

Ecclesiastes 8:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.

Analysis

I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. The Preacher advises submitting to royal authority, grounded in sacred oath. The Hebrew shamar (שָׁמַר, keep) means to guard, observe, or obey carefully. The phrase 'oath of God' (shevuat elohim, שָׁבּוּעַת אֱלֹהִים) likely refers to covenant loyalty sworn before God—either the king's coronation oath or subjects' pledge of allegiance witnessed by the divine.

This counsel addresses civic responsibility under monarchical government. Israelite kings ruled under God's authority (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), and citizens owed obedience as ultimately rendered to God Himself. This principle extends beyond monarchy to all legitimate governing authority. Paul later commanded submission to governing authorities as God's servants (Romans 13:1-7), and Peter urged honoring the king (1 Peter 2:13-17). The oath's sacredness transforms political obedience into spiritual duty—defiance becomes not merely civil disobedience but covenant violation.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern monarchies functioned through oaths binding subjects to rulers. Israel's covenant framework meant kings ruled under divine mandate (2 Samuel 5:3; 1 Kings 1:30), and citizens' loyalty had theological significance. Solomon himself received pledges of allegiance (1 Kings 1:47-53). The 'oath of God' elevated political loyalty beyond mere pragmatism to sacred obligation.

However, this obedience had limits—when rulers commanded what contradicted God's law, obedience to God superseded political loyalty (Acts 5:29). The Reformers developed this into resistance theory: lesser magistrates could oppose tyrants violating God's law, but private citizens should generally submit while trusting God's justice.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does understanding governmental authority as established by God affect your attitude toward laws and leaders you may disagree with?
2. Where is the boundary between submitting to authority 'in regard of the oath of God' and the duty to obey God rather than humans when they conflict?

Interlinear Text

אַבְדֵּן	פִּי	מִלְּהָנָה	שְׁמַר	לִעְלָה	דָּבָרְתָּה
H589	commandment	the king's	I counsel thee to keep	H5921	and that in regard
	H6310	H4428	H8104		H1700
שְׁבֹועַת	אֱלֹהִים:	תְּשִׁבְעֵת			
of the oath	of God				
H7621		H430			

Additional Cross-References

1 Kings 2:43 (Word): Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with?

Proverbs 24:21 (Kingdom): My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change:

Titus 3:1 (Parallel theme): Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

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