

Mark 13:36

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

Analysis

Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping—The Greek *exaiphnēs elthōn* (ἐξαίφνης ἐλθών, 'suddenly coming') emphasizes unexpectedness, not imminence. The aorist participle *elthōn* (coming) pictures decisive arrival. *Heurē hymas katheudontas* (εὗρη ὑμᾶς καθεύδοντας, 'he find you sleeping') uses present active participle—caught in the act of sleeping, not having fallen asleep momentarily.

This warning recalls Jesus's Gethsemane rebuke: 'Could you not watch one hour?' (Mark 14:37). Peter, James, and John—the three present for this Olivet Discourse (13:3)—failed this very test hours later. Spiritual sleep means negligence, complacency, moral compromise (Romans 13:11-13, Ephesians 5:14). The shame of being found unprepared appears in 1 John 2:28, 'that we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.' Jesus frames eschatology pastorally: the issue isn't decoding timelines but maintaining faithfulness until the Master's return.

Historical Context

The early church grappled with delayed parousia. Some mocked, 'Where is the promise of his coming?' (2 Peter 3:4). Others became idle, quit working, expecting immediate return (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12). Jesus's warning guards against both extremes: neither complacent presumption ('My master delays') nor frenetic date-setting, but steady, watchful obedience. Church fathers saw believers' death as individual 'coming' requiring equal readiness.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What areas of spiritual 'sleep' (complacency, compromise, distraction) do you need to wake from?
2. How does remembering Jesus found his own disciples sleeping challenge your confidence in staying alert?
3. What practices help you maintain long-term watchfulness without burning out or growing cynical about Christ's return?

Interlinear Text

μὴ	ἐλθὼν	ἐξαίφνης	εὕρη	ὕμᾱς	καθεύδοντας
Lest	coming	suddenly	he find	you	sleeping
G3361	G2064	G1810	G2147	G5209	G2518

Additional Cross-References

Mark 14:40 (Parallel theme): And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him.

Luke 21:34 (Parallel theme): And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

Matthew 25:5 (Parallel theme): While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

Isaiah 56:10 (Parallel theme): His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.

Mark 14:37 (Parallel theme): And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?

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