

Ecclesiastes 10:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.

Analysis

If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place (אִם־רוּחַ הַמֶּלֶךְ יִתְעַלֶּה עָלֶיךָ מִקְוֶמְךָ אַל־תִּנָּח—when a superior's ruach (רוּחַ, spirit/anger) rises against you, don't abandon your maqom (מְקוֹם, place/position)). The temptation when facing unjust anger is to resign, flee, or retaliate. The Preacher counsels remaining steadfast in your assigned position. This requires humility, self-control, and trust in God's sovereignty over authorities (Romans 13:1). **For yielding pacifieth great offences** (כִּי מַרְפָּא יַנִּיחַ הַטָּאִים הַגְּדוֹלִים)—the Hebrew marpe (מַרְפָּא) means healing, calmness, or gentleness. Maintaining composure and gentle response can settle (yaniach, יָנִיחַ, cause to rest) even great provocations.

This isn't counseling passive acceptance of evil but wisdom for navigating unjust treatment from those in authority. Proverbs teaches, "A soft answer turneth away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). Daniel and his friends exemplified this: maintaining position and respectful demeanor even when facing deadly threats from kings (Daniel 1-6). Jesus demonstrated ultimate application: maintaining His mission despite authorities' hostility, answering Pilate respectfully though unjustly accused (John 18:33-37). The verse teaches that maintaining composure and position often proves wiser than defensive reaction.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern monarchies granted rulers nearly absolute power—royal anger could mean immediate execution (Esther 1:12-22; Daniel 2:12-13). Subjects

had limited recourse against unjust treatment. This verse provided practical wisdom for surviving volatile political environments. Joseph exemplified this wisdom when falsely accused by Potiphar's wife—he didn't abandon his position but entrusted himself to God, leading eventually to vindication (Genesis 39-41). The Preacher, traditionally identified as Solomon, knew royal court dynamics intimately. The counsel anticipates New Testament teaching on submitting to authorities (1 Peter 2:18-23) while maintaining ultimate allegiance to God (Acts 5:29). Church history shows martyrs often maintained their "place" (witness, calling) despite authorities' rage, and their calm endurance sometimes converted persecutors. The Reformers faced this dilemma when confronting ecclesial and civil authorities—maintaining position while calling for reform.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. When facing unjust treatment from an authority figure, what is your instinctive response—flight, fight, or faithful steadfastness?
2. How can you maintain respectful composure and faithfulness to your calling when those in power treat you unfairly?

Interlinear Text

אֵם	ר וִחַ	הַמֹּשִׁל	תָּעַל הַ	עַל יָב	מְקוֹמָךְ	אֵל
H518	If the spirit	of the ruler	rise up	H5921	not thy place	H408
	H7307	H4910	H5927		H4725	
יֵן יָחַ	כִּי	מִרְפֵּי אֵ	יֵן יָחַ	חֲטָאִים	גְּדוֹלִים:	
against thee leave	H3588	for yielding	against thee leave	offences	great	
H3240		H4832	H3240	H2399	H1419	

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 25:15 (Parallel theme): By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.

Ecclesiastes 8:3 (Parallel theme): Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him.

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