

Ecclesiastes 3:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

Analysis

This verse presents two sets of opposites related to communication and response. 'A time to rend, and a time to sew' refers to the ancient practice of tearing garments in grief, anguish, or repentance (Genesis 37:34; Joel 2:13), followed by later mending. The Hebrew 'qara' (קָרַע, rend/tear) signified deep emotional/spiritual crisis, while 'taphar' (תָּפַר, sew) indicated restoration and healing. The second pair—'a time to keep silence, and a time to speak'—addresses verbal wisdom. The Hebrew 'chasah' (חָשָׂה, keep silence) means purposeful, disciplined quiet, while 'dabar' (דָּבַר, speak) indicates articulated expression. Proverbs extensively praises guarded speech (10:19, 17:28), yet Scripture also condemns cowardly silence when truth requires voice (Esther 4:14). The verse teaches that wisdom requires discernment about both emotional expression and verbal communication—knowing when symbolic actions or words serve God's purposes and when restraint does.

Historical Context

Garment-tearing was a powerful cultural symbol throughout Israelite history. Jacob rent his clothes when believing Joseph dead (Genesis 37:34); Job did so in grief (Job 1:20); Mordecai tore his garments at Haman's plot (Esther 4:1); the high priest rent his garments at Jesus's 'blasphemy' (Matthew 26:65). Sewing the torn garment symbolized recovery from crisis. Ancient Near Eastern culture valued both eloquent speech (especially in royal courts) and disciplined silence. The prophets had to discern when to speak uncomfortable truth versus when to remain

silent before hardened hearts (Amos 5:13). Jesus modeled this wisdom: speaking boldly to religious leaders yet remaining silent before Herod (Luke 23:9). James later counseled believers to be 'swift to hear, slow to speak' (James 1:19), reflecting Ecclesiastes' wisdom about measured words.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What situations in your current season call for silence rather than hasty speech, and which require you to speak up despite fear or discomfort?
2. How does this verse inform when to express grief openly (rending) versus when to move toward healing (sewing)?

Interlinear Text

וְעַתָּה	לְקַרְעַת	וְעַתָּה	לְתַפּוֹר	וְעַתָּה	לְחַשׂוֹת	וְעַתָּה	לְדַבֵּר:
A time	to rend	A time	to sew	A time	to keep silence	A time	to speak
H6256	H7167	H6256	H8609	H6256	H2814	H6256	H1696

Additional Cross-References

Amos 5:13 (Parallel theme): Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time.

Micah 7:5 (Parallel theme): Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

Acts 4:20 (Parallel theme): For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Lamentations 3:28 (Parallel theme): He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him.

Joel 2:13 (Parallel theme): And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

Esther 7:4 (Parallel theme): For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

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