

Ecclesiastes 8:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?

Analysis

Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? This verse asserts the king's absolute authority in his domain. The Hebrew *shalton* (שָׁלוֹן, power) denotes sovereign authority and dominion. A king's word carries executive force—his decree becomes reality. The rhetorical question emphasizes accountability's absence: who dares challenge royal decisions?

This observation applies first to earthly monarchs—their words command armies, determine fates, and shape kingdoms. Solomon experienced this power firsthand, both wielding it as king and remembering how his father David exercised it. Yet the verse's deeper truth points beyond human rulers to God's absolute sovereignty. God's word possesses ultimate power—creating *ex nihilo* (Genesis 1:3), sustaining all things (Hebrews 1:3), accomplishing His purposes infallibly (Isaiah 55:11). No one successfully challenges divine decrees. Job learned this: 'Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge?' (Job 42:3). Paul echoed it: 'Who art thou that repliest against God?' (Romans 9:20). This verse thus teaches both political realism about earthly authority and theological humility before divine sovereignty.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern monarchs claimed divine sanction and absolute authority. Mesopotamian kings called themselves 'shepherds' appointed by gods; Egyptian pharaohs claimed divine status. Israel's kings ruled under different theology—their

authority derived from God's covenant but remained subordinate to divine law. Nevertheless, within their sphere, kings' words carried power subjects couldn't resist. Solomon's own pronouncements determined life and death (1 Kings 2:19-46). The verse reflects this political reality while pointing to its ultimate archetype: God's sovereign word. Prophets regularly challenged kings (Nathan confronting David, Elijah opposing Ahab), demonstrating that divine word supersedes royal authority. The New Testament reveals Christ possesses 'all power in heaven and in earth' (Matthew 28:18)—the ultimate King whose word none can resist.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing God's absolute sovereignty—that His word has ultimate power—transform your anxiety about circumstances beyond your control?
2. In what areas are you functionally questioning God's authority ('What doest thou?') through worry, complaint, or resistance to His providence?

Interlinear Text

בְּאֵשׁ רַ	דִּבֶּר	מִלֶּךְ	שֶׁלֹּט וְ	וּמִי	יֹאמַר
H834	Where the word	of a king	is there is power	H4310	and who may say
	H1697	H4428	H7983		H559
לִּ	מָה	תַּעֲשֶׂה:			
H0	H4100	unto him What doest			
		H6213			

Additional Cross-References

Job 9:12 (Parallel theme): Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?

Daniel 4:35 (Parallel theme): And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Proverbs 19:12 (Kingdom): The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass.

Proverbs 20:2 (Kingdom): The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.

Romans 9:20 (Parallel theme): Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?