

Ecclesiastes 5:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because
God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

Analysis

For he shall not much remember the days of his life (כִּי לֹא הַרְבֵּה יִזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמָיו חַיָּו, ki lo harbeh yizkor et-yemei chayav)—'for not much will he remember the days of his life.' This can mean either he won't dwell on past troubles, or life passes quickly when enjoyed. **Because God answereth him in the joy of his heart** (כִּי הָאֱלֹהִים מַעֲנֵהוּ בְשִׂמְחַת לִבּוֹ, ki ha'elohim ma'aneh besimchat libbo)—literally 'because God occupies/answers him with the joy of his heart.'

The Hebrew verb ma'aneh is fascinating—it can mean 'answers,' 'occupies,' or 'keeps busy.' The sense is that God fills the person's attention with present joy, crowding out anxious rumination about past or future. The contrast with verse 17 ('he eateth in darkness... much sorrow') is stark: same brevity of life, opposite experience. The difference is God's simchat libbo (heart-joy)—not circumstances but divine grace producing contentment. This anticipates Paul's 'the joy of the Lord is your strength' (Nehemiah 8:10) and 'rejoice in the Lord always' (Philippians 4:4). When God grants contentment, life's transience becomes less burdensome because the present moment becomes sufficient.

Historical Context

Ancient wisdom literature recognized that memory can torture (dwelling on losses) or fade into irrelevance when present satisfaction exists. The righteous person, content in God's provision, experiences time differently than the anxious hoarder.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does God's gift of present joy prevent obsessive dwelling on past regrets or future anxieties?
2. In what ways might you be missing current blessings by constantly 'remembering the days of your life' rather than receiving today's joy?
3. What does it mean practically for God to 'answer you in the joy of your heart'—and how do you cultivate receptivity to that answer?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	לֹא	הֶרֶב	יִזְכֹּר	אֶת	יָמָיו	חַיָּיו	כִּי
H3588	H3808	For he shall not much	remember	H853	the days	of his life	H3588
		H7235	H2142		H3117	H2416	
יָמָיו	בְּשִׂמְחָתוֹ	תַּעֲנֶה	הָאֱלֹהִים	לְבָבוֹ:			
because God	answereth	him in the joy	of his heart				
H430	H6031	H8057	H3820				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 37:16 (Parallel theme): A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.

Romans 5:1 (References God): Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Deuteronomy 28:47 (References God): Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things;

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