

1 Samuel 22:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD.

Analysis

And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the LORD.

The soldiers' refusal represents remarkable moral courage. The Hebrew 'lo avu' (were not willing) indicates deliberate choice despite royal command. These 'footmen' (ratsim—runners, royal guards) risked everything by refusing. Their reasoning—unwillingness to 'fall upon the priests of the LORD'—shows reverence for God's servants trumped fear of the king. Saul's accusation (their hand is with David, they knew and didn't tell) distorts hospitality into conspiracy. The guards' disobedience echoes the Hebrew midwives defying Pharaoh (Exodus 1:17). When human authority commands what God forbids, faithful resistance becomes obedience to the higher King.

Historical Context

Royal guards typically executed without question. Their refusal to kill priests indicates the profound sanctity accorded to those who served at the altar. This act of conscience cost them royal favor but preserved their integrity before God.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. When must civil disobedience become faithful obedience to God?
2. What does the soldiers' refusal teach about maintaining moral boundaries under immoral authority?

Interlinear Text

ס. בְּ ְעַל ְיְהֹוָה אֶתְרָא
said And the king unto the footmen that stood about him Turn
H559 H4428 H7323 H5324 H5921 H5437

עַמְּדָה ְבְּכָבְדָן ְיְהֹוָה ְבְּכָבְדָן ְיְהֹוָה
and slay the priests of the LORD because their hand
H4191 H3548 H3068 H3588 H1571 H5973

אֵלָי ְיְדָעָה ְיְדָעָה ְבְּכָבְדָן ְיְהֹוָה
also is with David and because they knew when he fled
H1732 H3588 H3045 H3588 H1272 H1931 H3808

עָבֵד ְאָבָד ְאָזְנָה ְאָתָה ְגָלָל
and did not shew it to me But the servants
H1540 H853 H241 H3808 H14 H5650

בְּכָבְדָן ְלִפְגָּעָה ְבְּכָבְדָן ְלִשְׁלָלָה
And the king not put forth because their hand to fall the priests
H4428 H7971 H853 H3027 H6293 H3548

יְהֹוָה:
of the LORD
H3068

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 1:17 (Kingdom): But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.
