

Ecclesiastes 8:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

Analysis

Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing. The Hebrew shomer mitzvah (שָׁמֵר מִצְוָה, keeps the commandment) promises protection to the obedient. In context, 'commandment' refers to the king's decree (v. 2-4), but the principle extends to God's commands. Obedience provides security—keeping commandments avoids the calamity disobedience brings. The phrase 'feel no evil thing' (lo yeda davar ra, לֹא יְדַעْ דָּבָר רָע) means experiencing no harm or evil consequence.

And a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment. Wisdom involves da'at (דָּעַת, knowing/discriminating) the right et (עֵת, time/season) and mishpat (מִשְׁפָט, judgment/proper manner). The wise person knows not just what to do but when and how to do it. This echoes chapter 3's teaching about appointed times. Prudence requires timing—even right actions performed at wrong moments may fail. Wisdom discerns kairos (opportune moment), not just chronos (sequential time). This anticipates New Testament wisdom: Paul urged making 'the most of every opportunity' (Ephesians 5:16) and acting appropriately 'in season and out of season' (2 Timothy 4:2).

Historical Context

In monarchical contexts, knowing when to speak, when to stay silent, when to act, and when to wait often determined survival. Esther demonstrated this wisdom—discerning the right time to approach the king (Esther 5:1-8). Daniel showed both

obedience to authority and discernment of when to maintain loyal dissent (Daniel 1:8-16; 6:10). The principle that obedience brings protection appears throughout Scripture—covenant blessings follow obedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-14), while disobedience brings curses. Yet this isn't mechanical—the righteous sometimes suffer (as Ecclesiastes elsewhere acknowledges). The promise is general wisdom, not absolute guarantee. Full protection comes only in Christ, where obedience to God brings eternal security regardless of temporal circumstances (Romans 8:31-39).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does obedience to God's commandments provide protection and wisdom that disobedience forfeits?
2. In what current decision do you need wisdom to discern not just what to do but the right time and manner of doing it?

Interlinear Text

שׁׁוֹמֵן	רְ	מִצְׁרָה	לֹא	לִדְעָה	רְ	עַד	בְּ	עַד	בְּ	עַד	תְּ
Whoso keepeth	the commandment	H8104	H4687	H3808	discerneth	H3045	H1697	H7451	no evil	both time	H6256

וְמִשְׁפָט	תְּ	בְּ	לִבְ	לְ	מִשְׁפָט	תְּ	
and judgment	discerneth	H4941	H3045	H3820	heart	H2450	and a wise man's

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 5:14 (Evil): But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Acts 4:19 (Judgment): But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

1 Chronicles 12:32 (Word): And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.

Luke 20:25 (Parallel theme): And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.

Acts 5:29 (Parallel theme): Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Proverbs 17:24 (Parallel theme): Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.

Ecclesiastes 8:2 (Word): I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.

Ecclesiastes 10:2 (Parallel theme): A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.

Ecclesiastes 2:14 (Parallel theme): The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

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