

## Ecclesiastes Chapter Eleven

Take Action in the Face of an Uncertain Future (vv. 1-6)

**VERSE 1** Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after

many days (שִׁלַּח לַחֲמֶדָּה עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם כִּי־בָרַב הַיָּמִים תִּמְצָאֲנֶהּ) [*Piel imper.m.s. shalat send; cast + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. lechem bread + prep al upon + noun both p.constr. paneh face; “surface” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. mayim waters + part ki for + prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. rab many + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. yom day + Qal impf.2m.s.w.3m.s.suff. matsa find*]).

**VERSE 2** Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what

misfortune may occur on the earth (לִשְׂמוֹנָה כִּי לֹא תֵדַע מַה־יִּהְיֶה רָעָה עַל־הָאָרֶץ) [*Qal imper.m.s. nathan give; “divide” + noun m.s.abs. chalaq share; “portion” + prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. sheba seven + waw w/conj gam also; “even” + prep lamed w/adj.m.s.abs. shemoneh eight + prep ki for + neg lo + Qal impf.2m.s. yada know + interrog. mah what + Qal impf.3m.s. hayah be; “may” + adj.f.s.abs. ra-ah evil; “misfortune” + prep al on + d.a.w/noun both m.s.abs. eretz earth*]).

**VERSE 3** If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth (עַל־הָאָרֶץ יִרְיֶקוּ) [*part im if + Niphal impf.3m.s. male be full + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. ab*

cloud + noun m.s.abs. geshem rain + prep al + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. eretz + Hiphil impf.3m.p. riq empty out; “pour out”];

**and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree**

**falls, there it lies** [וְאִם־יִפּוֹל עֵץ בְּדָרוֹם וְאִם בְּצָפוֹן מִקּוֹם שִׁיפּוֹל הָעֵץ שָׁם יִהְיֶה]

[waw w/part im if + Qal impf.3m.s. napal fall + noun m.s.abs. etz tree + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. darom south + waw w/part im + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun f.s.abs. sapon north + noun m.s.constr. maqom place; “wherever” + rel.pro.suff. w/Qal impf.3m.s. napal fall + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. etz tree + adv. sham there + Qal impf.3m.s. hayah be; “it lies”]).

**VERSE 4 He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds**

**will not reap** [שֹׁמֵר רוּחַ לֹא יִזְרַע וְרֹאֶה בְּעָבִים לֹא יִקְצוֹר] [Qal part m.s.abs. shamar

observe + noun both s.abs. ruach wind + neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s. zara sow + waw w/Qal part.m.s.abs. ra-ah see + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.p.abs. ab cloud + neg lo + Qal impf.3m.s. qatsar reap]).

**VERSE 5 Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed**

**in the womb of the pregnant woman** [מִהַדְרֵךְ הַרוּחַ כַּעֲצָמִים בְּבֶטֶן הַמְּלָאָה כִּכְהָ] [prep kaph w/rel.pro. asher + adv ayin not + Qal part m.s.abs. yada know

+ interrog mah + noun both s.abs. derek path + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. ruach wind + d.a.w/prep kaph w/noun f.p.abs. etsem bone + prep beth w/noun f.s.abs. beten womb + d.a.w/adj.f.s.abs. male that which fills; “pregnant woman”], **so you do not know the activity of God who**

**makes all things** [כִּכְהָ לֹא תִדַע אֶת־מַעֲשֵׂה הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַכֹּל] [adv. kaka

thus, so + neg lo + Qal impf.2m.s. yada know + d.o. + noun m.s.constr. ma-asheh activity + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim + rel.pro. asher who + Qal impf.3m.s. ashah make + d.o. + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. kol all]).

