

## Of Times and Seasons

Biblical references to TIMES or SEASON (all quotations from RSV unless otherwise noted):

Esther 4:14. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews of another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Ecclesiastes 3:

1. For everything there is a seasons, and a time for every matter under heaven:
2. a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up
4. a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and time to dance
5. a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
6. a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
7. a time to rend, and a time to sew;  
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
8. a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 8:6-8. For every matter has its time and way, although man's trouble lies heavy upon him. For he does not know what is to be, for who can tell him how it will be? No man as power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death.

Ecclesiastes 9:11-13. Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time. Like fish which are taken in an evil net, and like birds which are caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

Ezekiel 30:3. For the day is near,  
the day of the Lord is near;

it will be a day of clouds,  
a time of doom for the nations.

Jeremiah 8:20. The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.

Ephesians 5:15-17. Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Mark 4:26-29. And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

John 4:35. Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest"? I tell, you lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest.

Acts 24:25. And as he (Paul) reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. (KJV)

Colossians 4:5. Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.

Revelation 1:3. ...the time is near.

1. Times and seasons are, at least partly, beyond human control, and are a fate that looms over us.
  - 1.1 The writer of Ecclesiastes emphasizes fate, the lack of human ability to control it, and the inexorability of that fate. (Explain the point, that times change, that life and seasons move regardless of our action, and that human power is limited. E.g., one can no more retard the process of time than King Canute could stop the rolling of the waves. Use your own examples.)
  - 1.2 There are times in which things are possible and appropriate, and times when they are not. For example, it is pointless to plant seeds except at the appropriate time, and impossible to harvest except when the grain is ripe. Therefore it is pointless, and shows lack of wisdom, to attempt to override this aspect of time. (The long poetic list from Ecclesiastes 3 is to the point here.)

- 1.3 But since times and seasons move by their own laws, it is necessary for humans to seize the time and opportunity when it presents itself, or the opportunity may be lost, never to return. (Esther presents one example, Paul's preaching to Felix is another. Also, Pilate's opportunity to free Jesus was something that Pilate didn't seek, but it came to Pilate inexorably. Once the time of Jesus' crucifixion had passed, Pilate couldn't reverse his decision – it was eternally fixed. Explain this point with your own examples. Shakespeare's line, "There is a tide in the affairs of men..." is very much to the point here.)
2. But times and events are also partly under human control and are something for which we are (at least partly) responsible.
  - 2.1 Failure to seize a time or opportunity often limits future times or opportunities, whereas working for a desired result often makes future opportunities happen. "Lucky" times or opportunities frequently occur for those persons who prepare themselves for and work for them. (Explain this point with your own examples. There are many examples of "lucky breaks" having occurred for people who are determined and work for a goal, so much so that it is clear that it's not just luck, but that human work actually influences the work of times and fates.)
  - 2.2 Even the seasons and their effects are partly under human control. (E.g., climatic and seasonal changes as the result of "greenhouse effects," "acid rain," soil erosion, air pollution, etc. Changing growing seasons by development of new plants; changing the effects of seasonal weather patterns through building dams and aqueducts, through heating and air conditioning, etc. Add or use your own examples.)
  - 2.3 Humans can either be enslaved by time, or (partly at least) master it. Successful people usually owe part of their success to their master of time. (Explain this point.)
3. In responding to God's providence, the call is (usually) for an immediate response at the present time.
  - 3.1 God's predestination is both for an outcome and for a particular person to fulfill his part in making that outcome. So God's call to a person is a call to seize the time and opportunity. (Explain and give examples.)

- 3.2 The claim that the present time is not the right one is usually an excuse for procrastination, and not a true response to the providence of God. (Felix's response to Paul is an example of such an insincere excuse for avoiding commitment.)
- 3.3 The present time is especially important for God's providence, and presents both opportunities and dangers a never before in history. (Use this point to challenge your audience toward fulfillment of whatever task or challenge is at hand. Emphasize that "Now is the time!" Use the quotes from the Bible that emphasize the importance of not allowing the time and opportunity to pass.)