

# Ecclesiastes 10:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler:

## Analysis

**There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler** (יֵשׁ רָעָה רָאִיתִי תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כְּשֶׁגָּגָה שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִלְפְּנֵי הַשְּׁלִיט)—the Preacher identifies a specific ra'ah (רָעָה, evil/calamity) he has personally observed (ra'iti, רָאִיתִי, I have seen). He characterizes it as shegagah (שֶׁגָּגָה, error/inadvertent wrong) proceeding from the shalit (שְׁלִיט, ruler/one in power). The phrase "under the sun" signals this is empirical observation of earthly governance, not divine ideal. The "error" isn't necessarily the ruler's mistake but the systemic wrong that flows from flawed human authority.

This verse introduces the observation completed in 10:6-7: incompetent fools elevated to high positions while capable people demoted to low status. Such inversions produce social dysfunction, injustice, and instability. The Preacher recognizes that fallible human rulers make poor personnel decisions—whether from misjudgment, favoritism, or political necessity. This wasn't cynicism but realism: even well-intentioned governance suffers from human limitation. The observation anticipates Jesus's teaching that earthly rulers lord authority over subjects (Matthew 20:25-28), unlike kingdom leadership through humble service. Only Christ's perfect rule will establish true justice (Isaiah 11:1-5).

## Historical Context

Solomon witnessed court politics firsthand—his own succession involved intrigue, rival claimants, and political maneuvering (1 Kings 1). Ancient Near Eastern courts

regularly experienced incompetent appointments through nepotism, bribery, or political alliance. The phenomenon of fools in high places while worthy people languish in obscurity plagued every ancient society. Joseph experienced this: gifted administrator imprisoned while Pharaoh's officials blundered (Genesis 39-41). Mordecai experienced it: worthy Jew excluded while Haman the Agagite was promoted (Esther 3). Israel's later history confirmed the pattern: corrupt officials, false prophets in royal favor, faithful prophets persecuted. Post-exilic Jewish community under Persian rule saw this repeatedly. The Reformers experienced it: papal corruption, indulgence-sellers enriched, faithful preachers exiled. Church history repeatedly demonstrates that institutional leadership doesn't automatically correlate with spiritual competence or moral worthiness.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. How do you respond when you see incompetent or immoral people elevated to positions of power and influence?
2. What does this verse teach about maintaining faithfulness even when earthly systems promote the wrong people?

## Interlinear Text

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שׁוֹ	רָעָה	רָאִיתִי	תַּחַת	הַשֶּׁשֶּׁשׁ	כְּשֹׁגֵגָה
<b>There is</b>	<b>an evil</b>	<b>which I have seen</b>	H8478	<b>under the sun</b>	<b>as an error</b>
H3426	H7451	H7200		H8121	H7684
שֶׁנֶּשְׂאָה	מִלְפָּנֵי	הַשֹּׁלֵט:			
<b>which proceedeth</b>	<b>from</b>	<b>the ruler</b>			
H3318	H6440	H7989			

## Additional Cross-References

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**Ecclesiastes 5:13** (Evil): There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.

**Ecclesiastes 4:1** (Parallel theme): So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.

**Ecclesiastes 4:7** (Parallel theme): Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.

**Ecclesiastes 9:3** (Evil): This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

**Ecclesiastes 6:1** (Evil): There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: