

Ecclesiastes 3:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

Analysis

That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been (מה-שָׁהַיָּה כָּبֵר הוּא וְאַשְׁר לְהִיּוֹת כָּבֵר הַיָּה)—this verse affirms historical repetition and cyclical patterns. The phrase 'k'var hu' (כָּבֵר הוּא, already is) emphasizes that present reality repeats past patterns, and future events will likewise echo what has already occurred. Human nature, sin patterns, divine judgments, and redemptive principles remain constant across time.

The verse concludes with a striking statement: **and God requireth that which is past** (וְהַאֲלֹהִים יַבְקֵשׁ אֶת-נִרְצָח) The Hebrew 'baqeish' (בַּקֵּשׁ) means to seek, require, or demand, while 'nirdaf' (נִרְצָח) means pursued, persecuted, or that which has passed. God seeks accountability for past deeds—nothing is forgotten or irrelevant. This prevents the repetition from becoming meaningless: though patterns recur, God judges each instance. History's repetitions don't eliminate moral accountability; rather, they demonstrate consistent divine principles operating across time. Jesus taught this: 'every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof' (Matthew 12:36)—nothing passes into irrelevance.

Historical Context

Israel's history demonstrated this pattern vividly: repeated cycles of sin, judgment, repentance, and restoration (the Judges cycle). What happened to previous

generations recurred in subsequent ones. The exile to Babylon repeated the Egyptian bondage in many ways. Post-exilic readers recognized that their current struggles echoed ancestors' failures. Yet the phrase 'God requireth that which is past' prevented historical fatalism—though patterns repeat, each generation remains accountable to God for its choices. The New Testament affirms that God will judge all things, including 'the secrets of men' (Romans 2:16), demonstrating that past deeds aren't forgotten but will be required at final judgment.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What patterns from the past (personal, familial, cultural) do you see repeating in the present, and how does this awareness inform your choices?
2. How does knowing that God 'requireth that which is past' change your perspective on unresolved wrongs, forgotten sins, or overlooked righteousness?

Interlinear Text

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|-------|--------|------------------------------------|----------|-------|-------|
| מָה | שָׁבֵת | כִּי | וְאֵשֶׁר | וְאֵת | לְהִי |
| H4100 | H1961 | That which hath been is now | | H1931 | H834 |
| | | H3528 | | | H1961 |

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|------------------------------------|----|----------|---------------------|------|-------|
| כִּי | הִ | וְאֵלֶּה | יְמִ | שְׁ | אֵת |
| That which hath been is now | | H1961 | been and God | H430 | H853 |
| H3528 | | | | | H1245 |

בְּתַתְּפָה:
that which is past
H7291

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 6:10 (Parallel theme): That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it is man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.

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