

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

Analysis

This opening verse of the famous 'A Time for Everything' poem establishes God's sovereign ordering of human experience. The Hebrew word 'zeman' (season/appointed time) emphasizes divinely ordained timing, while 'chephets' (purpose) indicates intentional design. The Preacher affirms that all human activities fall under providential governance—nothing happens randomly 'under the heaven.' This verse introduces a profound theological balance: human life involves inevitable change and diverse experiences, yet these occur within God's purposeful framework, not chaotic chance.

Historical Context

This passage likely dates to Solomon's later years (circa 935 BC) when reflection on life's rhythms would carry particular weight. Ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature often categorized human experiences, but Ecclesiastes uniquely subordinates all temporal activities to divine sovereignty. The phrase 'under the heaven' (distinct from 'under the sun' used elsewhere in Ecclesiastes) suggests God's perspective encompassing all earthly existence. This poem became deeply embedded in Jewish wisdom tradition and was later set to music ('Turn! Turn! Turn!'), demonstrating its enduring recognition of life's universal patterns under God's governance.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing God's sovereignty over life's seasons help you navigate unexpected changes or transitions?
2. In what ways do you struggle to accept that certain experiences have their appointed time rather than being under your complete control?

Interlinear Text

לְכָל

H3605

To every

thing there is a season

H2165

וְעַת

H6256

and a time

לְכָל

H3605

לְכָל

H2656

to every

purpose

מְתֻמָּה

H8478

בְּשָׁמָיִם:

under the heaven

H8064

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 3:17 (Parallel theme): I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

Matthew 16:3 (Parallel theme): And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?

Ecclesiastes 7:14 (Parallel theme): In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

2 Kings 5:26 (Parallel theme): And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?

Proverbs 15:23 (Parallel theme): A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!

Ecclesiastes 2:3 (Parallel theme): I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

Ecclesiastes 2:17 (Parallel theme): Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Ecclesiastes 1:13 (Parallel theme): And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.

2 Chronicles 33:12 (Parallel theme): And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,