

Ecclesiastes 3:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.

Analysis

I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there—the courtroom itself is corrupted. The Hebrew mishpat (מִשְׁפָט, judgment) denotes the sacred space where justice should reign, yet resha (רָשָׁא, wickedness) pollutes it. **The place of righteousness, that iniquity was there**—even where tsedek (צְדָקָה, righteousness) should dwell, awel (אַוְלָה, iniquity/perversion) resides instead.

This is the Preacher's devastating observation: institutional corruption infects the very systems designed to uphold justice. Judges take bribes (Exodus 23:8), courts favor the powerful (Amos 5:12), righteousness becomes a commodity. This fallen-world reality points humanity toward God's ultimate judgment where no corruption exists (3:17). Jesus faced this same perverted justice—religious leaders condemned the innocent, Pilate released a murderer. Only God's eschatological judgment will finally set all things right (Acts 17:31).

Historical Context

Solomon wrote during Israel's united monarchy when he himself served as supreme judge (1 Kings 3:16-28). His wisdom enabled him to see through false testimony, yet even his court wasn't immune to corruption. Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Hittite laws) acknowledged judicial corruption as a perennial problem. Israel's prophets repeatedly condemned unjust judges who 'turn judgment to wormwood' (Amos 5:7) and 'take a bribe' (Isaiah 1:23). Post-

exilic Judaism, living under Persian and Greek rule, experienced foreign legal systems often hostile to covenant values. The New Testament era saw Roman courts and Sanhedrin collaboration execute the righteous Judge (Jesus), perfectly fulfilling this verse's pattern.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 – Judging others

Study Questions

1. When you encounter corruption in systems meant to provide justice, how does this verse help you maintain both realistic expectations and prophetic outrage?
2. How does God's promise of ultimate judgment (3:17) sustain hope when earthly justice systems fail?

Interlinear Text

בְּמִשְׁפָט וְמִקְרָם כִּי יְהִי תְּחִתְּךָ וְמִשְׁמֶךָ תְּחִתְּךָ כִּי יְהִי תְּחִתְּךָ

H5750 **And moreover I saw** H8478 **under the sun** H4725 **the place** H4941 **of judgment**

H7200 H8121

שְׁמָה	בְּרִשָׁעָה	וּמְלָקָה	בְּאַדְקָה	שְׁמָה	בְּרִשָׁעָה
H8033	that iniquity	the place	of righteousness	H8033	that iniquity
H7562	H4725		H6664		H7562

Additional Cross-References

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 5:8 (Righteousness): If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.

Acts 23:3 (Judgment): Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

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