

Job 34:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand.

Analysis

In a moment shall they die, and the people shall be troubled at midnight, and pass away: and the mighty shall be taken away without hand. Elihu describes sudden divine judgment without human agency. "In a moment" (rega, רגע) means an instant, the blink of an eye—death comes without warning when God decrees it. "The people shall be troubled" (yego'a'u am, יגעו'ו עם) uses gua'ash (געה), meaning to shake, quake, or be in turmoil. "At midnight" (chatsoth laylah, חצות לילה) emphasizes the unexpectedness—death strikes when people feel most secure.

The mighty shall be taken away without hand (yusaru abbirim velo ve-yad, יוסרו אבירים ולא ביד) is theologically crucial. Abbirim (אבירים) are the powerful, strong, mighty ones who seem invincible. "Without hand" (lo ve-yad, לא ביד) means without human intervention—God needs no army, disease, or instrument to remove even the mightiest. This echoes Egypt's firstborn plague (Exodus 12:29, striking at midnight), Sennacherib's army destroyed by God's angel (2 Kings 19:35), and Belshazzar's death the night of Babylon's fall (Daniel 5:30). The verse emphasizes God's absolute sovereignty—human power, security measures, and status provide no protection against divine judgment. Yet Elihu again misapplies sound theology, implying Job's suffering evidences such judgment. The irony: God's "hand" has indeed struck Job (19:21), but for testing, not judgment. The verse ultimately points to final judgment when Christ returns "as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2)—sudden, unexpected, inescapable for the unprepared.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern culture revered the mighty—kings, warriors, nobles—as seemingly invulnerable. Their sudden deaths demonstrated divine sovereignty in ways that resonated powerfully. Israel's history provided examples: Pharaoh's firstborn, Sennacherib, Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:23). The phrase "without hand" anticipates Daniel 2:34's stone "cut out without hands" that destroys earthly kingdoms—God's kingdom comes through divine, not human, agency. Elihu's description would have evoked these precedents, reinforcing his argument for God's sovereign judgment.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does the certainty of sudden death for the mighty challenge worldly values that prize power and security?
 2. What does God's ability to judge "without hand" teach about the futility of human attempts to protect ourselves from divine accountability?
 3. How should awareness that death can come "in a moment" affect your daily priorities and spiritual preparedness?

Interlinear Text

בְּ גַעַ	וְ מִתְהַ	וְ חַצְצָה	לְ יְלָה	וְגַעַשׂ וְ	עַם
In a moment	shall they die	at midnight	H3915	shall be troubled	and the people
H7281	H4191	H2676		H1607	H5971

