

Ecclesiastes 7:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

Analysis

And I find more bitter than death the woman (ומזא אַנְיִ מֵר מִמְּוֹת אֶת-הָאִשָּׁה) —'and I find bitter beyond death the woman.' **Whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands** (אֲשֶׁר-הִיא) (מַצְוָדִים וְחֲרָמִים לְבָה אֲסּוּרִים יָדֶה) —whose heart is traps and nets, whose hands are fetters. **Whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her** (טוֹב לִפְנֵי כָּלֹהִים) (וְפָלַט מִמְּפָנֶה וְחוֹטָא וְלֹכֶד בָּה). Tov lifnei ha'elohim yimmalet mimmenah vechote yillakhed bah).

This controversial verse requires careful interpretation. The definite article 'the woman' (ha'ishah) suggests a specific type, not womankind generally—likely the adulteress/seductress of Proverbs 2:16-19, 5:3-14, 7:10-27. The hunting imagery (metsodim—traps, charamim—nets, asurim—fetters) depicts calculated ensnaring. The conclusion is key: the righteous man (tov lifnei ha'elohim, 'good before God') escapes through divine protection, while chote (the sinner) falls prey. This isn't misogyny but warning against sexual temptation, echoing Joseph fleeing Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:12). Proverbs 31 celebrates the excellent wife—Ecclesiastes warns against her opposite.

Historical Context

Ancient Israelite wisdom literature frequently personified both Wisdom and Folly as women (Proverbs 1-9), using feminine imagery pedagogically. Temple prostitution in surrounding cultures made sexual temptation a pervasive danger requiring explicit warning.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing sexual temptation as 'more bitter than death' shape appropriate boundaries and vigilance?
2. What does it mean practically that the righteous 'escape' through pleasing God rather than mere willpower?
3. How should this warning be taught today without falling into misogyny or dismissing its serious counsel?

Interlinear Text

ה יא אֲשֶׁר הָאֲשָׁה	ה יא אֲשֶׁר הָאֲשָׁה	the woman	the woman	the woman	the woman
And I find	more bitter	than death	than death	than death	than death
H4672	H589	H4751	H4194	H853	H1931
is snares	and nets	whose heart	as bands	and her hands	whoso pleaseth
H4685	H2764	H3820	H612	H3027	H2896
לְפָנָי בְּאֱלֹהִים יְמִלְאָה מִתְּבָנָה וְחַטָּאת	לְפָנָי בְּאֱלֹהִים יְמִלְאָה מִתְּבָנָה וְחַטָּאת	from her but the sinner			
H6440	God	H430	H4422	H4480	H2398
shall be taken	shall escape	shall escape	shall escape	shall escape	shall escape
H3920	H0				
בָּהּ כִּי	בָּהּ כִּי				
shall be taken	shall be taken				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 22:14 (Parallel theme): The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein.

Proverbs 2:16 (Parallel theme): To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words;

Ecclesiastes 2:26 (Sin): For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

Proverbs 9:18 (Parallel theme): But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell.