often rapid. The passage's realism prepared readers for mortality while urging present faithfulness. Church fathers emphasized using earthly life well before entering eternity's 'long home.'

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does confronting mortality's reality (rather than avoiding thoughts of death) clarify what truly matters in life?
2. In what ways does Christian hope transform death from a 'long home' to be feared into transition to eternal joy?

Interlinear Text

גַּם	מִגֵּבָהּ	יִכְאוּ	וַחֲתָחֶת יָמַי
H1571	of that which is high	Also when they shall be afraid	and fears
	H1364	H3372	H2849
בְּדֶרֶךְ	וְיִגְאָץ	הַשֶּׁקֶד	וַיִּסְתָּבֵל
shall be in the way	shall flourish	and the almond tree	shall be a burden
H1870	H5006	H8247	H5445

וְהַחֲגָב	וְתִפֹּשׁ	וְהָאֲבִיּוֹן	כִּי	הֵלֵךְ	הָאָדָם	אֵל
and the grasshopper	shall fail	and desire	H3588	goeth	because man	H413
H2284	H6565	H35		H1980	H120	

בֵּית	עוֹלָמוֹ	וְסָבֵב	בְּשׁוּק	הַסּוֹפְדִים:
home	to his long	go about	the streets	and the mourners
H1004	H5769	H5437	H7784	H5594

Additional Cross-References

Job 17:13 (Parallel theme): If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.

Job 30:23 (Parallel theme): For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.

Proverbs 16:31 (Parallel theme): The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

Psalms 71:18 (Parallel theme): Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.

Job 15:10 (Parallel theme): With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men, much elder than thy father.

Leviticus 19:32 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.

