

Ecclesiastes 5:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice—the Hebrew *ra'ita* (רָאִיתָ, if thou seest) acknowledges that social injustice is observable reality. *Oshek rash* (עֹשֶׁק רָשׁ, oppression of the poor) describes exploitation of the vulnerable. *Gezel mishpat va-tsedek* (גְּזֵל מִשְׁפָּט וְצֶדֶק, violent robbery of judgment and righteousness) indicates corrupt legal systems perverting justice.

Marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth—*al-titmah* (אֲלִתִּתְמָה, marvel not/be not amazed) counsels not surprise at injustice—sin produces systemic evil. The phrase *gavoha me-al* *gavoha shomer* (גָּבוֹהַ מֵעַל גָּבוֹהַ, he that is higher than the highest watches) points to God's sovereign oversight above human hierarchies. *Shomer* (שָׁמֵר, watches/guards) indicates divine vigilance. **And there be higher than they**—plural *gevohim* (גָּבוֹהִים, higher ones) may refer to multiple layers of corrupt officials or to God and His angels. Either way, no injustice escapes divine notice. God will judge (Ecclesiastes 3:17; 12:14).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern societies featured hierarchical power structures prone to corruption. Solomon's united monarchy had regional officials (1 Kings 4:7-19) who could oppress subjects. After the kingdom divided, both Israel and Judah experienced corrupt leadership denounced by prophets (Isaiah 1:23; 10:1-2; Amos 5:11-12; Micah 3:1-3). The verse doesn't endorse quietism but provides theological context: human injustice doesn't surprise God or escape His governance. He permits temporary evil while working His purposes (Romans 8:28). The prophets balanced this sovereignty with calls for justice (Micah 6:8). The early church faced Roman oppression, yet trusted divine vindication (Romans 12:19; Revelation 6:9-11). The Reformers emphasized that earthly injustice will be rectified at final judgment, motivating patient endurance and pursuit of justice where possible.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. When you witness injustice and corruption, does it drive you to despair, cynicism, or trust in God's ultimate justice?
2. How does knowing that "he that is higher than the highest" watches over all injustice motivate both patience and pursuit of righteousness?

Interlinear Text

אֵלֶּא אָם עַשְׁנָק בְּשֵׁל יְגִיל מִשְׁפָּט מִשְׁפָּט אֵלֶּא
the oppression of the poor and violent perverting of judgment and justice
H518 H6233 H7326 H1499 H4941 H6664

כִּי בְּמִדְיָן הַלְּתָמָם עַלְיָם: תַּתְּמִם הַלְּתָמָם
If thou seest in a province marvel than they not at the matter
H7200 H4082 H408 H8539 H5921 H2656 H3588

וְגַבְהָ יָמִין עַלְיָם: וְגַבְהָ יָמִין שָׁמָן רְגַדְתָּה וְגַבְהָ יָמִין
and there be higher than they and there be higher regardeth and there be higher
H1364 H5921 H1364 H8104 H1364

עַלְיָם:
than they
H5921

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 12:5 (Parallel theme): For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.

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 3:16 (Righteousness): And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there.

Psalms 82:1 (Judgment): God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.