

Ecclesiastes 9:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

Analysis

For man also knoweth not his time (כִּי גַם־לֹא־יָדַע הָאָדָם אֶת־עֵתוֹ, ki gam-lo-yeda ha'adam et-itto)—humanity does not know its appointed moment, from et (time, season). **As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare** (כַּדָּגִים שְׁנֹאֲחָזִים בְּמִצְוֶה רָעָה וְכַצִּפֹּרִים הָאֲחֻזּוֹת בַּפֶּחַ, kaddagim shene'echazim bimtsodah ra'ah vekatsipporim ha'achuzot bapach)—vivid hunting imagery. **So are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them** (כֹּהֵם יוֹקֵשִׁים בְּנֵי הָאָדָם לְעֵת רָעָה הַשֶּׁתִּפּוֹל עֲלֵיהֶם פְּתָאִם, kahem yuqashim benei ha'adam le'et ra'ah keshetippol aleihem pit'om).

Qoheleth employs nature's brutal metaphors: fish unaware of the net closing, birds oblivious to the snare's trigger—both caught instantly, helplessly. The phrase 'evil time' (et ra'ah) refers not to moral evil but calamity or disaster that strikes pit'om (suddenly, unexpectedly). This isn't fatalism but realism about mortality and crisis—we don't know our 'time' of death, judgment, or sudden reversal. Jesus used similar imagery: 'As were the days of Noah... they were unaware until the flood came' (Matthew 24:37-39). James warns, 'You do not know what tomorrow will bring' (James 4:14). The antidote isn't paranoia but readiness: 'Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect' (Luke 12:40).

Historical Context

Ancient fishing with nets and bird hunting with snares were common subsistence activities, making these metaphors immediately accessible. The unpredictability of death was heightened in antiquity by disease, warfare, and limited medical knowledge.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How should awareness that you 'know not your time' shape daily priorities and readiness?
2. In what ways might you be living as if disaster or death are distant rather than potentially sudden?
3. What does spiritual readiness look like practically, given that calamity 'falleth suddenly'?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	גַם	לֹא	יָדַע	הָאָדָם	אֶת	לֹעַת	כְּדָגִים
H3588	H1571	H3808	also knoweth	For man	H853	not his time	as the fishes
		H3045		H120		H6256	H1709
הָאָחֳזִי	וְהַ	בְּמִצּוֹתָהּ	רָעָה	וְכַצִּפֹּרִים	וְהָאָחֳזִי		
that are caught		H4686	in an evil	and as the birds	that are caught		
H270			H7451	H6833	H270		
בַּפֶּחַ	כִּהֶם	וְיִקְשְׁמוּ	בְנֵי י	הָאָדָם	לֹעַת	רָעָה	
in the snare	so	snared	are the sons	For man	not his time	in an evil	
H6341	H1992	H3369	H1121	H120	H6256	H7451	
כַּשֵּׁתָּפָּ וְלֹ	עָלֶיהָ	פְּתָאִים:					
when it falleth	H5921	suddenly					
H5307		H6597					

Additional Cross-References

1 Thessalonians 5:3 (Parallel theme): For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Proverbs 29:6 (Evil): In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice.

Proverbs 6:15 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy.

2 Timothy 2:26 (Evil): And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Isaiah 30:13 (Parallel theme): Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant.

Psalms 11:6 (Evil): Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

2 Peter 2:12 (Evil): But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

Ecclesiastes 8:11 (Evil): Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

2 Corinthians 6:2 (Parallel theme): (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

Luke 12:39 (Parallel theme): And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

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