**VERSE 6 Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening (יָדַעַךְ)**

בַּבֹּקֶר זָרַע אֶת־זְרְעֶךָ וְלֹא־תִנָּח [d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. boqer morning + Qal imper.m.s. zaa sow + d.o. + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. zera seen + waw w/d.a.w/prep lamed w/noun m.s.abs. ereb evening + neg al not + Hiphil impf.2m.s. jussive ruach rest; “be idle + noun f.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. yad hand], **for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good** /טוֹבִים/

וְאִם־שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּאֶחָד טוֹבִים כִּי אֵינְךָ יוֹדֵעַ אִי זֶה יִכָּשֵׁר הַזֶּה אִוְזָה וְאִם־שְׁנֵיהֶם כְּאֶחָד [conj ki for + adv ayin not + Qal part.m.s.abs. yada know + interrog. ay whether + adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + Qal impf.3m.s. kasher be right, proper; “will succeed” + part.interrog.w/adj.m.s.abs. zeh this + part o whether + waw w/adv. if + adj.m. dual constr.w/3m.p.suff. shenayim two; “both” + prep kaph w/adj.m.s.abs. ebad one + adj.m.p.abs. tob good].

**ANALYSIS: VERSES 1-6**

1. This section contains some of the more difficult, though provocative, verses in Ecclesiastes.
2. Verse 6, debated in meaning, is well known in popular idiom.
3. All these verses deal with the uncertainty of human industry.
4. The translation of verse 6 is straightforward from a linguistic perspective, but its proverbial and metaphorical nature makes it challenging to understand.
5. What does it mean to “cast your bread upon many waters”?
6. Even if one could find it after many days what good would be waterlogged bread?
7. The popular and ancient meaning persisting to modern times is that the verse refers to charity.
8. The Arabic proverb states: “Do good, throw your bread on the waters, and one day you will be rewarded.”
9. Another view argues that the verse has nothing to do with charity, but rather has to do with calculated risks in business.
10. In other words, it is saying that in spite of the risks of loss involved, one should go ahead and engage in maritime trade.
11. The idea being that when people engage in trade, profits may come back to them.
12. Risk is involved, but the potential rewards are worth the risk.

13. This view is widely held.
14. The problem with the business venture view is that a person engaged in a capital investment expects a return greater than the original investment.
15. Yet another approach sees this verse as referring to a senseless act (bread merely dissolves in water), but then unexpectedly the senseless act results in a positive result.
16. It is clear that verses 1-6 are encouraging people to be active in light of the uncertain future.
17. Verse 1 must be read in consideration of verse 2.
18. 'Bread' in verse 1 corresponds to 'portion' in verse 2.
19. Both these terms occurs in calls to enjoyment of the fruits of labor in this book (cf. 3:22; 5:17; 9:7, 9).
20. One's portion in life (2:10), consisting of eating, drinking, and enjoying the benefits of labor, needs to be augmented with the advice given in these first two verses.
21. This is what is different here as over against the advice seen thus far.
22. Here Q. is encouraging people to use the limited benefits of labor in a way that might bring further benefit to them.
23. If a person only enjoys the portion of one's labor, the danger is that a disaster may strike, and that portion could be lost.
24. However, by using the portion in a certain way, one can prepare to face the uncertainty of future calamity.
25. Verse one is akin to a promise, with verse 2 expanding and explaining the metaphor of verse one.
26. "Divide (or 'give') a portion' parallels "Cast your bread."
27. "Many waters' parallels "to seven, or even eight."
28. This best supports the view that Q. is encouraging using the benefits of labor on behalf of others in need.
29. Another thing to keep in mind is that the distribution of a part of one's bread/portion to the needy, while appearing to bring no immediate return, is in fact a kind of insurance for hard times in an uncertain future.
30. There is no direct mention of God in this, but He rewards people for generosity, even when there is no apparent expectation of a return on this kind of investment.
31. The one who helps the needy will receive help in a times of economic trouble under the law of reaping and sowing.
32. The act of releasing results in the possibility of receiving again whatever was released, even though at the time it appears unprofitable.
33. The reason one would give to seven or to eight is "for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth."
34. By giving to others in their time of need ensures that if misfortune/disaster strikes a person will find help from an unexpected source.
35. Again, this only works if there is a God who oversees the affairs of men.
36. The Gentile widow who out of her poverty feed the prophet Elijah during the great famine is a classic example.
37. The next three verses describe actions that are inevitable and unpredictable.
38. The inevitable and conditional is illustrated by: "If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth."
39. Humans cannot stop a coming rain storm.
40. For a random event the illustration is that of a tree falling of its own accord in verse 3b.

41. The point is not that a tree cannot be moved after it falls, but one could not predict which direction it might someday fall to the ground.
42. Certain events are predictable and certain events are random.
43. The unpredictable nature of things does not mean the people should not take action.
44. That is the point of verse 4.
45. One must act even in the face of uncertainty.
46. Verse 4 views this from the standpoint of a farmer.
47. There is a time to sow and a time to reap.
48. The farmer does not hesitate to act, even if the conditions in the sky are not favorable.
49. Inaction on the part of humans in the face of an uncertain future is foolish.
50. In verse 5 Q. emphasizes human ignorance with respect to the works of God, and how He runs the world.
51. Two things are used to illustrate this: “the path of the wind” and “how bones are formed in the womb of a pregnant woman.”
52. The word *ruach* refers to wind as it does in the previous verse.
53. The word *etsem* refers to a feature of the developing embryo in the womb—the formation of the skeletal structure.
54. The way God works in the world (“you do not know the works of God who makes all things”) is beyond the ability of humans for fully grasp.
55. In chapter 3 verses 9-15 sage advice is given regarding life under the sun (also see 7:13; 8:17).
56. Inactivity in the face of uncertainty is advised against in verse 6.
57. Certain things are beyond human knowledge or control, but that does not mean that a person should take caution to the extreme.
58. Take action even in the face of a uncertain future as inaction is crippling.
59. “Sow your seed” is an agricultural activity used here to illustrate all kinds of human labor.
60. Q. is advising more than one activity as per “sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening” so that if one fails the other may succeed.
61. Maybe both “of them alike will be successful” (*tob* good).
62. If a person is involved in multiple activities, the failure of one activity is not a disaster, because there is another that might succeed.
63. The lesson for humans: the future is uncertain but a person should not be afraid to act and even should be willing to engage in a variety of activities.
64. For the believer with access to the realm of divine viewpoint the advice here is augmented to include God’s promises in the face of personal and widespread calamities.

## Enjoy Life While You Can (11:7-12:8)

**VERSE 7 The light is pleasant, and *it is* good for the eyes to see the sun (הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הַיָּמִינִים לְרִאֲוֹת אֶת**

וּמְתוֹק הָאֹר וְטוֹב לְעֵינַיִם לְרִאֲוֹת אֶת [waw w/dj.m.s.abs. matoq sweet; “pleasant” + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. or light + waw w/noun m.s.abs. tob good + d.a.w/prep lamed w/noun f. dual constr. ayin eye + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. ra-ah see + d.o. + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun]).

**VERSE 8 Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many (כִּי־הַרְבֵּה יְהִי־יָמָיו וְיִזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמָיו הַחֹשֶׁךְ**

כִּי אִם־שָׁנִים הַרְבֵּה יְהִי־הָאָדָם בְּכֹלֵם יִשְׂמַח וְיִזְכֹּר אֶת־יָמָיו הַחֹשֶׁךְ [part. ki + part im if + noun f.p.abs. shanah year + Hiphil infin.constr. rabah be many + Qal impf.3m.s. hayah live + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. adam man + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr.w/3m.p.suff. ko “in them all” + Qal impf.3m.s. jussive shamach rejoice + waw w/Qal impf.3m.s. jussive zakar remember + d.o. + noun m.p.constr. yom day + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. choshek darkness + part ki for + Hiphil infin.constr. rabah be many + Qal impf.3m.p. hayah be]).

**Everything that is to come *will be* futility (כָּל־שֶׂבַּא הַבָּל) [Qal impf.3m.pl. hayah be + noun m.s.constr. kol “everything” + rel.suff.w/Qal perf.3m.s. bo come + noun m.s.abs. hebel futility]).**

**VERSE 9 Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood** (וּטְיִבֶּךָ לִבְךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּחַוְרוֹתֶיךָ)

וּטְיִבֶּךָ בְּיָמֶיךָ בְּחַוְרוֹתֶיךָ [Qal imper.m.s. shamach rejoice + noun m.s.abs. bachur young man + prep beth w/noun f.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. yalduth childhood + waw w/Hiphil impf.3m.s.w/2m.s.suff. yatabe be good; “be pleasant” + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. leb heart + prep beth w/noun m.p.constr. yom day + noun f.p.constr.w/2m.s.suff. bechurim youth; “young manhood”].

