

Proverbs 23:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.

Analysis

This verse continues describing drunkenness's effects through vivid imagery. 'Thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea' (וְהָיִיתָ כְּשֹׁכֵב בְּלִבְיָם/vehayita kheshokhev belev-yam, you will be like one lying in the heart of the sea) depicts drowning—helplessness, disorientation, danger. 'Or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast' (וְכִשְׁשׁוֹכֵב בְּרֹאשׁ חִבֵּל/vekheshokhev berosh chibbel, or like one lying atop a mast) adds vertigo and precarious instability. Both images convey loss of control and imminent peril. The drunk person feels this way—the room spins, equilibrium fails, danger looms but can't be processed. This isn't recreational fun but dangerous stupor. The passage concludes with the drunk's tragic statement: 'when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again' (verse 35)—demonstrating addiction's grip. This warns not merely against occasional overindulgence but against alcohol's enslaving power.

Historical Context

Ancient seafaring was dangerous. Ships lacked modern navigation and safety equipment. Being cast into the sea meant probable death (Jonah 1:15). Climbing masts in storms was perilous (sailors who fell died). Solomon uses these maritime images effectively—Israelites weren't primarily seafarers, making these images exotic and frightening. The point is stark: drunkenness puts you in mortal danger. Archaeological evidence shows ancient wine was often diluted (3 parts water to 1 part wine). Modern strong beverages would have been unknown. Yet even ancient wine could intoxicate if consumed heavily. In the early church, drunkenness at the

Lord's Supper scandalized Paul (1 Corinthians 11:21). He commanded sober-mindedness as Christian virtue (1 Timothy 3:2-3, 11; Titus 2:2). Church history shows periodic struggles with alcohol abuse, prompting various responses from abstinence movements to moderation teaching.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. Have you experienced or witnessed the 'drowning' sensation of lost control through substance use?
2. What 'masts' are you clinging to precariously through unwise choices?
3. How can you cultivate Spirit-filled joy that doesn't depend on artificial substances?

Interlinear Text

יְהִי כִשְׁכֵּי H1961	וְכִשְׁכֵּי ב H7901	בְּלֶב H3820	יָם H3220
Yea thou shalt be as he that lieth down	in the midst	of the sea	
יְהִי כִשְׁכֵּי ב H7901	בְּרֹאשׁ H7218	חֲבֵל: H2260	
Yea thou shalt be as he that lieth down	upon the top	of a mast	