

Job 36:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place.

Analysis

Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place (אַל־תִּשְׁאַף הַלַּיְלָה לְעַלְוֹת עַמִּים תְּחַתֵּם, al-tish'af hallaylah la'alot ammim tachtam)—This cryptic verse warns against longing for death or divine judgment. The verb sha'af (to pant after, desire, long for) suggests eager anticipation. Laylah (night) symbolizes judgment, darkness, and death throughout Scripture (John 9:4, Romans 13:12). The phrase **when people are cut off in their place** uses amim (peoples, nations) and suggests sudden destruction.

Elihu warns Job against the temptation to wish for death—a desire Job has expressed repeatedly (3:11-13, 6:8-9, 7:15). Ecclesiastes 7:17 similarly warns: 'Why shouldest thou die before thy time?' The night of judgment comes for all eventually, but to desire it prematurely shows despair rather than faith. Job has wished for death as release from suffering, but Elihu argues this reveals dangerous impatience with God's timing. The New Testament teaches we should desire Christ's return (2 Timothy 4:8, Revelation 22:20) but not seek premature death (Philippians 1:21-24).

Historical Context

In ancient Near Eastern thought, premature death represented curse and defeat. Long life was the blessing promised to the righteous (Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:33, Proverbs 3:16). To desire death showed either extreme despair or arrogant presumption about when one's time should end. Elihu warns against both attitudes.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does suffering tempt us toward death-wish despair rather than patient endurance?
2. What distinguishes biblical hope for Christ's return from suicidal despair or escapist fantasies?
3. How can we maintain the will to live when circumstances make death seem preferable to continued suffering?

Interlinear Text

אֶל	תִּשְׁאַף	הַלַּיְלָה	לִטָּל	וְכִי יָמֻתוּ	הָעָמָר:
H408	Desire	not the night	are cut off	when people	H8478
	H7602	H3915	H5927	H5971	

Additional Cross-References

Job 34:20 (Parallel theme): 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.

Job 34:25 (Parallel theme): Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed.

Exodus 12:29 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.

2 Kings 19:35 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore

and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.

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