**And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes** (וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ)

וּבְמַרְאֵי עֵינֶיךָ [waw w/Piel imper.m.s. halak walk; “follow” + prep beth w/noun both p.constr. derek way, path; “impulses” + noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. leb + waw w/prep beth w/noun m.p.constr. mare-eh sight; “desires” + noun f. dual constr.w/2m.s.suff. ayin eye].

**Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things** (בְּמִשְׁפָּט)

בְּמִשְׁפָּט [waw w/Qal imper.m.s. yada know + part ki that + prep al upon + noun m.s.constr. all + adj.p.abs. elleh these + Hiphil impf.3m.s.w/2m.s.suff. go; “will bring” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. Elohim + d.a.w/prep beth w/noun m.s.abs. mishpat judgment].

**VERSE 10 So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain [evil] from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting** (הָבֵל)

וְהָסֵר כַּעַס מִלִּבְךָ וְהַעֲבֵר רָעָה מִבְּשָׂרְךָ כִּי־הַיְלָדוּת וְהַשְּׁחָרוּת [waw w/Hiphil imper.m.s. sur turn; “remove” + noun m.s.abs. ka-as vexation, grief + prep min w/noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. leb + waw w/Hiphil imper.m.s. abar pass over; “put away” + adj.f.s.abs. ra-ah evil, misery; “pain” + prep min w/noun m.s.constr.w/2m.s.suff. bashar flesh; “body” + part ki for + d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. yaduth youth + waw w/d.a.w/noun f.s.abs. shachruth blackness of hair, i.e. dawn of youth + noun m.s.abs. hebel vanity; “fleeting”].

#### ANALYSIS: VERSES 7-10

1. There is a broad consensus that 11:9-12:7 is a distinct unit.
2. The debate is whether 11:7-8 are a conclusion to 11:1-6, or whether they are an independent unit.
3. Verses 7 & 8 are connected with what follows based on vocabulary and subject matter.
4. The verb ‘rejoice/enjoy’ (v. 8) sets the tone for verses 9 & 10; and the verb ‘remember’ sets the tone for 12:1-7.
5. Both are used as exhortations (i.e., imperatives).
6. Also, themes of light and darkness (11:7-8 and 12:2), as well as expressions of time (11:7-8 and 12:1), connect 11:7-8 with 11:9-12:7.
7. The preceding section (vv. 1-6) only has a general connection with 11:7-12:7.
8. The former section encourages people generally to take action whereas the section that follows encourages young people to make use of every opportunity during the days of their youth because the future is full of darkness.
9. Both sections deal with living in the present in light of the inevitable darkness coming upon them.
10. Although 11:7-12:7 starts with light, the darkness slowly begins to dominate and puts a damper on the whole section.
11. Verses 7 & 8 sets the stage for the rest of the unit, which is final section of the 1<sup>st</sup> person discourse (11:7-12:7).
12. He begins with a positive statement that stresses the value of being alive.
13. The statement “light is sweet” (literally) expresses delight in being alive.
14. The benefit of sunlight hardly needs any comment but Q, calls it ‘sweet’ a term used of honey in Judges 14:14, which is not only delightful but also very beneficial (cf. Eccl. 5:12).
15. Q. states that ‘it is good for the eyes to see the sun.’
16. This statement asserts that it is good to be alive.
17. Life has its good moments, and it is these good moments that people should embrace as long as they can, because a time is coming which will not be as pleasant or as delightful.



