

## 12th Chapter of Ecclesiastes

Of the two favorite interpretations of Biblical commenter's one makes this dramatic passage a description of old age and senile decay; the other, a reference to the seldom experienced and much feared thunderstorm in Palestine.

Verses 1,2: The darkening light and luminaries refers to coming blindness or extreme nearsightedness, and the clouds which return after the rain to a continuation of poor sight after much weeping.

Verse 3: The keepers of the house are the hands which tremble with palsy in old age. The strong men are the legs which become bowed with the years. The grinders which cease when they are few are the teeth, and those that look out of the windows are, poetically, the eyes.

Verse 4: The doors are the ears which grow deaf in age and can no longer hear the sound of grinding or grain in the little stone mills which the women use. To rise up at the voice of a bird may signify either the light sleep of age easily interrupted by any slight sound, or the nervousness which is so extreme in some old men that they start at any little noise.

The daughters of music are the vocal cords which loose their timbre in age; hence, the cracked voice of senility.

Verse 5: The old man fears any height, knowing his brittle bones will stand no fall. He is timid as he has no strength with which to defend himself. The almond tree blossoms white, like an old man's hair. Any little weight, even a grasshopper, is to much a burden for extreme age to carry. The old have no desires. The long home is the grave, in anticipation of which the mourners go about the streets.

Verse 6: The silver cord is the spinal cord, the golden bowl is the brain, the pitcher broken at the fountain a failing heart, and the wheel broken at the cistern the kidneys, bladder and prostate gland, all of which give trouble to old men.

Whether or not the writer possessed a sufficient knowledge of anatomy to symbolize parts of the body as the "silver cord," the "golden bowl", the "pitcher," the "wheel broken at the cistern" is so problematical that much skepticism of this interpretation has been expressed.

The storm interpretation is not open to this objection and certainly is far more in keeping with the magnificent poetry of the words.

Think of a windy day, with clouds and rain; towards evening it begins to clear, but the heavens turn black again as the "clouds return after the rain." This was a signal for caution if not for terror in Palestine. Men and women and children feared the thunderstorm, probably because it came so seldom. Doors were shut in the streets. The strong guards who stood before the houses of the wealthy were afraid, and trembled, for they might not leave their places. The little mills with which the women ground grain at eventide ceased; few would remain at their tasks in the face of the storm.

Women in upper rooms drew back into the dark. Those outdoors became nervous; no one sang; the black thunderheads flourished their white tops like the almond tree; everyone feared the lightning and the thunder on high; even a little weight which kept a man from running to shelter was a burden.

Here the admonition is to remember the Creator before the terror of death, which is worse than the terror of the storm. The rich man with his golden water bowl hung from a silver chain must fear it. The poor man with his earthen pitcher who must send his women to the well for water was in terror. Even the man strong and rough as the crude wooden wheel which drew the skin bucket to the top of the well shook with fear. Death is the same for all, and it is feared alike by all.