

Ecclesiastes 12:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

Analysis

And the doors shall be shut in the streets—the allegory continues. The 'doors' (דלתים) likely represent lips or perhaps ears, now closed and less active in speech or hearing. **When the sound of the grinding is low**—with few teeth remaining (v. 3), the sound of chewing becomes faint. **He shall rise up at the voice of the bird**—elderly people sleep lightly and wake early, roused by dawn's first birdsong rather than sleeping soundly. **All the daughters of musick shall be brought low**—the 'daughters of music' (בנות השיר) represent either vocal cords (voice weakening) or hearing (music appreciation fading). The phrase 'brought low' (נשח) indicates diminishment or humbling.

The accumulating imagery paints comprehensive decline: reduced social engagement (doors shut), quieter eating, disrupted sleep, diminished musical capacity. Yet the passage isn't merely depressing—it urgently calls readers to remember God while faculties remain (v. 1). The Christian reading finds hope: though outer nature wastes away, inner nature renews daily (2 Corinthians 4:16), and bodily resurrection awaits (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Present limitations are temporary; glorified bodies will transcend aging's effects.

Historical Context

Ancient cultures valued music highly—David's psalms, temple choirs, celebratory songs. The loss of musical capacity (whether performing or appreciating)

represented significant diminishment. Early waking was practical in agricultural societies (rising at dawn to begin work), but for the elderly it meant restless nights rather than productive mornings. The detailed observations suggest close familiarity with aging's progression—either personal experience or careful observation. Jewish interpretation often took this passage literally while also seeing spiritual lessons about maintaining devotion through life's seasons. Christian exposition emphasized preparing for eternity before death's 'doors shut.'

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What capacities or pleasures do you currently enjoy that aging may diminish, and how does this motivate gratitude and stewardship?
2. How can you cultivate spiritual vitality that transcends physical decline and endures into eternity?

Interlinear Text

וְסָגְרוּ shall be shut H5462	וְדָלְתֵי יָם And the doors H1817	בֵּשׂ וּק in the streets H7784	בִּשְׁפָּל is low H8217	לִקְוֹל at the voice H6963	הַטֹּחֵן of the grinding H2913
וְיָקוּם and he shall rise up H6965	לִקְוֹל at the voice H6963	הַצֶּפֶר of the bird H6833	וְיֵשׁ חוֹ shall be brought low H7817	כָּל H3605	
בְּנוֹת and all the daughters H1323	הַשִּׁיר: of musick H7892				

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 25:10 (Parallel theme): Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle.

2 Samuel 19:35 (Parallel theme): I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?

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