

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 (יש רעה באהית תחת השמש כשגגה שׁוֹא מִלְפָנֵי הַשָּׁלִיט)—the Preacher identifies a specific *ra'ah* (רעָה, evil/calamity) he has personally observed (*ra'iti*, בָּאתִי, I have seen). He characterizes it as *shegagah* (שְׁגָגָה, error/inadvertent wrong) proceeding from the *shalit* (שָׁלִיט, 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

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

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

וְשָׁמְדֵנִי בְּשָׁמֶן הַשְׁמָן כִּי־שְׁמָן
There is an evil which I have seen H8478 under the sun as an error
H3426 H7451 H7200 H8121 H7684

מַלְפֵנִי שְׁמַיָּא כִּי־מַלְפֵנִי
which proceedeth from the ruler
H3318 H6440 H7989

Additional Cross-References

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: