

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 (כי גם-לא-ידע באדם את-עתו) — 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** (קדמים שנאכלים במקצתה רעה וכפים באהוזות בפוח) — vivid hunting imagery. **So are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them** (כהם יוקנישים בני באדם לעת רעה כשתפול עלייהם פתאום) — we don't know our 'time' of death, judgment, or sudden reversal.

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

כַּגִּים לֹא גַם כִּי
H3588 H1571 H3808 also knoweth For man H853 not his time as the fishes
H3045 H120 H6256 H1709

בָּאָחֵז וְתַּחֲזִק בְּמִצְדָּךְ הַבָּאָחֵז וְתַּחֲזִק
that are caught H4686 in an evil and as the birds that are caught
H270 H7451 H6833 H270

בְּשָׁבֵךְ מִכְּבָשׁוּם יְוָקָשִׁים בְּגַם בְּאָחֵז מִבָּאָחֵז
in the snare so snared are the sons For man not his time in an evil
H6341 H1992 H3369 H1121 H120 H6256 H7451

פָּתָאָם: עַלְיָה מִכְּשָׁתָף וְלֹ
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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