

Ecclesiastes 3:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

Analysis

The first antithesis pairs life's ultimate boundaries—birth and death—with the agricultural cycle of planting and harvesting. The Hebrew construction uses infinitives ('to be born... to die') emphasizing activities rather than static states. Birth and death bracket every human existence, reminding us that we enter and exit life's stage at divinely appointed moments (Job 14:5). The agricultural imagery (plant/pluck up) metaphorically extends this principle: just as farmers must respect planting and harvest seasons, so human endeavors have proper timing that cannot be forced. This verse grounds the poem's abstract theology in concrete, relatable human experience.

Historical Context

In ancient agrarian Israel, planting and harvest cycles were existentially crucial—mistiming could mean starvation. The Gezer Calendar (10th century BC) documents Israel's agricultural seasons, showing how deeply seasonal rhythms shaped Israelite consciousness. Pairing biological life cycles with agricultural ones would resonate powerfully with Solomon's original audience. The New Testament echoes this imagery: Jesus compared His death to a grain of wheat falling into the ground (John 12:24), and Paul used planting/watering metaphors for ministry (1 Corinthians 3:6-7), demonstrating continuity with Ecclesiastes' seasonal theology.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does accepting that birth and death are appointed times affect your perspective on life's brevity and purpose?
2. What 'planting' are you being called to do in this current season, trusting God for future harvest?

Interlinear Text

וְעַתָּה	לֵלֶדֶת	וְעַתָּה	לָמוּת	וְעַתָּה	נִטְּוֵה:	וְעַתָּה
A time	to be born	A time	to die	A time	that which is planted	A time
H6256	H3205	H6256	H4191	H6256	H5193	H6256
וְעַתָּה	לִקְלוֹץ	נִטְּוֵה:				
to pluck up	that which is planted					
H6131	H5193					

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 9:27 (Parallel theme): And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

Job 14:5 (Parallel theme): Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

Luke 1:20 (Parallel theme): And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

Galatians 4:4 (Parallel theme): But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

Isaiah 38:1 (Parallel theme): In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came unto him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.

Job 7:1 (Parallel theme): Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?

Matthew 15:13 (Parallel theme): But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.

John 16:21 (Parallel theme): A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

Isaiah 54:1 (Parallel theme): Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD.

Isaiah 38:5 (Parallel theme): Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.