OLD AGE IN ECCLESIASTES 12:1-8

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Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version updated edition.

There is a magnificent, and accurate, depiction of old age in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8. It describes old age by comparing it to a dying town.

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”;

before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened

and the clouds return with the rain;

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;

[Some allegory there: guards = arms? strong men = legs? women = teeth; windows = eyes.]

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;

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;

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,

and the dust returns to the earth as it was,

and the breath returns to God who gave it.

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher;

all is vanity.

The poem in Eccl 12:1-8 uses a rhetorical device called parataxis. According to *Wikipedia*:

Parataxis . . . favors short, simple sentences, without conjunctions or with the use of coordinating, but not with subordinating conjunctions. . . . Parataxis can most simply be described as and compared to the way children speak. . . . Parataxis may [replace] punctuation marks with “and” to seamlessly string the speech or written piece together and present the words as each being equally important. Works utilizing parataxis as a style may emit a staccato rhythm.

Eccl 12:1-8 uses the coordinating conjunction “and” *16 times* in only 8 verses! Rather than a staccato rhythm, I would say that in this poem parataxis intimates a weary speaker: “A. and B. and C . . .”

Here is the poem, with “and” (when used as a coordinating conjunction) capitalized.

I’ve also emboldened the 9 subordinating conjunctions for comparison. Two of the latter are “because,” and 1 is “as”; but the other six are temporal: 4 “whens” and 2 “befores.” That too is fitting for a poem about one’s time running out.

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”;

before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened

AND the clouds return with the rain;

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;

**when** the doors on the street are shut,

AND the sound of the grinding is low,

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