18. The dark horizon comes into view in verse 8, but nevertheless a person is advised to enjoy life as long as they can.
19. Verse 8 begins with an emphatic *ki*, translated ‘indeed,’ which is followed with a conditional clause ‘if a man should live many years.’
20. The advice given is how a person should respond to a long life (‘let him rejoice in them all’).
21. In the second part of verse 8 a somber note is struck introduced by a *waw* translated, ‘but/yet.’ (not in NAS).
22. A person who lives many years is encouraged to enjoy them as much as possible, ‘but let him remember the days of darkness, because they will be many.’
23. So the one who is blessed to live a long life will experience many days of misery and sorrow on this earth.
24. “Many years” corresponds to the many days of darkness.
25. When it is all said and done, the darkness with triumph over the good times, and this is expressed in the mantra of Ecclesiastes—“everything that is to come—futility/vanity” (1:2, 14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8, 16; 5:6, 9; 6:2, 4, 9, 11, 12; 7:6, 15; 8:10, 14; 9:9; 11:8, 10; 12:8).
26. This is the best that a man can attain to apart from a relationship with his Creator.
27. Good times and bad times all ending in death!
28. Nothing in the future can overcome *hebel* for even a good and successful person who lives merely for the here-and-now.
29. “All that is coming” must refer to life after death, because with death all normal activity comes to an end (cf. 9:10).
30. In verse 9 Q. moves for a general exhortation to everyone, as in 11:8, to exhorting a ‘young man.’
31. He as well is enjoined to “rejoice, during your childhood/youth” which is reinforced with “let your heart be pleasant/cheerful during the days of young manhood.
32. The parallel phrase to ‘rejoice young man’ is let your heart be cheerful’ where ‘heart’ is personified, and identified as bringing happiness (*tob* heart) to a person.
33. Its meaning can be seen in the phrase that follows, ‘walk/follow the impulse/ways of your heart and in the desires of your eyes.’
34. The ‘heart’ and the ‘eyes represent the organs of desire.
35. Q. encourages a young man to pursue a path that their heart desires, and to follow what they can see with their eyes in the pursuit of happiness.
36. Strictly speaking, following one’s own heart and eyes is disastrous (cf. Num. 15:39).
37. The good son follows the wisdom provided by his parents (Prov. 1:8ff.; 23:26).
38. Here Solomon is not advocating hedonism or criminal behavior.
39. He is following the pattern of behavior noted elsewhere in this book where he advocates enjoyment of life considering its brevity (cf. 2:10-11).
40. God does approve of the enjoyment of the benefits of honest labor (9:7).
41. The last clause of v. 9 keeps the advice within the realm of what is permitted for a young man during his prime.
42. The judgment coming from God is a reference to temporal judgment that should serve to keep things in a proper perspective.
43. Nowhere does Q. appeal to a final judgment as a warning with respect to behavior.
44. His counsel is confined to the temporal realm.

45. The judgment in view is the judgment that might befall a person in this life (note the results of living overly righteous and overly wicked in 7:15-18).
46. However, one can never be certain whether righteousness will be rewarded and wickedness will receive the negative consequences it deserves.
47. So the warning is not that God **will** bring a person to judgment, but that ‘God may bring you to judgment.’
48. The call to ‘enjoy life’ in verse 9 is followed in v. 10 with good counsel for the young man that aspires to maximum enjoyment of the years of the prime of life.
49. To exploit life the individual must be proactive and ‘remove (hiphil imperative *sur* turn aside, depart) vexation from your heart’ (inner disposition).
50. The noun *ka-as* (translated ‘grief and anger’ in the NAU) was used earlier (1:18) with the sense of anger produced by distress (also see Ps. 6:7; 31:9; Eccl. 7:3).
51. In other words, the young man is to get passed things that might undermine his enjoyment of life by not dwelling on things beyond his control.
52. He is to quickly move past events that bring soul misery (like a failed marriage).
53. Mental health is in view followed by a call to take care of one’s physical health.
54. “Put away (hiphil imperative *abar* pass over/by, take away) pain from your body” refers to taking care of the outer person.
55. This means one should not engage in that which can undermine one’s health.
56. The overriding reason to be circumspect with regard to being proactive regarding one’s mental and physical health, follows the last clause of verse 10 (because the childhood/youth and the prime of life are fleeing”).
57. The noun “fleeting” is *hebel*, and this is the one instance where the rendering is clearly to be understood in relationship to time, because it refers to a stage of life.
58. So in view of the dark days that are coming, old age and death, it behooves the young person to not engage in that which undermines the call to ‘enjoy life.’
59. The final exhortation of the first-person discourse is given in 12:1 by the imperative ‘remember.’

**END: Ecclesiastes Chapter Eleven**  
**March, 2019**  
**Jack M. Ballinger**