

Proverbs 20:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The fear of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul.

Analysis

A king's wrath is like 'the roaring of a lion,' and provoking him 'sinneth against his own soul.' The Hebrew 'naham' (roaring) evokes terror—a lion's roar before attack. To anger the king is suicidal folly. This teaches respect for authority and caution in approaching power. Reformed theology recognizes that God establishes governing authorities (Romans 13:1), and while we must obey God over man when they conflict, we should approach earthly rulers with prudence and respect. Unnecessarily provoking authorities is foolish and sinful.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern monarchs held absolute power over subjects' lives. Provoking royal anger could result in immediate execution. This proverb counseled careful, respectful interaction with those who held life-and-death authority.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do you balance respect for authorities with prophetic truth-telling when necessary?
2. In what ways might you be unnecessarily provoking conflict with those in authority?
3. What does prudent respect for governing authorities look like in contemporary society?

Interlinear Text

וְהוּם	כִּפְּיֵר	אֵי יִמֵּת	מֶלֶךְ	מִתְעַבֵּר וְ
is as the roaring	of a lion	The fear	of a king	whoso provoketh him to anger
H5099	H3715	H367	H4428	H5674
חֹטֵא	נֶפְשׁוֹ:			
sinneth	against his own soul			
H2398	H5315			

Additional Cross-References

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 8:36 (Sin): But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

Ecclesiastes 10:4 (Parallel theme): If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences.

1 Kings 2:23 (Kingdom): Then king Solomon sware by the LORD, saying, God do so to me, and more also, if Adonijah have not spoken this word against his own life.

Hosea 11:10 (Parallel theme): They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.