

Ezra 10:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

Analysis

Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware. Ezra immediately acts on Shecaniah's call—"Then arose Ezra" (vayyaqom ezra) shows decisive response without hesitation or political calculation. He binds the leadership and people by oath (shava), creating solemn covenant obligation before God. This wasn't a democratic vote subject to reversal but sacred vow invoking divine witness.

The threefold designation—"chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel"—encompasses religious leadership and entire community. The Hebrew construction emphasizes comprehensiveness: nobody could claim exemption or ignorance. Public oath-taking made this corporate commitment with individual accountability. Each person became bound not just by Shecaniah's proposal but by their own sworn word before God.

The simple statement "**And they sware**" (vayyishave'u) carries weight because oath-breaking brought divine curse (Leviticus 19:12, Zechariah 5:3-4). This wasn't casual agreement but self-imprecation: "May God punish me if I don't fulfill this." Ezra secured commitment through the most binding mechanism available—sworn covenant before YHWH. This demonstrates how serious sin requires serious resolution backed by accountability structures.

Historical Context

Oath-taking in ancient Israel invoked God as witness and enforcer (Genesis 24:3, 1 Samuel 20:42). Breaking oaths brought divine judgment, making them more binding than modern legal contracts. The community understood that swearing "according to this word" meant committing to divorce foreign wives despite personal cost.

Ezra's requirement that leaders swear first follows biblical leadership patterns: those who govern must model obedience (2 Chronicles 29:10, Nehemiah 10:28-29). The priests and Levites bore special responsibility for teaching Torah (Malachi 2:7) and thus couldn't claim ignorance of the marriage prohibitions. Their oath meant some would divorce their own wives—leadership required personal sacrifice.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does requiring leaders to swear first demonstrate the principle that authority comes with greater accountability?
2. What role should solemn vows and public commitments play in corporate repentance and reformation?
3. How does the seriousness with which Israel treated oaths contrast with modern casual promise-making?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּקָּם	עֲזָרָה	וַיִּשְׁבָּעוּ:	אֶת	שָׂרִי	הַכֹּהֲנִים
Then arose	Ezra	And they swear	H853	and made the chief	priests
H6965	H5830	H7650		H8269	H3548
הַלְוִיִּם	וְכָל	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לַעֲשׂוֹת	כַּדָּבָר	הַזֶּה
the Levites	H3605	and all Israel	that they should do	according to this word	H2088
H3881		H3478	H6213	H1697	
וַיִּשְׁבָּעוּ:					
And they swear					
H7650					

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 13:25 (Creation): And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.

Nehemiah 5:12 (Parallel theme): Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.