

Numbers 27:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.

Analysis

The command 'he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD' establishes that Joshua's leadership operated under priestly mediation for divine guidance. The Urim and Thummim were objects used by the high priest to discern God's will in binary decisions (Exodus 28:30). Joshua, unlike Moses, could not speak with God directly but required priestly mediation. This demonstrates that even the highest civil authority operates under spiritual authority. The principle continues: civil magistrates should heed spiritual counsel derived from Scripture.

Historical Context

The Urim and Thummim (Hebrew: lights and perfections) were mysterious objects in the high priest's breastplate that provided yes/no answers to inquiries. Their precise nature is debated—perhaps sacred lots, stones, or other divinely appointed means. They functioned during the period of judges and early monarchy (1 Samuel 28:6) but apparently ceased before the exile. They pictured divine guidance, fully realized in the Spirit's internal witness to believers (Romans 8:14).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the relationship between Joshua and Eleazar model proper separation yet cooperation of civil and spiritual authority?
2. What replaced the Urim and Thummim for discerning God's will—Scripture and the Spirit?
3. How should civil leaders today seek spiritual wisdom for governance?

